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## A MISUNDERSTOOD WORD

By SAMUEL KRAUSS, Vienna.

NOT only the Greek and Roman loan-words in the Talmud and Midrash, to which I have devoted a separate work, but even quite common Semitic terms of the same literature are still misinterpreted, for the simple reason that the facts and data constituting the life of the ancient Jews are given no consideration.

This somewhat bitter truth will be illustrated by the following example :

R. Nathan of Rome, author of the '*Aruk*', has preserved for us, among many other treasures for which we are indebted to him, an old Midrash (from the Yelamdenu),<sup>1</sup> which reads as follows : והיה עקב תשמעון פרש' ועתה ישראל מה : בילמדנו והיה עקב תשמעון פרש' ועתה ישראל מה : בשם שחברין יושבין ה' אלהיך שואל מעמך היושבת בגנים הברים<sup>2</sup> ; ששם שחברין יושבין גנוניות גנוניות ועוסקים בתורה אני יורד אצלם ואני מקשיב לקולם ושומע שנאמר לקולך השמיעני

In this otherwise simple statement it is only the word גנוניות that offers some difficulty. The lexicographers are perplexed. Levy disregarded it altogether and does not quote it at all. Kohut endeavours to explain it by the Greek *κοινωνία* = *communion*. It is hardly necessary to prove that this is wrong. Kohut, it is true, supports his opinion by quoting a similar Midrash to the same passage in

<sup>1</sup> '*Aruk*, 6 (ed. Venice 53 a, ed. Kohut II, 315).

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 8. 13. The citation includes הברים and does not, as Kohut believes, end with בגנים.

Canticles,<sup>3</sup> which reads thus: כשאתם קורין החברים אני ופמליא שלי מקשיבים לקולך החברים. But Kohut himself remarks that in the Rabba passage the difficult word was omitted because the copyists failed to understand it. Who will vouch then that they have rendered correctly the sense of the passage by the use of החברים? To me it is evident that there are several haggadic explanations to the same verse in Canticles;<sup>4</sup> the one made use of the expression גנוניית, the other employed החברים. These are indeed similar but not identical terms.

Ben Jehuda, the author of the very useful and scholarly dictionary of the entire Hebrew literature,<sup>5</sup> admits openly that the etymology of the word is unknown to him, yet he believes that he hit upon the sense by translating it with 'class'. He is right in giving גנונית as the singular.

It is the merit of Jastrow to have come much nearer to the meaning of the word.<sup>6</sup> He derives it from גגין = *couch*, and translates the sentence as follows: 'when the students at college sit ג' ג' *arranged by couches* (school forms).' According to this interpretation an allusion is made to a definite arrangement of seats in the rabbinic schools, and it is conceivable that the haggadists would utilize just such a feature of the scholarly life, since indeed the latter was especially dear to them. The similarity with the sentence that one should read (the קריאת שמע or other biblical extracts) in conjunction with friends (חברים) suggests itself at once, since *ḥabērim* are primarily men of the learned

<sup>3</sup> Cant. rabba to 8. 13.

<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact there are several interpretations in Cant. rabba, *loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> מלון הלשון העברית, p. 811.

<sup>6</sup> *Dictionary of the Targumim*, &c., p. 258.

guild, and since this word is actually found in the scriptural text as well as in the fragment of the Yelamdenu.

We continue now on this road and explain גנויח as a feature of the ancient scholarly life. The Neo-Hebraic idiom is built upon the vocabulary of the Aramaic language,<sup>7</sup> and hence it must not be surprising if we have recourse to the Aramaic also this time. גנויחא or גנויחא means in Aramaic or Syriac a little garden, garden of the house, *hortulus*.<sup>8</sup> Formations like גנויח (fr. גנן) are e.g. תלולית (fr. תלל), שלולית (fr. שלל), and דגוניח (fr. דגנ).<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact the Hebrew גנויח<sup>10</sup> has been combined by Segal with the Aramaic גנויחא. The plural גנויחא is formed exactly as the plural תלוליות. With this the grammatical side of the word is sufficiently explained. But there is also no reason why the meaning should be sought elsewhere than in the word itself; the word denotes, as stated above, a small garden, a bed.

From the life of the ancient rabbis it is necessary to know that they exercised their preceptorial activities in the open field and in gardens.<sup>11</sup> I have proved<sup>12</sup> that the expression שורות שורות 'in single rows', occurring in the arrangement of seats for the rabbis is to be explained in this way, that the assemblies of the rabbis actually took place in vineyards, where the sitting in rows was a natural consequence. In the open field such an arrangement of

<sup>7</sup> M. H. Segal, *Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford, 1909, reprinted from *JQR.* for July, 1908), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Levy, I, 348; Kohut, II, 313; Jastrow, p. 258.

<sup>9</sup> See Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 65 f.

<sup>10</sup> גנויח של ירק, b. Berakot 43 b.

<sup>11</sup> See my *Talmudische Archäologie*, III, 205.

<sup>12</sup> 'Die Versammlungsstätte der Talmudgelehrten' in *Lewy-Festschrift* (Breslau, 1911), p. 22.

seats is called *πρασιαὶ πρασιαί* (Mark 6. 40), in Hebrew perhaps *ערוגות ערוגות*. To these expressions, formed always by the iteration of the word, there is now added as third in number our equally doubled *ננויות ננויות* 'in form of small beds'. The word thus obtains its meaning without force. The meaning of the whole Midrash is now as follows:

The passage in Cant. 8. 13 speaks of listening to the voices of those who sit together as friends (*חברים*). The mere word *חברים* reminds the haggadists of the learned men who raise their voices either in the school-house or in the house of worship. The Midrash *ad locum* has haggadic sayings for both of these alternatives. Yet it is preferable to think of the seating arrangement for the scholars in the school-house, and it is in reference to this that the haggadist says: 'Those who sit there in form of small gardens,<sup>13</sup> indulging in the study of the law—to them I (God) descend, listen to their voice, and hear them.'

<sup>13</sup> I. e. in groups or classes.