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I wish to show that the Septuagint translator of Exodus accurately represents Jewish interpretation in his choice for a rendering of פסח in Exod 12:13. This will be done by comparing the ancient versions as well as the Tannaitic Midrash to Exodus, Mekilta deRabbi Ishmael.

MT=SP: וראיתי את־הדם ופסחתי עליכם "and when I see the blood I will pass over you"

G: καὶ ὄψομαι τὸ αἷμα καὶ σκεπάσω ὑμᾶς "and I will see the blood and I will protect you"

Pesh: ואפצה עליכון "and I will pass over you"

TO: ואחוי ית דמא ואיחוס עלחכון "and I will see the blood and I will have mercy on you"

N: ואחמי ית אדמיה ואפסח ואגן במימרי עליכון "and I will see the blood and I will pass by and I will defend you by my word"

PsJ: ואחמי זכות אדמא ואיחוס עליכון "and I will see the merit of the blood and I will have mercy on you"

GF: ויחמי ממרי ית אדמה ויגן ויפסח עלחכון "and my Memra will see the blood and it will protect and pass over you (Cf Klein, 1986 Vol 2:210)

4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup>: " [ ... ופסחת' ] על[יכ]ם" this could be anything at all, but ופסחת' is the most likely alternative.

Mekilta: אין פסיחה אלא חייס "passing over' really means 'protecting'" and also אני חס עליכם "I will protect you"

The formula "אין ... אלא Y" "When Scripture says X it means Y", is a means of philological explanation of words in Scripture, often given by recourse to a foreign language (Bloch: 1978a:32). Now, a commentator or translator coming across the word פסח had the option of choosing for his purposes one of two possible meanings: 'pass over' or 'protect'. Mekilta chooses 'protect', as does the Greek by using σκεπάζειν (to cover, shelter) instead of παρέρχεσθαι. The verse adduced by Mekilta to



corroborate this understanding of פסח is Isa 31:5: "שנאמר כצפרים עפות כן יגן יי" as it says: like birds hovering, so the Lord of Hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it, he will spare and rescue it". Kadushin (1969:3) sees this as an interpretation "with a sure philological sense" in favour of "protect" and agrees with Lieberman (1950:49) that the Greek has the same interpretation. The Greek synonymous variant offers the reader an explanation of פסח rather than giving a literal translation of it. This explanation of the word is identical to that offered by the Jewish interpreters: the Targumim and Mekilta (Cf. Weiss, 1964:128 and Brock, 1982:29). Indeed the section in Mekilta following on this explanation deals with those whom God will protect (חוס) as a further indication of the commentator's interpretation.

It is interesting to note a counter-tendency to the above, in the next section of Mekilta (cf. Le Boulluec and Sandevor, 1989:49 [hereafter LeB-S]). That the Rabbis had to adduce an alternative text in which an attempt was made to underscore the original meaning of the Biblical Hebrew root פסח as "pass over", is borne out by the אל תקרא אל תקרי ופסחתי אלא ופסעתי שהמקום מדלג על בתי בניו<sup>1</sup> midrash<sup>1</sup> found there: "Do not read 'and I will protect' but rather 'and I will step over' because God skipped over the houses of his children in Egypt, as it is said: 'Listen! my beloved! Look! Here he comes leaping over the mountains'". KBL (893) gives the meaning for פסח as "Überspringen der Behausungen" because פסח has the meaning of 'limping past' or 'hopping over'. One can see how it is used here in Isaiah 31:5 to mean 'protect'.

When we look at how פסח is translated at Ex 12:23, we see the following:

MT: אל־הפתח יי ופסח "and the Lord will pass over the door"

G: παρελεύσεται κύριος τὴν θύραν "the Lord will pass over the door". Now we do not have σκεπάξειν but παρέρχεσθαι!

<sup>1</sup> Whether one can take Talmon's supposition that the אל תקרא אל תקרי midrash is evidence of double readings (1975b:231) to mean that every instance of this type of midrash points to a double reading, only the cumulative evidence will have to show. It is very tempting to take this view, especially when the G agrees with the alternative lemma!



Pesh: ונפצה מריא על תרעא "and the Lord will pass by the doors"

TO: על תרעא וייחוס יי "the Lord will protect the door" This is the equivalent of σκεπαζέιν!

PsJ: ויגין מימרה דה' על תרעא "the Memra of the Lord will protect the door"

N: ויפסח ויגן מימרה דיי' על תרע "the Memra of the Lord will pass over and protect the door"

ExRab ad loc: שנאמר כי הנה היום בא בוער כתנור וגי אבל אתם וחמלתי עליהם: "as it is written: 'behold the day comes, burning like an oven, etc.'" (Mal 4:1) "But as for you: I will spare them as a man spares his son" (Mal 3:17).

It seems as if there was some degree of uncertainty among the ancient translators of whether to translate the verb פסח with "pass over" or "protect", due to a diversity of ancient exegetical traditions (LeB-S, 49, Brock, 1982:27). Obviously the meaning had undergone some change between the time of Scripture and the late Second Temple period. The Rabbis were aware that פסח in the vernacular meant "protect" and they seemed to try and show by philological reasoning that in fact it could also mean 'pass over' in the sense of 'miss out'. But most of the evidence points to the opposite. Initially they explain the biblical "pass over" by referring to its meaning in the vernacular. The translators of the Greek, when making a choice for the meaning of פסח in v 13 followed the tradition which influenced Mekilta: God will protect the Israelites, but in the case of v23 it used another: God will pass by the doors. It is clear that the Greek makes a choice which was well argued in proto-Rabbinic circles: an exegetically derived interpretation of פסח (Cf. Wevers, 1990:175, LeB-S, 48).

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