

ON YERUSHALMI BABA MEṢI^cA 6.1, 10D

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ABSTRACT

The recent translations of yBM 6.1 by Gerd A. Wewers and Jacob Neusner fail to do justice to the text by ignoring the grammar. A proper philological analysis of the text, in particular the elucidation of the form רביון, “myriads,” as designating an amount of money (i.e., “myriads” of denars), contributes to a clearer understanding of the passage and makes its rhetorical analysis easier.

The two most recent translations of Yerushalmi Baba Meṣi^ca, that by Gerd A. Wewers¹ and that by Jacob Neusner,² differ significantly from each other in the rendering of the section designated 6.1 I.A by Neusner. The section deals with the hiring of artisans, where the relevant mishnah reads: השוכר את האומנים והטעו זה את זה אין להם זה על זה אלא תרעומת: “If one hires artisans, and one deceived the other, they have nothing against each other but complaint.”

The text³ of the gemara reads as follows:

הטעו זה את זה מהו {איתי} {אתיי} אתון עבדין/עבדון /E עמלעמן /E היך אתון
עבדין מן חמש רב(ו)ן/רובן /E ואשכחון {אי} עבדין מן עשר רב(ו)ן/רובן /E
למלאכה {אתיי} אתון עבדין עמלעמן /E
היך אתון עבדין מן עשרה יומין ואשכחון עבדין מן חמשי יומין הטעו/הטעו
/E בעל הבית מהו {איתי} {אתיי} אתון עבדין עם חביריכון היך
הינון/אתון /E עבדין מיי רב(ו)ן/רובן /E ואשכחון {אי} עבדין מהי רב(ו)ן/רובן
/E למלאכה אתיי אתון עבדין עם חביריכון היך הינון/אתון /E עבדין
חמשה יומין ואשכחון {אי} עבד {ו} {י}ן מעשרי יומין

¹ *Übersetzung des Talmud Yerushalmi: Bavot Pforten* (Tübingen, 1982), pp. 277–278.

² *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, A Preliminary Translation and Explanation* (Chicago, 1984), 29:140–141.

³ Venice edition, yBM 10d, with editorial changes { } = delete; < > = insert; // = variant. E = variant appearing in the Escorial (Madrid) manuscript, cited according to *Yerushalmi Neziqin*, edited from the Escorial Manuscript with an Introduction by E. S. Rosenthal, Introduction and Commentary by S. Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1983).

Wewers offers the following interpretive translation:

Wieso kann einer den anderen betrügen? (Das geschieht, wenn ein Handwerker zu anderen Handwerkern sagt:) kommt, arbeitet mit mir! (Sie fragen ihn: für) wie (viel Lohn) arbeitet ihr? (Er antwortet:) die Mehrheit der (Handwerker arbeitet) für fünf (Geldstücke Tageslohn). (Dann gehen sie) und finden, dass die Mehrheit der (Handwerker) die (vorgesehene) Arbeit für zehn (Geldstücke Tageslohn) verrichtet. (Oder es geschieht, wenn ein Handwerker zu anderen Handwerkern sagt:) arbeitet mit mir! (Sie fragen ihn: für) wie (lange) habt ihr Arbeit? (Er antwortet: es gibt Arbeit und entsprechenden Lohn) für zehn Tage. (Dann gehen sie) und finden, dass (es nur) für fünf Tage (Arbeit) zu verrichten (und entsprechend weniger Lohn zu erhalten) gibt?

Wieso kann der Hausherr die (Handwerker) betrügen? (Das geschieht, wenn er zu ihnen sagt:) kommt, arbeitet mit euren Genossen (= Handwerkern) beim Hausherrn! (Sie fragen ihn: für) wie (viel Lohn) arbeiten sie? (Er antwortet:) die Mehrheit der (Handwerker arbeitet) für zehn (Geldstücke Tageslohn). (Dann gehen sie) und finden, dass die Mehrheit der (Handwerker) die (vorgesehene) Arbeit für fünf (Geldstücke Tageslohn) verrichtet. (Oder es geschieht, wenn er zu ihnen sagt:) kommt, arbeitet mit euren Genossen (= Handwerker beim Hausherrn!) (Sie fragen ihn: für) wie (lange) haben sie Arbeit? (Er antwortet: es gibt Arbeit und entsprechenden Lohn) für fünf Tage. (Dann gehen sie) und finden, dass (es) für zehn Tage (Arbeit) zu verrichten (aber nur für fünf Tage Lohn) gibt.

By contrast, Neusner translates and explicates as follows:

What is the meaning of “one party deceived the other”? “Come and work with me,” [says one craftsman to another, the former being employed by a householder]. “The work [which you will perform] with me is worth five *denars*.” Then they found that the work was worth ten denars. “Come and work with me, and you will have ten days of work,” and they went and found only five days of work.

What is the meaning of “the householder deceived them”? “Come and work with your fellow-workers, for they are doing work worth ten denars,” and the workers found that the work was worth only five denars.

The following E variants have not been cited since they are either clearly secondary or inconsequential: (1) עבדיו for עבדין six additional times, i.e., reading *waw* for *yod*; (2) אשכחין without initial connective *waw* three times; (3) spellings of numerals; (4) the independent preposition *נן* in place of the inseparable preposition *נ*. As expected, the Leiden manuscript contains no substantial differences from the Venice edition. L = *The Palestinian Talmud, Leiden Ms. Cod. Scal. 3, A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript*, with Introduction by Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1970), 4:377. L. reads איתי, where the Venice edition reads איתי.

“Come and work with your fellows, and the job will last for five days,” and they came and found it was a job for ten days.

Clearly, these two translations disagree with one another. This fact makes a philological analysis of the passage, which is written in Aramaic, necessary. Five items need discussion: (1) the phrase אתון עבדין; (2) the sentence הווד אתון/הינון עבדין; (3) the expression ויאשכחו (אי) עבדין; (4) the meaning of the preposition מן; and (5) the form רב(ו)ן. The proper understanding of these items elucidates the meaning of the passage.

First, the phrase אתון עבדין needs clarification. It is not clear from their translations whether Wewers and Neusner accept this reading of the text or not, since they render imperatives. Their renderings may reflect an alternative, emended reading, such as איתון אתון עבדון or the like. While this solution is possible, the fact that participial forms are clearly attested at least once in E and once in L and that the form איתי appearing twice in L is not clearly either a participle or an imperative, it seems better to read participles. Only once in E does the second verbal form in the sequence appear as an imperative (i.e., עבדון), but it appears there to be inconsistent with the foregoing participle איתי. It is probably an error for עבדין, the reading of L. Now, one might allege, as does Hugo Odeberg, that the participle at times functions as the imperative.⁴ To support this claim, Odeberg cites two highly questionable cases. His first case, מלבשוני, is certainly a scribal error for the imperative form, אלבשוני, as both the following context⁵ and the parallel passage⁶ demonstrate. His second case, מקדמין, is likewise unconvincing. The version of Ekha Rabba cited by Odeberg appears corrupt; the text⁷ of the story should be emended to read as follows:

(אמר להון) אמרון אתון (קדמי) דבני אתר מקדמין [ליה]⁸
אמרין ליה אמור את (קדמי) דאת גבר סב

He said to them: You say (ask) first, because locals go first.

They said to him: You say (ask) first, because you are an old man.⁹

⁴ Hugo Odeberg, *The Aramaic Portions of Bereshit Rabba, II. Short Grammar of Galilaean Aramaic*, Lunds Universitets Årsskrift, N. F. Avd. 1, Bd 36, Nr4 (Lund and Leipzig, 1939), p. 102.

⁵ yKet 32b (5–9). The correct form, אלבשוני, appears three times in the following context. In favor of the emendation, cf. Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat-Gan, 1990), p. 88.

⁶ yKet 35a (12–16). The parallel passage contains the correct form, אלבשוני, all four times.

⁷ There are at least two versions of this story in manuscripts of Ekha Rabba, with minor variants of each version. For easy access, contrast the text of the first printed edition (Constantinople, 1520) with the edition of S. Buber (Vilna, 1899).

⁸ Alternatively, one could read להון for ליה.

⁹ An Athenian came to a school in Jerusalem where he proceeded to play a word-game with the students, whose teacher was absent. The Athenian insisted that the student ask first; the students the Athenian.

The two sentences should be syntactically parallel: a command clause followed by a causal clause introduced by τ . After reviewing the evidence offered by Odeberg, one must conclude that the participle does not function as an imperative in Galilean Aramaic. The phrase אתון עבדין should be translated “Are you coming to work?” as does Sokoloff.¹⁰ Rather than being a command, the sentence is a question.

Second, the phrase $\text{היך אתון/הינן עבדין}$ needs comment. Neusner does not translate it. He merely paraphrases on the basis of M. Margolies’s commentary *Pene Moshe*.¹¹ Wewers does better, but renders עבדין first as a verb, then as a noun. But in all four occurrences the form עבדין , the masculine plural participle of the verb עבד , functions verbally, not substantively. The adverb היך is deliberately ambiguous, as is evident from the different answers to the questions. It can mean either “for how much money” or “for how long.” The ambiguity can be maintained by explaining “how” as “under what terms.” For the translation of the entire phrase, it seems best to follow Sokoloff: “How do you/they work?”¹²

Third, the form עבדין in the expression $\text{ואשכחון (אי) עבדין}$ is a participle functioning verbally and not substantively.¹³ It may imply a cognate accusative, עבדין עבדיה , which was omitted in the compressed legal style of the passage.

Fourth, the meaning of the preposition מן deserves comment. It appears in phrases which answer the question: $\text{היך אתון/הינן עבדין}$, “How (under what terms) do you/they work?” and as complements of the phrase $\text{ואשכחון עבדין (אי)}$, “But they found they worked. . . .” It means “consisting of, or, for.”

Fifth, the form רב(ו)ן needs to be explained. The forms found in the sources—namely רבן and רובן —are determined forms of the adjective רב , made so by the addition of the first person plural pronominal suffix. Wewers accordingly renders “die Mehrheit.”¹⁴ But the syntax of the passage casts considerable doubt on the genuineness of these forms. The words מן חמש רב(ו)ן and the like appear to constitute a syntagm, which is identical in structure to the syntactical unit מן עשרה יומין and the like. The common syntagm is composed of the preposition מן + a quantifying numeral + an undetermined nominal head in the plural. Whereas in the phrases like מן חמש יומין the nominal head is a unit of time, the nominal head in the corresponding phrases should be a unit of money. While Neusner does render the form as “denar,” following the exegesis of *Pene Moshe*, he

¹⁰ Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, p. 80.

¹¹ היך אתון עבדין מן חמש רבן. כלומר והמלאכה שתעשו תהיה כמו ערך חמשה דינרין שוה והלכו ומצאו שהיו צריכין לעשות להמלאכה שהיה שוה עשרה דינרין.

¹² Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, p. 392.

¹³ On the participle אי , see Sokoloff, p. 47.

¹⁴ Cf. Margolies’s commentary *Mar’eh ha-Panim*.

never attempts to explain the form philologically. It appears that the forms רבן and רבון found in the sources are corruptions of the form רבָּוֹן, the undetermined plural form of רבו, “myriad.” Here the “myriads” are “myriads” of denars, the monetary unit “denar” being assumed after רבָּוֹן by the text. In times of hyperinflation, the denar was greatly devalued, to the extent that a “myriad” was not an enormous amount.¹⁵ Thus the phrase מן חמש רב(ו)ן means “for five myriads (of denars).”

As forcefully underscored by both Wewers and Neusner, a pure philological analysis of this talmudic text can hardly produce the full sense of the text. The legal discussion is highly stylized rhetoric written in compressed language. The discussion offers two possibilities as to who is the deceiver: a fellow artisan and a householder; and two possibilities for the deception: with regard to wages and with regard to length of the project. There is a four item rhetorical sequence which occurs four times: (1) an invitation to work in the form of a question; (2) a question concerning the terms of the employment by the artisan invited to join the project; (3) a reply to the question by the party inviting the participation of the artisan; and (4) the truth about the terms. In addition, there is a symmetrical sequence of numerals, appearing in chiasmic order: 5 myriads—10 myriads—10 days—5 days // 10 myriads—5 myriads—5 days—10 days. The rhetoric is more important than clarity and presupposes that the one studying the passage understands the implications of the compressed discussion.

RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

Situation 1: Deceiver = Fellow Artisan (הטעו זה את זה מהו)

1.1 Deception about wages:

- 1.1.1 Invitation to work: אתון עבדין עמי {אתיי} {אתיי}
- 1.1.2 Question regarding terms of employment: היך אתון עבדין
- 1.1.3 Reply by responsible party: מן חמש רב(ו)ן
- 1.1.4 Truth of the matter: ואשכחון (אי) עבדין מן עשר רב(ו)ן למלאכה

1.2 Deception about length of the project:

- 1.2.1 Invitation to work: אתון עבדין עמי {אתיי}
- 1.2.2 Question regarding terms of employment: היך אתון עבדין
- 1.2.3 Reply by responsible party: מן עשרה יומין
- 1.2.4 Truth of the matter: ואשכחון עבדין מן חמשי יומין

Situation 2: Deceiver = Householder (הטעו בעל הבית מהו)

2.1 Deception about wages:

- 2.1.1 Invitation to work: אתון עבדין עם חביריכון {אתיי} {אתיי}
- 2.1.2 Question regarding terms of employment: היך הינון עבדין

¹⁵ See Daniel Sperber, *Roman Palestine 200–400: Money and Prices* (Ramat-Gan, 1974), pp. 264f., n. 13, for examples in Hebrew passages and for literature.

2.1.3 Reply by responsible party: מ״י רב(ו)ן

2.1.4 Truth of the matter: ואשכחן (אי) עבדין מהי רב(ו)ן למלאכה

2.2 Deception about length of the project:

2.2.1 Invitation to work: את״י אתון עבדין עם חביריכון

2.2.2 Question regarding terms of employment: היך הינון עבדין: מחמשה יומין

2.2.3 Reply by responsible party: מחמשה יומין

2.2.4 Truth of the matter: ואשכחון (אי) עבד(ו)ן מעשרי יומין

In light of the foregoing philological and stylistic remarks, I offer the following annotated translation:

Situation 1: What does it mean that “one (artisan) deceived the other (artisan)”?

1.1 Deception about wages:

Artisan 1: Are you coming to work with me?

Artisan 2: How (under what terms) do you work?

Artisan 1: For five myriads.

Truth: But they found they worked for ten myriads for the project.

Commentary: Artisan 1, who was already employed on the project by the householder, invited Artisan 2 to join. Artisan 2 was told that Artisan 1 was being paid five myriads and so agreed to that amount. But afterwards Artisan 2 found out that Artisan 1 was really paid ten myriads for the work.

1.2 Deception about length of the project:

Artisan 1: Are you coming to work with me?

Artisan 2: How (under what terms) do you work?

Artisan 1: For ten days.

Truth: But they found they worked for five days.

Commentary: Artisan 1 told Artisan 2 to expect ten days of work. Instead, Artisan 2 got only five.

Situation 2: What does it mean that “the householder deceived them (i.e., the artisans)”?

2.1 Deception about wages:

Householder: Are you coming to work with your fellows?

Artisan: How (under what terms) do they work?

Householder: For ten myriads.

Truth: But they found they worked for five myriads for the project.

Commentary: The householder told the artisan to expect ten myriads worth of work, but the artisan got only five.

2.2 Deception about length of the project:

Householder: Are you coming to work with your fellows?

Artisan: How (under what terms) do they work?

Householder: For five days.

Truth: But they found they worked for ten days.

Commentary: The householder told the artisan that he (the artisan) would complete the job in five days, but it took the artisan ten days. Yet he received payment only for five.

The gemara of the Yerushalmi raises the question of the antecedent of the verb הטעו found in the Mishnah. The subject of the circumstantial clause זה הטעו זה את זה could be either האומנין (Situation 1) or השוכר (= בעל הבית) (= Situation 2). In both situations two possibilities of deception exist, deception regarding wages and deception regarding length of the project. Despite the compressed language and rhetorical style, it is important to pay attention to the grammar to properly understand the text.