

## The Gabriel Inscription, b. Sukkah 52a, and Psalm 2

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*Résumé.* Un passage de b. Sukkah 52a présente d'étroits parallèles avec des lignes cruciales de l'inscription de Gabriel. Les deux textes interprètent de façon similaire les échanges entre le Seigneur et le roi davidique en Ps 2,7-8: le conflit entre les peuples ennemis et l'élú davidique, le dialogue entre Dieu et le fils de David et l'intervention en faveur de son oint sont perçus comme éléments prophétiques de la bataille attendue à la fin des temps.

Lines 16-23 in the Gabriel Inscription<sup>1</sup> should probably be read as follows (cf. Qimron and Yuditsky 2011: 31-4; Elgvin 2012: 222-4).

עבדי דוד בקש מן לפני, אַמְרִים [הש] יבני, האות אני מבקש מן לפניך. כה אמר [י] הוה צבאות אלהי ישראל, בני ב[י] די ברית חדשה לישראל, לשלשת ימין תדע. כו אמר יהוה אלהים צבאות אלהי ישראל, נשבר הרע מלפני הצדק. שאלני ואגיד לכה מה הצמח הרע הזה. לו ביסד אתה עומד, המלאך הוא בסמכך, אל תירא.

My servant David, ask me: <sup>17</sup> “Give me words [in re]sponse, the sign I ask from you!” Thus says <sup>18</sup> the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: “My son, in my hands I have <sup>19</sup> a new covenant for Israel, on the third day you will know it. Thus says <sup>20</sup> the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel: Evil will be broken before <sup>21</sup> righteousness. Ask me, and I will tell you what this <sup>22</sup> evil plant is. You do not stand on firm ground, but the angel <sup>23</sup> is your support, do not fear!”

With the reading אַמְרִים in line 16 (and not “Ephraim”) any messiah son of Ephraim, as asserted by Israel Knohl, evaporates from

<sup>1</sup> For a structured English translation of this text, see Elgvin 2012: 229-31.

this text (Qimron and Yuditsky 2011: 33-4; Elgvin 2012: 222-3).<sup>2</sup> Both Knohl and John Collins have in their discussion on Hazon Gabriel referred to a text in *b. Sukkah* 52a that deals with Messiah son of David and Messiah son of Joseph/Ephraim, without noting the close terminological parallels between this text and the Gabriel inscription (Knohl 2011: 49; Collins 2011: 109). The talmudic text runs as follows:

תנו רבנן, משיח בן דוד (שעתיד להגלות במהרה בימינו), אומר לו הקב"ה שאל ממני דבר ואתן לך, שנאמר "אספרה אל חק יהוה, אמר אלי, בני אתה אני היום ילדתיך. שאל ממני ואתנה גוים נחלתך" וכיון שראה משיח בן יוסף נהרג, אומר לפניו, רבש"ע איני מבקש ממך אלא חיים. אומר לו, חיים עד שלא אמרת כבר התנבא עליך דוד אביך, שנאמר "חיים שאל ממך, נתתה לו ארך ימים עולם ועד".

Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the Messiah son of David (May he reveal himself speedily in our days), "Ask of me anything, and I will give it to you", as it is said, "I will tell of the decree of the Lord. The Lord said to me, you are my son, today have I begotten you. Ask of me and I will give the nations for your inheritance" (Ps 2:7-8). But when he will see that the Messiah son of Joseph is slain, he will say to Him, "Lord of the Universe, I ask You for nothing but life". "As to life", He would answer him, "Your father David has already prophesied this concerning you", as it is said, "He asked life of You, You gave it to him, even length of days for ever and ever" (Ps 21:5).

This talmudic discussion opens with a reference to Zech 12:12, "And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart." Rav (= R. Abba, Babylon, d. 247 CE) asks for the cause of this mourning, and explains that rabbi Dosa (Galilee, late 2<sup>nd</sup> century) and the rabbis differ on the issue. For rabbi Dosa, Zechariah prophesied on the slaying of the Messiah son of Joseph in the end-time battle.<sup>3</sup> Rav concludes

<sup>2</sup> The parallels between Psalm 2 and the Gabriel Inscription demonstrated below adds further weight to the reading אָמְרִים: in this psalm God instructs the Davidide to ask him for intervention.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Heinemann attributes the development of the idea of a fighting messiah from Joseph/Ephraim who is killed by Israel's enemies, to rabbinic

that the rabbis voted him down, the mourning of Zech 12:12 is related to the end-time slaying of the evil inclination. But Rav admits that rabbi Dosa had a good cause since his interpretation would accord well with the preceding verse, “They shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son” (Zech 12:10).

The rabbis of the Bavli (3<sup>rd</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century) knew that Zech 12:10-12 could be read on the piercing of the Messiah son of Joseph and the subsequent mourning for him. Not surprising they read Psalm 2 as a dialogue between God and the Messiah son of David. Somewhat more surprising to a modern reader, they found the cause of the dialogue in the slaying of the Messiah son of Joseph in the battle against the enemies of Israel.

What did the Davidide ask his God for, ...שאל ממני ואתנה... (Ps 2:7)? They answer by referring to another royal psalm (Ps 21), easily connected with a Davidic messiah, where they find the same words on David asking and God giving in response (שאל, נתן), חיים ...נתתה לו. שאל ממך, נתתה לו. According to the Bavli, the Davidide asks God with the words איני מבקש ממך אלא חיים “I ask You for nothing but life” (i.e. not die as did the Messiah son of Joseph). In response God grants him life everlasting, i.e. victory against the enemies and a portion in the world to come.

reflection after Bar Kokhba’s catastrophic defeat (Heinemann 1975). And rabbi Dosa is indeed dated to two generations after this revolt. Three targumic texts contain contrasting traditions on this messianic figure (Fishbane 1998; Reeves 2005: 49-50; Schäfer 2010: 133-5). The “full story” of this Messiah as a precursor to the Davidic Messiah is preserved in the 7<sup>th</sup> century *Sefer Serubabel* and the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century *Secrets of R. Shimon bar Yohai* (Reeves 2005: 40-66, 76-89), but seems to be presupposed in *b. Sukkah 52a*, a targumic *tosefet* to Zech 12:10, *Bereshit Rabbah*, *Midrash Tanhuma*, and *Midrash Tehillim*. Israel Yuval suggests that the Messiah son of Joseph is a Jewish internalization of the figure of Jesus as Messiah (he too is a son of Joseph, a northerner, destined to die): Yuval 2006: 35-8. Schäfer finds such an internalization in the 7<sup>th</sup> century *Pesikta Rabbati*, the only Jewish text with a preexistent and suffering Messiah who atones for mankind (Schäfer 2010: 135-178).

The dialogue between God and the Davidic Messiah in the Bavli is surprisingly close to God's instructions to "David" in *Hazon Gabriel*:

עבדי דוד בקש מן לפני, אַמְרִים [הש] יבני, האות אני מבקש מן לפניך .... שאלני ואגיד לכה

The Bavli and the Gabriel Inscription represent similar interpretations of Psalm 2 as a dialogue between God and the Davidic Messiah within the context of the end-time battle with Israel's enemies. In both texts the Davidide asks God for divine grace or intervention, and God responds to the benefit of his anointed and his people. The Bavli uses the term בקש where Psalm 2 has שאל, while *Hazon Gabriel* uses both בקש and שאל.

It seems difficult to postulate a literary or tradition-historical line between these two texts from respectively the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. More probably *Hazon Gabriel* and *b. Sukkah* 52a represent similar interpretations of royal biblical psalms that are reread on the role of the messiah in the end-times.

The 7<sup>th</sup> century apocalypse *Sefer Serubabel* presents a similar dialogue between the Davidide Serubabel and the archangel Michael/Metatron, where Michael four times addresses Serubabel with the words שאל (לי) ואגיד לך "Ask (me), and I will tell you." This terminology in *Sefer Serubabel* is likely indebted to *b. Sukkah* 52a, since both texts relate to the end-time war and the two messiahs, and Serubabel is a Davidide himself.<sup>4</sup>

Psalm 2 deals with enemy peoples conspiring against the Davidide; the same setting is presupposed in *Hazon Gabriel*. The promise הצדק מלפני הרע נשבר "evil will be broken before righteousness" (*Hazon Gabriel* lines 20-21), terminologically close

<sup>4</sup> The dialogue between Serubabel and Michael in *Sefer Serubabel* can be compared with that between the anonymous prophet and Gabriel in *Hazon Gabriel*. In the Gabriel text God "will shake [the powers of] heaven and earth" (ll. 24-25), in *Sefer Serubabel* "the mountains and hills will quake, the earth and everything on it will shake, with the sea and all that is in it" (Reeves 2005: 62). Serubabel has a heavenly encounter with the Davidic messiah, and the same may be the case for the prophet of the Gabriel Inscription.

to 1QMysteries (1Q27) 1 i 5-7,<sup>5</sup> may be an actualization of Davidic texts such as Ps 2:8-9; 110:5-6; Isa 11:4-5.

Thus, not only biblical prophets, also royal psalms in the Psalter were formative for the prophetic rereading of biblical texts in the Gabriel Inscription. Psalm 2 seems particularly formative for this text.

Texts slightly earlier than *Hazon Gabriel* such as 1 Macc 3:3-9; 14:4-15 (cf. Elgvin 2013) and Ps. Sol. 17 also represent messianic readings of royal psalms including Ps 2. Texts of the *Yahad* present the same picture: the term used in the *Rule of the Congregation* for God's sending of the Davidic messiah, אִם יוֹלִיד [אֵל] תְּ[הַמְשִׁיחַ, "when [God] begets the Messiah among them" (1QSa II 11-12),<sup>6</sup> refers to Ps 2:7. And Psalm 2 belongs to the reference texts of 4QFlorilegium in its reading of the end-time assault against God's people and his Messiah (4Q174 I 11, 18-19). The peshet on Isaiah contains similar tradition on the Davidic Messiah in the end-time wars (4Q161 frgs. 2-6 and 8-10).<sup>7</sup>

Does the Gabriel Inscription presuppose a specific historical situation of crisis? According to Heinemann, such a scenario creates the background for the development of the idea of a slain

<sup>5</sup> וזה לכם האות כי יהיה בהסגר מולדי עולה וגולה הרשע מפני הצדק כגלות [ח] וישך מפני "This shall be to you the sign that it shall come to pass: When the begotten of unrighteousness are delivered up, and wickedness is removed from before righteousness, as darkness is removed from before light and as smoke wholly ceases and is no more, so shall wickedness cease forever, and righteousness shall be revealed as the sun (throughout) the full measure of the world." Cf. 4QTime of Righteousness (4Q215a) 1 ii 3-4 ת[עבו]ר וכול עולה ת[עבו]ר "for the period of wickedness has been completed and all injustice will ha[ve and en]d" (translations mine).

<sup>6</sup> Qimron's reading יוֹעֲדֹךְ must be discarded (Qimron 2010: 237). Josef Milik has no doubt about יוֹלִיד, but suggests the scribe misread a יוֹלִיד in his *Vorlage* (DJD 1: 117). IAA's recent infrared photo B-284824 confirms Milik's reading יוֹלִיד (<http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/1Q-28-1>). *Yod* is awkwardly drawn, but there is no other material option. Stephen Pfann reads the perhaps parallel text preserved in 4Qpap cryptA Sa<sup>i</sup>? אִם תְּ[וֹעֵד] הַעֲדָה (DJD 36: 572-3). Also texts such as Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; Mic 5:2 may have influenced the tradition of the begetting and presentation of the Messiah.

<sup>7</sup> On Ps. Sol. 17 and these sectarian texts, see Collins 2010: 52-78.

Messiah of Ephraim in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (Heinemann 1975). *Sefer Serubabel* reflects the experience of wars between Persia, Byzantium, and perhaps also the new Muslim empire 614-638 CE (Reeves 2005: 47; Schäfer 2010: 134-5, 174-7). In contrast, the text from the Bavli hardly presupposes such a crisis. Thus, the Bavli adds weight to the option that Hazon Gabriel represents prophetic-eschatological exegesis of biblical texts disentangled from any acute situation of military crisis (cf. Elgvin 2012: 228).

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