Bə-ʻēmeq ha-bākā (Psalms 84:7) interpreted as ‘Vale of tears’ in early Jewish exegesis and beyond*

C. Aslanov

Aix-Marseille Université-LPL,
5, avenue Pasteur, 13100 Aix-en-Provence, France
St. Petersburg State University,
7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation

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The present study tracks the genealogy of the figurative-paronymic interpretation that considers בָּכָא bākā (Psalms 84:7) a reference to tears and weeping from the Septuagint to several rabbinic Jewish sources where the term ʻēmeq ha-bākā has been identified either as a reference to the Gehenna (Targum and Talmud), as a metaphoric denomination of the mundane Vale of tears in the liturgical poem שַׁן שֶׁשֶּׁמֶק אֲיוּמָה Šōan ʻēmeq ayūmah or as a figurative denomination of the Exile in Isaiah of Trani’s commentary to Psalms 84:7, as well as by two Renaissance Jewish authors, Joseph Ha-Kohen Ha-Rofe and Rabbi Shelomo Alqabeṣ. Following David Qimḥi’s interpretation of the verse, the author suggests rereading the hemistich in Psalms 84:7 in a more literal way through the identification of בָּכָא bākā with the mulberry tree. Qimḥi’s isolated interpretation is all the more tempting in that the Latin term bacca/bāca “berry” itself could be viewed as the borrowing of the Phoenician or Punic word bākā, parallel to Hebrew בָּכָא bākā.

Keywords: Septuagint, Targum, Talmud, classical piyyuṭ, Isaiah of Trani, Joseph Ha-Kohen Ha-Rofe, Shelomo Alqabeṣ, Punic loanwords in Latin.

Introduction

The first hemistich of Psalms 84:7 עֹבְרֵי בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא obrē bə-ʻēmeq ha-bākā “Who passing through the valley of Baca...” (KJV) contains the mysterious term בָּכָא bākā that was understood as a mere toponym and therefore left untranslated in the King James Version (see quote above). Perhaps because this term is so obscure, it was paronymically connected with the Hebrew root ה/–bky/-h “to cry”. From this psychological understanding of בָּכָא bākā, an allegorical exegesis of the whole phrase בָּכָא בְּעֵמֶק ha-bākā emerged. Instead of referring to

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a concrete valley planted with a tree named בָּכָא bākā (as in II Samuel 5:23–24 where the form is used twice in the plural בָּכָאִים bokā‘im), בָּכָאִים 'emeq ha-bākā was perceived as meaning “the valley of weeping”. The first attested occurrence of such an interpretation is found in the Septuagint where בָּכָאִים ha-‘emeq ha-bākā was rendered by εἰς τὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος “to the valley of weeping”. Likewise, the above-mentioned occurrence of the plural form בָּכָאִים bokā‘im in II Samuel 5:23–24 is translated by the same word κλαυθμῶν “weeping” (also in the singular though the original בָּכָאִים bokā‘im appears in the plural). This figurative reading of the hemistich that probably relies on wordplay¹, has been reproduced by the various Latin translations of the Psalms: in convalle plorationis in the Vetus Latina; in convalle lacrimarum in Jerome’s translation juxta LXX; and in valle fletus in his translation juxta Hebraeos.

Parallel to this exegetical twist that goes back to Hellenistic Judaism and its Christian continuation, the interpretation of the first hemistich of Psalms 84:7 as referring to “the valley of tears” is well attested in rabbinic Judaism. The present study will try to track the genealogy of the figurative-paronymic interpretation that views בָּכָא bākā as a reference to tears and weeping in several rabbinic Jewish sources: i) the classical Palestinian piyyut exemplified by a piece traditionally ascribed to El'azar Ha-Kalir (c. 570–c. 640); ii) two sixteenth-century Jewish sources, the historical treatise חַבּות וְקָשָׁר 'Emeq ha-bākā by Joseph Ha-Kohen Ha-Rofe (1496–c. 1575) and Rabbi Shelomo Alqabe’s (1505–1584) renowned hymn Lekha Dodi that celebrates the entrance of Shabbath; iii) a more recent secularized recycling of the term בָּכָא ‘emeq ha-bākā in order to refer to the murderous tank battle waged on the Golan Heights in October 1973.

Lastly, this article will suggest rereading the hemistich in Psalms 84:7 in a more literal way through the identification of בָּכָא bākā as a specific tree species whose name does not have anything to do with the root בָּכָא bky/-h “to cry”.

**Rabbinic echoing of the paronomasia between בָּכָא bk’ and בָּכָא bkh**

The paronymic way of interpreting בָּכָא bākā as connected with the root בָּכָא bky/-h “to cry” was not limited to the Septuagint and the Christian exegesis founded in the text of the Alexandrine Bible. Indeed, an interesting parallel may be traced between the early Christian crystallization of the motive of the Vale of tears on the one hand, and similar motives in the core of Rabbinic literature on the other hand. Before the more recent extrapolation of the concept of the Vale of tears as a metaphor for earthly life, it seems that Late Antiquity Jewish and Christian commentaries both stressed another signification of the Vale of tears, that of penitence in the afterworld. Thus in an explanation to Psalm

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¹ On wordplay in the Hebrew original Book of Psalms and its rendering in the Septuagint, see: Backfish E. H. P. Hebrew Wordplay and Septuagint Translation Technique in the Fourth Book of the Psalter. London: T&T Clark, 2019.
83(84) spuriously attributed to John Chrysostom\(^2\), the phrase εἰς τὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμώνος is glossed as εν τῷ χωρίῳ τῆς μετάνοιας "in the place of penitence". Such a mention would be too laconic to be understood as a mention of penitence in the afterworld if it were not for an explicit connection between the phrase ḥַבָּכָא בְּעֵמֶק ha-bākā of Psalm 84:7 and the Gehenna in a word-by-word commentary of the verse in the Talmud of Babylon (‘Eruvin 19a):

"övrē: ēllū bənē ādām šə-ʾōvrīn ‘al roṣōnō ζελ haq-qādōs bārūk hū; ‘ēmeq: šə-maʿāmiqīm lāhem gēhinnom; ‘ha-bākā: šə-bōkīn u-mōridin dōmāt kə-maʿyān šel šītīn; ‘gam bərākōt yaʾteh mōreh: šə-maṣḏiqaṭin alēhem et ha-din vo-ōmrīm la-fānāv: Ribōnō šel ōvrē: šə-maṣḏiqīn ‘alēhem et ha-dīn və-yāfe tikqantā gēhinnom la-rəšā ’im, gan ‘edēn la-ṣadiqīm’.

‘Passing’ (ʿōvrē): those are the people who trespass (ʿōvrīn) the will of the Holy one, blessed be He; ‘valley’ (ʿēmeq): because they make the Gehenna deeper (maʿāmiqīn) for themselves; ha-bākā: because they cry (bōkīn) and shed tears like the flowing of the altar pits; ‘the rain also filleth blessings’: because they accept the justice on themselves and they say him: ‘Lord of the universe, you properly judged, you properly acquitted; you properly condemned; and you properly prepared the Gehenna for the wicked and the Paradise for the justs’.

The identification of בְּעֵמֶק ha-bākā with the Gehenna, a place of crying and repentance, goes back to Palestinian Jewish traditions. Indeed it is reverberated in an old Targum, the Targum Tehillim (“Targum of Psalms”) that is of clearly Palestinian Jewish origin, as shown by the specific blend of Aramaic in which it was written:

רַשִּׁיטֵא דַּעַבְרוֹי נֵּלֶכֶת צָפְּקָה בַּכָּרָא בֶּאֶדֶן מַעֲיִין לְאֹלְפָּן רֵדְבִּין יָעַשְׁוּנֵיהּ מַעֲיָינָא בִּכְיְיתָא בָּכְיָן גֵיהִנָּם עַל דְּעָבְרִין רֵשִּׁיעַיָּא אוֹרַיְיתֵיהּ.

"The wicked who cross over the valleys of Gehenna, weeping — he will make their weeping like a fountain; but those who return to the teaching of his Torah, he will cover them with blessings”.

This interpretation is further reverberated in later commentaries: Rashi (1040–1105) and David Qimḥi (1160–1235) ad locum. However, as we will see

\(^2\) Joannis Chrysostomi opera omnia quae extant / ed. Bernard de Montfaucon. Paris: Gaume, 1836. Vol. V, part II. P.935. — Psalm 83 (84) does not figure among the 58 psalms figuring in his Commentary of the Psalms. See: Hill R. C. Saint John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998.
It seems that the identification of בָּכָא בְּעֵמֶק ha-bākā with the Gehenna has been conditioned by the etymology of the Hebrew term הִנֹּם gehinnōm “Gehenna” etymologically or paretymologically related to יִהְיוֹם gēy ben hinnom “the valley of the son of Hinnom”\(^3\). Since since בָּכָא and gēy are synonymous, the phrase בָּכָא בְּעֵמֶק ha-bākā could have been perceived as referring to the infernal valley of gehinnōm, probably connected to גֵּיא הִנֹּם gēy ben hinnom, the place where the sacrifices to Moloch were perpetrated (II Kings 23:10) and where Jeremiah prophetized the eschatological massacre of the wicked (Jeremiah 7:32).

The paronomasie between בָּכָא bk’ and בָּכָה bkh in an early medieval liturgical poem: from the afterworld to this world

A significant semantic shift occurred when בָּכָא בְּעֵמֶק ha-bākā was reinterpreted not only as the afterlife infernal valley, the Gehenna or the place of punishment of the wicked after their death, but as the mundane Vale of tears. The change from the afterlife to the world here below is illustrated in the liturgical poem שׁוֹשַׁן עֵמֶק šōšan ‘ēmeq, traditionally recited during the additional prayer (Musaf) of the Day of Atonement in the Ashkenazi tradition, that is, during a solemnity that stresses the nothingness of the human being in comparison to God’s almightiness. This piyyut, that Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra erroneously attributed to Ele’azar Ha-Kalir, was most likely composed after Kalir’s death (c. 640), but before 900 (terminus ad quem) in a Byzantine Jewish context (Palestine or Southern Italy) where the Septuagint rendering of בָּכָא בְּעֵמֶק as εἰς τὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος was certainly known in spite of the rabbinic reluctance toward the text of the Septuagint, identified with the Christian appropriation of the Jewish Torah.

Some formal anomalies in the incipit of this poem confirm that its Hebrew phrasing was shaped by latent poetic devices directly inspired by the Greek rhetorical legacy\(^4\). First of all, it displays a strange lack of agreement between שׁוֹשַׁן שׁוֹשַׁן šōšan “lily of the valleys” and ayūmāh “awful” or rather אוּיְּמָה úyyəmāh “threatened”. This anomaly has already drawn the attention of Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra (c. 1089–1167) in his commentary to Ecclesiastes 5:1. According to Ibn ‘Ezra, the use of the feminine is wrong with שׁוֹשַׁן šōšan\(^5\). However, this morphosyntactic irregularity is perfectly legitimate from the vantage point of

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\(^3\) See: Kutscher Y. Millim u-toldoteihen. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1961. P. 66.

\(^4\) On the influence of Greek rhetoric on the Hebrew piyyut in Byzantine Palestine, see: Aslanov C. Romanos the Melodist and Palestinian Piyyut: Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Perspectives // Bonfil R., Irshai O., Stroumsa G. G., Talgam R. (eds) Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011. P. 613–628, especially p. 617–622.

\(^5\) Gómez Aranda M. Grammatical Remarks in The Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra on Qohelet // Sefarad. 1996. Vol. 56, fasc. 1. P. 61–82, especially p. 76.
Greek rhetoric where this agreement according to the meaning and in spite of the gender is called κατὰ σύνεσιν “according to the understanding”.

Moreover, the incipit šōšan ‘ēmeq ayūmāh (ūyyomāh) does not just reverberate the translation of בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא as εἰς τὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος. It also conflates together two Biblical phrases integrated in the text of the poem by dint of the poetical device known as sībus “cento”: שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים “the lily of the valleys” (Song of Songs 2:1), which the allegorical exegesis of the Song of Songs identifies with the Assembly of Israel, and אֲיוּמָה/אוּיְּמָה ayūmāh understood as “vale of tears”. beyond the phrase שׁוֹשַׁן ‘ēmeq ha-bākā “the lily of the vale of tears”, which is implicit in שׁוֹשַׁן ‘ēmeq ayūmāh (ūyyomāh) “the threatened lily of the valley” or maybe “the lily of the threatened valley” or possibly “the lily of the awful valley” if the reading אֲיוּמָה ayūmāh “awful” is to be preferred to אוּיְּמָה ūyyəmāh “threatened”.

Moreover, the transformation of the phrase שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים of Song of Songs 2:1 implicitly alluded to in the formula ‘ēmeq, obeys a specific device of the arsenal of Greek rhetoric, namely the apocope or to use the same term as Aristoteles in his Poetics (1457b), the aphaeresis (the exact term used by Aristoteles is ἀφῃρημένον “shortened”). By means of this recognized device of Greek rhetoric, שׁוֹשַׁנָּה is truncated to שׁוֹשַׁן and the determined plural הָעֲמָקִים becomes the singular ‘ēmeq without the article. This could be an explanation for the lack of gender agreement between שׁוֹשַׁן and אוּיְּמָה/אֲיוּמָה: not only an agreement κατὰ σύνεσιν, but the use of a masculine שׁוֹשַׁן that is actually a shortened feminine. In addition to this manipulation of the signifier that replaced the long form שׁוֹשַׁנָּה by the shortened one שׁוֹשַׁן, there might also be a repercussion of the semantic shift that led שׁוֹשַׁנָּה to become a synonym of וֶרֶד vered “rose”, which is attested since Mishnaic Hebrew.

The fact that the piyyuṭ שׁוֹשַׁן ‘ēmeq ayūmāh clearly relies on Greek rhetorical devices corroborates the assumption that it was composed in a Hellenized atmosphere where the influence of the Septuagint rendering of בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא is likely to have reactivated the paronomasia between בכא bk’ and הכא bkh.

Later reverberations of the paronomasia between בכא bk’ and הכא bkh in medieval and Renaissance Hebrew literature

The transition from the Talmudic-Midrashic eschatological interpretation to the Classical Hebrew piyyuṭ of Byzantine Palestine was characterized by a shift from the identification of בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא as εἰς τὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος is likely to have reactivated the paronomasia between בכא bk’ and הכא bkh.

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6 On this semantic evolution, see: Aslanov C. L’apocryphe réintégré: une réminiscence de Siracide 50, 1–21 dans l’hymnologie juive // Mimouni S. (ed.) Apocryphite. Histoire d’un concept transversal aux religions du Livre: En hommage à Pierre Geoltrain. Turnhout: Brepols, 2002. P.31–43, especially p. 35–41.
in those changes of signification was made when the metaphysical meaning of mundane Vale of tears was restricted to a specifically national-politic dimension, that of "Exile". The first attestation of this recentering from the general meaning of mundane Vale of tears to that of Exile appears in Isaiah of Trani's (c. 1165–c. 1240) commentary ad locum:

"'Ovrebbe ha-bakâ — Yiśrāēl, ša-hēm 'ōvrim ba-ēmeq ha-bakâ, vo-zehu ha-galût, ša-dōmāh la-ēmeq mōsugeret.

"Who passing through the valley of Baca...' — The Israelites, because they pass in the Valley of Baca, which is the Exile, that is similar to a closed valley".

With the substantial laconism that characterizes his exegetical method and without entering into eschatological-metaphysical considerations, Isaiah of Trani simply identifies the mysterious “Valley of Baca” with the Exile. Incidentally, it is interesting to see that in the medieval blend of Hebrew used by this Jewish Italian commentator, the word עמק 'ēmeq is perceived as feminine, probably under the influence of the Italo-Romance word valle: עמק מוגרセット 'ēmeq mōsugeret “closed valley” instead of the expected עמק מוגר "eumeq mesugar. In light of this lack of gender agreement motivated by Isaiah of Trani’s Italo-Romance surroundings, one could apply the same explanation in order to provide an account for the lack of gender agreement in the incipit of the afore-mentioned piyyuṭ Šōsan ‘ēmeq ayūmāh. In addition to or instead of the interpretation that recognizes the lack of gender agreement between ‘ēmeq and ayūmāh, one also could ascribe this violation of the Hebrew grammatical rules to the Proto-Italo-Romance surroundings, which makes sense if this liturgical poem had been composed shortly before 900 in Byzantine Italy.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the term עמק מוגרセット ‘ēmeq mōsugeret “closed valley” seems to translate the toponym Vallis clausa (Provençal Vau-clusa), literally “closed valley”, which is the name given to the highest part of the gorge of the river Sorgue in Provence, near Avignon.

It was precisely Avignon that gave birth to the above-mentioned Renaissance Jewish scholar Joseph Ha-Kohen whose historiographical treatise bears a title and a subtitle that clearly subscribe to the exegetical tradition initiated by Isaiah of Trani: עמק הבכא: ספר הקורות והתלאות אשר עברו על בית ישרואל "The Vale of tears: The book of the history and the tribulations that passed over the House of Israel"7.

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7 For a critical edition of this books, see: Joseph Ha-Kohen. Sefer 'Emeq Ha-Bakha (The Vale of Tears) with the chronicle of the anonymous Corrector / ed. by K. Almbladh. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1981. — On Joseph Ha-Kohen’s messianic inspiration, see: Yerushalmi Y. H. Messianic Impulses in Joseph Ha-Kohen // Cooperman B. D. (ed.) Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983. P.460–487.
A similar interpretation of the phrase בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא as a reference to Exile is found in the above-mentioned sabbatical hymn Lekha Dodi composed by a contemporary of Yosef Ha-Kohen, the above-mentioned Shelomo Alqabe. In the 3rd verse of the 3rd strophe of the poem (v. 13) עַל יְזָהַר שֶׁבֶט בָּהָר הָאָדֹם duas verses were merged together according to the poetical device of the double cento. Indeed, the phrase בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא was combined with another verse of the Bible רַב לָךְ שֶׁבֶת בָּהָר הָאָדֹם “Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount” (Deuteronomy 1:6; KJV).

Both Yosef Ha-Kohen and Shelomo Alqabe were born a few years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain the former 4 years later and the latter 13 years later. For those Spanish Jews who had been brutally thrown out of their country, the equivalence stated by Isaiah of Trani between בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא and גַּלּוּת “Exile” was doubly meaningful inasmuch as it symbolized not only the long Exile of the whole Jewish nation far away from Zion after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, but also more specifically, the very recent banishment of Spanish Jewry out of Sefarad that seems to have unleashed eschatological hopes in the hearts of the expelled Iberian Jews.

Contemporary developments: between the figurative and the literal meaning

Closer to modern day, the phrase בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא has undergone two opposite developments: on the one hand, the figurative meaning of “Vale of tears” was recycled in order to concretely refer to the tank battle held on at the eastern slopes of the Golan Heights between the 6th and 9th of October 1973; on the other hand, the literal meaning of בָּכָא was reassessed by modern Bible scholars, which allowed for the redemption of the phrase and the verse in which it appears from the negative connotations that were associated therewith from the time of the Septuagint translation at least.

It seems that the use of the term בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא as a reference to the tank battle appeared for the first time in Ronen Schorr’s press chronicle published two months after the event (December 1973) in the IDF magazine Bamahane.

Parallel to this recycling of an old metaphor transmitted by generations of Biblical interpreters, our time has witnessed an interesting comeback of a non-metaphorical reading of the term בָּכָא in the meaning of a species of tree. As a matter of fact, such an identification has been already suggested by David Qimḥi both for Psalms 84:7 and for II Samuel 5:23–24. The Narbonese commentator suggested to identify הבָּכָא/בְּכָאִים with the term תּוּתים “berries” that Qimḥi probably intended in the meaning of “mulberry trees”. This

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8 Scholom G. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. New York: Schocken Books, 1961. P. 244–250.
9 Benaya Y. Koḥah šel millah // Bamahane. 2013. September 12. URL: http://www.gvura.org/a345093-%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%97%D7%94- (accessed: 25.01.2020).
reading is all the more tempting inasmuch as the word תותים tūtīm, not attested before the Mishnah (e.g. Ma’asrōt 1, 2), is not genuinely Semitic. It is likelier to be an Iranian loanword in Aramaic and Hebrew rather than an Aramaic loanword in Persian. Indeed, the syllabic structure of Aramaic תות tūtā with the repetition of the same consonant in the 1st and 3rd positions makes it unlikely to be of Semitic origin.

It seems, therefore, that the concept of “berry” is apparently lacking in Biblical Hebrew unless we accept Qimḥi’s equivalence between the Biblical word בֶּכַא bākā/בְּכָאִים bəkā’im on the one hand, and the Mishnaic term תות tūtīm on the other hand. When Qimḥi proposed such an interpretation of the rare word בֶּכַא bākā/בְּכָאִים bəkā’im, he was probably influenced by his own linguistic background. Indeed, Old Provençal and Catalan baia, Spanish baya and their Latin etymon bāca/bacca may have induced the Languedocian Jew of Andalusian origin Qimḥi to recognize in בֶּכַא bākā/בְּכָאִים bəkā’im a plant name. Curiously enough, what could be considered a haphazard paronymy motivated by a superficial likeness between the Hebrew and the Latin signifier may rely on a serious foundation inasmuch as in Latin itself, the word bāca/bacca could be a Punic loanword. The connection reverberated by Varro (vinum in Hispania bacca “wine in Hispania <is> bacca”) could corroborate this Semitic etymology of Latin bāca/bacca since the Latin lexicographer did not specifically mention which of the languages in use in ancient Hispania is represented by bacca, a metonymic way to refer to the product of the grape considered a sort of berry10. Given the strong Phoenician, later Carthaginian, presence in a significant part of the Iberian Peninsula, the Semitic origin of bāca/bacca is very likely. What makes it even likelier is the variation between bāca and bacca at the level of Latin, as well as the fact that Varro gave the form bacca as the name of the wine in Hispania. This form with its geminated <cc> is a quite precise approximation for the dageš before the begedkefat lenition started to be felt in some of the Northwest Semitic languages, that is, first and foremost in Aramaic, then in Aramaic-influenced Hebrew, and only to a lesser extent in Late Phoenician and Late Punic (c. third century BC). Admittedly, the Latin loanword sūfes/sūffes < Punic šufeṭ/sufeṭ “judge; magistrate”, parallel to Hebrew שופט šofet, seems to reflect a Late Punic form that underwent the spirantization of [p] to [f]. However, it is possible that the loanword בֶּכַא bākā pertains to an older contingent of Semitic loanwords in Latin, words that had been borrowed from Phoenician and not necessarily from its Late Punic development. Lastly, it should be noted that in Latin itself, the sequence -VC-permutes with the sequence -VCC as in littera “letter” alternating with littera11. The alternation bāca/bacca could be interpreted in the same way with the only difference that if it is a Semitic loanword, the form bacca is probably older than bāca. In the case of literal/littera, however, the former precedes

10 Varro Marcus Terentius. De lingua Latina: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary / ed. by W.D.C. de Melo. Oxford: Oxford University Press. VII 87.
11 Leumann M., Hofmann J. B., Szantyr A. Lateinische Grammatik (1. Band: Lateinische Laut- und Formenlehre). 5th ed. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1926–1928. § 184c.
the latter, as shown by the archaic form leitera whose diphthong was eventually monophthongized in [-ī-].

Whatever it might be, David Qimḥi’s reading of נִבְכֵי יָמ nībkē yām, as referring to the mulberry tree, remains in clear contradiction with the allegorical/moralizing interpretation of the first hemistich of Psalms 84:7. Incidentally, in his commentary of the Prophets and Hagiographs, the Narbonese rabbi also suggests an allegorical reading of עֹבְרֵי בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא obrē bə-'ēmeq ha-bākā whereby he connects the word נִבְכֵי יָמ nībkē yām “springs of the sea” in Job 38:16. Since the sea is a metaphor for the Torah, he interprets עֹבְרֵי בְּעֵמֶק הַבָּכָא obrē bə-'ēmeq ha-bākā as

בֹּא - 'ēmeq mabō 'ē ha-hōkmāh
“in the valley of the wells of wisdom”

However, this alternative interpretation, though still adopting the allegorical mode, is not connected at all with the lachrymose understanding of נִבְכֵי יָמ nībkē yām as deriving from the root/בכ - n bky/-h “to cry”. Whatever it may be, the identification of בָּכָא bākā as “mulberry tree” appears after the allegory of the “springs of wisdom”, as if it came to correct it and to provide the last word. In his concern to put the text he commented in an historical perspective without renouncing the allegoric dimension altogether, Qimḥi anticipates Joseph Kaspi’s ultra-rationalist commentaries of the Bible12.

Conclusion

The text of the Bible is no less the final result of the long elaboration process that preceded the historical moment when it was written down than the starting point of the exegetical chain that elaborates on the meaning of the words and phrases in an atomistic way, taking isolated elements of the text as pretexts for the promotion of ideological representations reflecting the agenda of the various religions and of the competing trends within them.

This fundamental difference between an archaeological reading of the textual data and an approach more interested in the Nachleben of the text throughout its translations or interpretations, goes back to another basic dilemma of literary studies: what matters more between the genesis of the text, that is, its prehistory, its sources of influence, the creative act that brought it to existence as an oral or written text, or the study of its reception and reappropriations? Beyond this dilemma, it is easy to perceive the concurrence between a philological approach and an ideological one. The former considers the text a literary source able to reflect the context and the context within which it emerged, whereas the latter implicitly takes it for granted that the text was revealed or at

12 On Joseph ibn Kaspi’s historical perspectivism, see: Aslanov C. Le provençal des Juifs et l’hébreu en Provence: le dictionnaire Šaršot Ha-Kesef de Joseph Caspi. Leuven; Paris: Peeters Editions, 2001. P. 118.
least, divinely inspired. For this second approach, which is actually the earliest one in terms of relative chronology, the reception of the text is more important because it unravels all the treasures of meaning concealed in the revealed text.

Turning back to Psalms 84:7, the main danger implied by the second approach is that it contributed to congealing inveterate habits of reading a certain verse instead of scouring the text from the scorias of transmission that often blurred the inner logic that preceded its creation. The alliteration between בָּכָא bākā and the root bky/-h “to cry” is a good example of the way the rhetoric of interpretation (paronomasia and allegorizing) obliterated the genuine meaning of some very concrete places both in Judaism and Christianity.

David Qimḥi’s return to the literal meaning of the hemistich allows to connect it in a more satisfactory way to the overall context of Psalm 84 that is characterized by the joyous atmosphere pervading the evocation of the Temple starting from verse 2: הצָּוַם מֵאֲדוֹת מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ mah-yyədidōt miškənōtēkā “How amiable are thy tabernacles!” (KJV). Admittedly, it has been suggested that in the microcontext of Book III of Psalms (Psalms 84–89), Psalm 84 might express a hopeless longing to the destroyed Temple in a postexilic situation rather than the rejoicing provoked by the frequentation of God’s dwelling place. In this hypothesis, the first hemistich of Psalms 84:7 could indeed involve a pessimistic note. However, such a reading has been likely conditioned by the lachrymose interpretation of the word בָּכָא bākā as connected to the root bky/-h “to cry”. Therefore, Robert E. Wallace’s reading of Psalms 84 could constitute a further example of the impact exerted by an allegoric-paronomastic interpretation that fails to understand the literal meaning of the mysterious term בָּכָא bākā.

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13 Wallace R. E. The Narrative Effect of Psalms 84–89 // The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures. 2011. Vol. 11, art. 10, especially 7–8. URL: http://jhsonline.org/Articles/article_157.pdf (accessed: 29.01.2020).
Во-'ēmeq ha-bākā (Пс 84:7) как «юдоль плачевная» в ранней и поздней еврейской экзегезе*

C. Асланов

Университет Экс-Марсель,
Франция, 13100, Экс-ан-Преванс, авеню Пастер, 5
Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет,
Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9

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Настоящая статья исследует генеалогию аллегорического-парономастического толкования, согласно которому слово נְצָר bākā (Пс 84 [83]:7) связано с юдолью плачевной, начиная с Септуагинты вплоть до раввинистических источников. В них термин 'ēmeq ha-bākā воспринимается либо как на-азвание геенны (Таргуим и Талмуд), либо как метафора земного существа в литургической поэме שׁוֹשַׁן עֵמֶק אֲיוּמָה, либо как намек на Изгнание — например, у Исании из Трани и у двух раввинов XVI в. Йосефа ха-Коен ха-Рофе и Шломо Алькабеца. Следуя предложенному Давидом Кимхи толкованию стиха Пс 84:7, автор предлагает понимать первое по-лучшее этого стиха более буквально, переводя слово נְצָר bākā как «тутовое дерево». Это изолированное средневековое толкование любопытно тем, что латинское слово bacca/bāca «ягода» само может считаться заим-

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ствованием финикийского или пунического слова бака, соответствующего древнееврейскому ḫ.splitext bāḵā.

Ключевые слова: Септуагинта, Таргум, Талмуд, классический ḥ.splitext piyyuṭ, Исаия из Трани, Йосеф ха-Коен ха-Рофе, Шломо Алькабец, пунические заимствования в латыни.

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Информация об авторе:
Асланов Сирил — PhD, HDR, проф.; msaslan@mail.huji.ac.il