

ARTICLE VII.

IS ΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ THE CORRECT RENDERING OF רָחֵבָּהּ IN
ISAIAH VII. 14?

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THE answer to this question must depend upon the usage of the Hebrew language and upon the etymology of the word itself. We also need to inquire what is the necessary meaning of *παρθένος*. The importance of the question lies, of course, in its connection with the prophetic sign given by the prophet to Ahaz, and which is applied by Matthew to the conception of our Lord in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary.

The Septuagint in this passage translates the Hebrew word רָחֵבָּהּ by *παρθένος*, and it is repeated by Matthew. It is not our purpose to enter at all into the general argument, or into the question as to exactly what the prophetic sign consisted of, but simply to investigate the meaning and usage of the Hebrew word, as a purely philological question.

רָחֵבָּהּ is derived, according to its form, from the root רָחַב, and is the most simple derivative form, corresponding to the Arabic *nomen actionis*, and usually known as a Segholate. This root when pointed רָחַב has the signification of *hiding, concealing*, and occurs very frequently in the Hebrew literature. From it are derived the words רָחַב (רָחַב), רָחַבָּהּ, Chald. רָחַב. But there is another class of derivatives which cannot be ascribed to this verb, and which accordingly are attributed to a root רָחַב, which, though not appearing in its verbal form in Hebrew, does exist in the cognate languages, while these do not possess the verb רָחַב with the sense of *to hide* (though the Chald., Sam., Syriac, and Ethiopic have derivatives from it, with the senses of *aeternitas* or *mundus*). Such words are רָחַב *a young man* (1 Sam. xvii. 56; xx. 22), רָחַבָּהּ *youth* (Job xx. 11; xxxiii. 25; Ps. lxxxix. 45; Isa. liv. 4). רָחַבָּהּ, the word in question, the general meaning of which is *young woman* (Gen. xxiv. 43; Ex. ii. 8; Ps. lxxviii. 25; Prov. xxx. 19; Cant. i. 3; vi. 8; Isa. vii. 14). רָחַבָּהּ, probably plural of preceding, a musical term answer-

ing to our *soprano* or *treble* (1 Chron. xv. 20; Ps. xli. 1). These all have the sense of youth and of youthful vigor, and the meaning accordingly attributed to the root is that of *growing up, becoming strong, coming to puberty*; cf. אָזַם, אָזַם.

This root appears in Arabic under the form غَلِمَ *coëundi cupidus libidinosus eoque velut furibundus fuit* [camelus] IV. *Ad venerem incendit c. a.* VIII. *Coëundi Cupidus, libidinosus fuit* (Freytag, Lex. Arab.).¹ From this verb come the derivatives غَلِمٌ *libidinosus*, غَلَامٌ *adolescens* (masc.), غَلَامَةٌ *adolescens* (fem.), غَلِيمَةٌ *libido venerea*, غَيْلِمٌ *adolescens amplius medio capite multisque crinibus praeditus*.

In Syriac it also appears with much the same meaning, e.g. ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢ *juvenis factus est, juvenescere fecit*. Ethpa. *adolevit*, from whence come ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ (i.q. Heb. אָזַם) *adolescens* (masc.), ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ *adolescens* (fem.), ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ *pueritia, adolescentia*, ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ *adolescentia, juvenilitas*.

In Chaldee ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢ = *roboratus est, roboravit se, fortis fuit*, ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ = *puer lactens, adultus ad ministerium aptus*, ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ = *adolescentula*, ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ = *adolescentia*.

In Samaritan the verb is used only in the sense *connivit*, but the nouns ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ, ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ (equivalent to ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢ and ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ) are found, and also ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ *homo*, and ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ *puer, servus*.

In Phoenician (Punic), according to the testimony of Jerome, **Alma** was the common word for *maiden*. The same root is found in the Maltese **hlym** = *adolescens*.

The meaning, therefore, by the etymology, would seem to be *a young woman at the age of puberty*, with no implication whether married or not (so Abulwalides, "ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢܐ est puella et adolescentula sive virgo est sive non virgo est"). The old derivation from ܕܟܪܝܢܝܢ *to hide, to conceal*, = *the secluded one*, is extremely improbable, and has no philological parallel in the cognate languages, and is now very generally given up by scholars. Cf. Hengstenberg, Christol-

¹ Note.—The Arabic definitions in this Article are taken from Freytag's *Smaller Lexicon* (Halle, 1837), the Syriac, Samaritan, and Chaldee from *Castle's Lexicon Heptaglotton*.

ogy, i. p. 325; Delitzsch, Commentary on Isaiah, Vol. i. p. 217; Cheyne, p. 31.¹

Let us now examine the usage among the Hebrews. It is to be regretted that there are so few instances of the occurrence of this word—only six in the whole Bible, besides the passage in question. However, the usage can be shown from these six to be upon the side of the meaning *maiden* or *virgin*.

The first passage is Gen. xxiv. 43: "Behold I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass that when the '*Almah* cometh forth," etc. Here the term is applied to Rebekah, who is expressly stated in vs. 16 to be a תַּלְמִידָה. From this we gather two things: first, that תַּלְמִידָה is used in this passage of a *virgin*; second, that it is not an equivalent of תַּלְמִידָה; that is to say, it is not a specific term as the latter is. The LXX in this place translate it by *παρθένος*, the Targ. of Onkelos by תַּלְמִידָה, Targ. Jonathan and Jerus. by תַּלְמִידָה, the Syriac (Peschito) by ܐܠܡܢܐ, the Sam. by תַּלְמִידָה, the Arabic by أَلْبَحَارِيَّة. It is to be noted, however, that in verses 14, 16, 55 the Sept. translates תַּלְמִידָה (K'ri תַּלְמִידָה) also by *παρθένος*, as it does also in xxxiv. 3 *bis*, and 3 Kings i. 2. It also occurs as a *var. lect.* Joel i. 8. These are the only examples of this translation of תַּלְמִידָה,

¹ Cf. per contra, Jerome, Comment. in Isaiah vii. 14. He translates תַּלְמִידָה by *virgo*, and gives his reasons as follows: Quando autem dicitur, Dabit dominus ipse vobis signum, novem debet est atque mirabile, Sin autem juvencula vel puella, ut Judaei volunt, et non virgo pariat, quale signum potest appellari, cum hoc nomen aetatis sit non integritatis? Et revera, ut cum Judaeis conferamus pedem: et nequaquam contensioso fune praebamus eis risum nostrae imperitiae, virgo Hebraice תַּלְמִידָה appellatur, quae in praesenti loco non scribitur, sed pro hoc verbum positum est תַּלְמִידָה, quod praeter LXX qui posuerant *ἡ παρθένος*, omnes adolescentulam transtulerunt. Porro תַּלְמִידָה apud eos verbum ambiguum est, dicitur enim et adolescentula et abscondita, id est *ἀποκρυφές*. Unde et in titulo Psalmi ix., ubi in Hebraeo positum est תַּלְמִידָה caeteri interpretes transtulerunt pro adolescentia, quod LXX interpretati sunt, pro absconditis. Et in Genesi legimus, ubi Rebecca dicitur *alma*: Aquilam non adolescentulam, nec puellam sed absconditam transtulisse. Sunanimitis quoque mulier amisso filio, cum Helesai fuisset pedibus provoluta, et prohiberet eum Iezai, audit a propheta: Dimitte eam, quia in dolore est, et dominus abscondit a me. Pro eo quod in Latino dicitur, abscondit a me, in Hebraeo scriptum est תַּלְמִידָה. Ergo *alma*, non solum puella vel virgo; sed cum *secretae* virgo abscondita dicitur et secreta, quae nunquam virorum patuerit aspectibus, sed magna parentum diligentia custodita sit. Lingua quoque Punica, quae de Hebraeorum fontibus manare dicitur, proprie virgo *alma* appellatur."

it being rendered in other passages variously, sometimes by *παῖς*, sometimes by *νεάνις*, sometimes by *κοράσιον*.

2. Ex. ii. 8: "And the 'Almah went and called the child's mother." Here used of Miriam, who at the birth of Moses can hardly have been married. Here the Sept. translates by *νεάνις*, Targum Onk., Syriac, and Arabic as above, Sam. $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, Vulg. *puella*.

3. Ps. lxxviii. 25: "among them were the 'Alamoth playing with timbrels." The passage illustrating this best is Ex. xv. 20 (see also 1 Sam. xviii. 7) where the corresponding word is $\aleph \aleph$, and where Miriam—who was at that time at least eighty-five, and, according to Josephus, the wife of Hur—was the leader of the dance. Still the almost universal custom in the East confines these dancers and players on the timbrels to unmarried women. The Sept. here translates, as above, by *νεάνιδες*, the Targum paraphrases it with the expression $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, the Syriac has $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, the Arabic $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$ (*among the girls*), Ethiopic $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$ (*virgines*),¹ Vulg. *juvenculae*.

4. Prov. xxx. 19: "and the way of a man with an 'Almah." Here the allusion is evidently to the sexual act, and particularly to the first sexual act of the 'Almah; the case is expressly stated as different from the way of the adulterous woman. The force in this case seems to depend upon the 'Almah being considered as a virgin. The Sept. does not give the passage; the Syriac misunderstands it, and translates it by $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, as if the text read $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, Vulg. the same. The Targ. reads the text we have, and translates $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$.

5. Cant. i. 3: "therefore do the 'Alamoth love thee." From this passage no decided conclusion can be drawn either way. It is perhaps best explained by vi. 8, which see below. Sept. *νεάνιδες*, Vulg. *adolescentulae*, Syriac $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, Arabic $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$ = *adolescentulae*, Ethiopic $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$ = *virgines*.

6. Cant. vi. 7: "There are threescore queens and fourscore concubines, and 'Alamoth without number." Here the parallel word in the next verse is $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$, which proves nothing; but the mentioning of the 'Alamoth as inhabitants of the harem, distinct from the queens (wives) and the concubines, shows that in this passage it

¹ The Ethiopic in the first two cases is translated *adolescentulae* by Walton. The rendering given is from Dillmann (*Chrestomathia Aethiopiae* Leipzig 1866)

must be applied to virgins. The Sept. here gives, as above, *νεάνιδες*, Vulg. *adolescentulae*, Syriac ܕܠܡܢܕܐ , Arabic الشَّوَاب = *adolescentulae*, Ethiopic ላዋልደ = *adolescentulae*.

From this examination we may see that in no passage is the usage decidedly against the meaning *virgin*, and in several that meaning seems to be required by the context. We come now to the passage in question.

7. Isa. vii. 14: "Behold an *Almah* shall conceive, and shall bring forth a son," etc. Here the Sept. translates *παρθένος*, Aquila, Theod., Symm. *νεάνις*, Vulg. *virgo*,¹ Chald. ܩܪܝܢܐ , Syr. ܕܠܡܢܕܐ Arabic العذري = *virgo*.

There seems at first sight to be a consensus among the versions here, with the exception of the version of the Chaldee paraphrast, which is indeterminate, and that of Aquila, Theod., and Symm.; but the fact must be acknowledged, that here the Sept., Syr., etc. have varied from their usual rendering, and have intentionally used *παρθένος* in place of *νεάνις*. This we have already seen was done in Genesis in the case of Rebekah, who was expressly stated to be a virgin. Accordingly we see that in the mind of the interpreters ܩܪܝܢܐ had no such force as to render it impossible to translate it by *παρθένος*, and as they, in common with all Jews of their day, believed that the word here was used of a virgin, they translated it by the less general and more specific term, which is properly more nearly equivalent to ܩܪܝܢܐ than to ܩܪܝܢܐ . The word *παρθένος* does not necessarily convey the idea of an unspotted virgin,² but the usage is so general that we may call this sense almost universal. In the same manner *virgo*, from *vireo*, has no etymological meaning of chastity, but simply means the ripe, marriageable maiden; usage, however, has given it its more restricted signification.

The translation, then, is an allowable, though not a necessary, one; and though no stress should be laid upon ܩܪܝܢܐ , as if it were ܩܪܝܢܐ , still its force is such as to make it impossible that in this passage the wife of Isaiah can have been intended, who was already the mother of at least one son. Whether or not it refers to any virgin living at that time, and who was shortly to become pregnant and bring forth, or only to her who should be the mother of the Messiah, is a question which must be determined on other than philological grounds.

¹ Cf. note on p. 764.

² Cf. Homer. II. ii. 514.