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“Heavy of Mouth” and “Heavy of Tongue”
On Moses’ Speech Difficulty*

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One of the most popular of Jewish legends tells how Moses burned his tongue on a hot coal in infancy and remained for the rest of his life with a speech impediment. This.aggâdā reflects the ancient and widely held interpretation that Moses referred to such an impediment when he sought to escape God’s mission on the ground that he was “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” (kbd ph wkbd lšwn, Exod 4:10, JE) or “uncircumcised of lips” (‘rl ṣptym, Exod 6:12 and 30, P).1 For all their popularity, however, the legend and the interpretation were dismissed as apocryphal as early as the 12th century by Rashbam. Rashbam, Luzzatto, and most recent commentators2 have preferred the views of other ancient exegetes that Moses claimed to have forgotten his tia ti an,3 to be ineloquent, unskilled in debating,4 or the like. While differing from each other, these interpretations have in common the removal of Moses’ difficulty from the medical realm.5

There is no question that Moses did claim ineloquence. This is clear from his introductory remark in Exod 4:10a, “I am not a man of words” (cf. Jer 1:6, “I do not know how to speak”). The question is whether “heavy of mouth and tongue” and “uncircumcised of lips” repeat that idea or express something new, a reason for the ineloquence (as Jer 1:6b, “for I am a youth,” adds a reason), and if so, whether the reason is medical (whether physical or psychological in origin) or something else.

The present paper was occasioned by Akkadian and other evidence which places “heavy of mouth” squarely in the repertoire of medical terminology. Nevertheless, in the course of reviewing biblical and other evidence which had long been available, it became apparent that the disparity of views among exegetes is at least partially rooted in the elasticity of ancient usage. Although the term in question described a bodily ailment, it was early extended to another disability. In the end we shall have to be guided by the context, but we shall return to the context with an awareness of the meanings ancient readers were likely to see in the idiom, and we shall understand the semantic development which facilitated the disparity of interpretations.

Evidence from Hebrew

It seems clear that the different idioms used in Exodus 4 and 6 do not express different problems (Tgs. Onqelos and Neofiti use identical terms in 4:10 and 6:12, 30, and the other Aramaic renditions in these verses seem virtually interchangeable). kbd and ‘rl, when describing parts of the body, are often approximately synonymous,6 as shown by the following juxtapositions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. Isa 6:10 vs. Jer 6:10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>zknyw kkbd . . . pn . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . make its ears heavy . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Exod 7:14 vs. Lev 26:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kbd lb pr’h, m’n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Pharaoh’s heart is hard (lit. ‘heavy’), he refuses . . .”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is further clear that, when used with the ear, “heavy” refers to a malfunction of the organ: the heavy ear cannot hear (Ben Yehudah 1959: 2224). Although the phrases here juxtaposed are figurative (referring to imperceptiveness and stubbornness; cf. Ibn Ezra 1976 at Exod 13:9), others show the term’s basic medical usage. “The ears of the aged become heavy” refers to hardness of hearing (b. Šabb. 152a).7 In Gen 48:10 we read that “Israel’s eyes were heavy with age; he could
not see. A synonymous idiom is presumed in a midrash which takes Amos' name to mean "laden, heavy of tongue," hence "impeded of speech."

The only other passage to describe part of the mouth as heavy is Ezek 3:5-6, which speaks of nations "deep of lip and heavy of tongue" whose words Ezekiel would not understand. Comparison of this verse to Isa 33:19 is instructive:

\[\text{Both verses describe nations of unintelligible language in identical terms, save that } kbd \text{ alternates with } nlcg, \text{ clearly its synonym. } lCg, \text{ whose Syriac cognate means "stutter," appears in yet another comparable phrase, } bl'gy iph wbliwn \text{ "with stammering lips and an alien tongue" (Isa 28:11; the unintelligibility of foreign tongues is also mentioned in Deut 28:49; Isa 18:2, 7; Jer 5:15; Ps 81:6). (The apparently related } lg \text{ [cf. Syriac } l\text{"g}, \text{ "stutter"} \text{ refers in Isa 32:4 to those who speak unclearly; it is contrasted with speaking "quickly and fluently.") Thus the usage of } l\text{"g} \text{ for impeded speech has been extended in Isaiah 28 and 33 to express the unintelligibility of a foreign language. The same development underlies the synonymous "heavy of tongue" in Ezekiel 3, where "heavy" has been extended from a medical affliction which causes unintelligible speech to a metaphor for speech which is unintelligible because of its foreignness.}

The extension of terms for speech impediment to describe foreign languages and accents is a widely attested semantic development, both among the Semitic languages and elsewhere. Best known is Greek barbaros, "speaking in a foreign or unintelligible tongue" (cf. 1 Cor 14:6-11), which is related to Sanskrit bara-, which means both "stammering" and "non-Aryan" (Random House Dictionary, s.v. "barbarian," kindly confirmed by my colleague, Ludo Rocher). Arabic uses timitim(iyy)u and cajamu, both originally referring to defective speech, for non-Arabic speaking peoples. Hebrew uses c'l\text{"g}, "stammerer," in the same way, and c'z, "speak in a foreign tongue," is related to cognates meaning "speak indistinctly, obscurely." The Palestinian Talmud uses the Greek loan-word psill\text{o}̣s for both stammering and dialectal peculiarities (Jastrow 1953: 1195). In Sumerian and Akkadian we have a bilingual inscription describing distant peoples as eme-bi gilim-ma: lišānunu egr\text{u}, "whose tongue (= language) is garbled" (UET 1, 146: iii, 6, and iv, 6f.; see Finkelstein 1955: 6, n. 53 for literature; add Landsberger 1931: 136; CAD E: 42b). Both Sumerian gil(im) and Akkadian e\text{g}\text{e}rutu are used elsewhere for physical disabilities, including lameness and speech defect; here the nuance is "unintelligible." The Sumerian word for heavy, dug\text{u}, is used for physical afflictions (Hallo 1968: 83/85: 27) and also to describe speaking Sumerian poorly. In a disputation text, one student of Sumerian taunts his schoolmate: eme-ger,-šē al-dug\text{u} eme-ni si nu-ub-sā, "In the Sumerian tongue he is heavy, he cannot keep his tongue straight" (see Sjöberg 1976: 162; Kramer 1963: 223). The semantic development underlying this widely attested figure of speech conforms to the relationship we presume to exist between kbd ph wbld l\text{u} in Exod 4:10 and kbdy l\text{u} in Ezek 3:5-6.

**Arabic and Akkadian Evidence**

The medical usage of "heavy" appears in other Near Eastern languages as well. In Arabic, the verbs waqara and taqala are predicated especially of the ear to describe hardness of hearing and deafness (Lane 1863-65: s.v. waqara and taqala; in Arabic kbd is primarily used for severity and difficulty rather than heaviness). In the Chronicle of Tabari (ca. 838-923) it is reported that Al-\text{Fa\text{"}d} ibn Barmak was stricken with an illness "which began with a heaviness which affected him in his tongue and side" (de Goeje 1881: III, 733, year 193). This appears to be a stroke, with at least partial paralysis of the side and tongue. Presently Al-\text{Fa\text{"}d} "improved and began to converse"; his speech loss in the interim had not been total since he made certain remarks while ill. After a later relapse "his tongue and extremity were bound" (\text{"uqida}), and he soon died. This passage shows heaviness of the tongue referring to the aphasia which often accompanies strokes.

In Akkadian the cognate of kbd, kabātu, is used in medical texts as a symptom of several parts of the body. Here, too, the symptom frequently affects the ears (Thompson 1931: 1-25; Labat 1957: 114-17; TDP 70:14). That it refers to heaviness of hearing is clear from texts where heaviness of the ears alternates freely with heaviness of hearing (AMT 35/2: lines 2-9; cf.
A number of Akkadian texts mention a symptom KA-šū kabit. In this phrase, the sign KA has usually been assigned its reading pū, “mouth,” so that the symptom is “his mouth is heavy” (Thompson 1934: 1, 2; TDP 228:97; CAD B: 350d; CAD K: 31b). Recently, the CAD has read KA as dabābu, “speech,” in one group of passages (CAD K: 15-16 sub 2’; cf. TDP 65 n. 118).21 By itself, such a reading is conceivable (just as we find “heavy hearing” along with “heavy ears”), but one text attributes the symptom to a baby, where speech is out of the question (TDP 228:97). “His mouth is heavy” remains the most likely reading.

It is easier to state what this symptom does not mean than what it does. It is clearly not ineloquence or inability to speak the native language, which would not be dealt with in medical texts. However, the available evidence is insufficient for defining the symptom. There is a medical series of at least five tablets entitled “If a man’s mouth is heavy” (śumma amīlu pašū [KA-šū] kabit), but the entries dealing with the title symptom are missing. The extant parts deal mainly with the chest, epigastrum, lungs, and stomach. Respiratory ailments can cause difficulty in speech;23 as J. V. Kinnier-Wilson suggests, “his speech is labored” might be the meaning in this context (letter of May 5, 1971). Various speech disorders are mentioned in other Akkadian medical texts and would not be unexpected here, although pū kabit is not one of the standard phrases in other texts (the terms include ebētu, egēru, uqquqqu, šabātu kasāru, dannu, pardiš, parāku, ħasu, and šassā’u; see TDP 58-69, esp. 64:61-66:85; Kraus 1936-37: 219ff.). It is well to remember that it is not the Akkadian text itself but only the cognate Hebrew usage which raises the possibility that a speech difficulty is involved here.

Other medical texts offer little more guidance toward a precise definition. The passage AMT 28/2:1-3 reads: [śumma amīlu pašū šabī]sma KA,DIB,BL,DA irtanašši/[... K]A-šū kabit illatušu ittanallakuma la parsa / [šinnāšu en]ša u dannu ihill. If the reading [K]A in line 2 is correct,24 we may have an occurrence of pū kabit in context. CAD K: 31b assumes this to be the case and translates: “if a man’s mouth is affected and he has aphasia repeatedly, [... ] his mouth is paralyzed, his saliva running again and again without stopping, [his teeth are]lose and bleeding [... ]” (restoration assured by AMT 69/12.2, cited in CAD H: 54-55). CAD assumes the passage refers to “a particular type of aphasia which is caused by mental diseases such as epilepsy.” If this be so, we should consider a restoration [napīš KA-šū (= either pāšū or appišu) kabit, “his breathing (lit., the breath of his mouth or nose) is heavy” (cf. n. 22), for one of the symptoms of grand mal epilepsy is suspension of breathing (along with foamy, often blood-stained saliva; McQuarrie 1966: 645a). In this case, the text would not mention heaviness of the mouth at all. In any case, the explanation found in the CAD does not account for the looseness of teeth,25 and its understanding of kabit as “paralyzed” goes beyond the evidence. Paralysis of the mouth is likely to be fatal, and that is something which none of the texts mentioning heaviness of the mouth leads us to expect.

The only other occurrence of “heavy mouth” I have found is in the medical text TDP 228:97, mentioned above: śumma la-ù libbēšu ebētu u pāšu (KA-šū) kabit bušānu ishassu, “If a baby’s bowels are contracted by cramps and its mouth is heavy, stinking disease has seized it.”26 The association with a baby27 not only rules out the CAD reading of KA as dabābu, “speech,” but likewise prevents interpreting “heavy of mouth” as a speech defect here, since this would not be observable in a baby (notwithstanding references to newborn infants talking in omen texts such as Leichty 1970: I, 82; IV, 35). To go any further, we would have to know to what the term “stinking disease” (bušānu) refers. Several possibilities have been suggested, and each seems compatible with some of the texts which mention the term — but only with some. One gains the impression that bušānu refers to several different malodorous oral afflictions. Current suggestions are a type of leprosy (CAD B: 351b; cf. Goetze 1955: 13), scurvy (Wilson 1966: 47-58 and 1967: 193-94), and diphtheria (Wilson 1967: 205; Köcher apud Lambert 1970b: 43:11, 29n.). However, each of these views is medically questionable so far as TDP 228:97 is concerned. In infantile leprosy, intraoral manifestations are the least noticeable symptom and develop late in the disease. A nursing child (see n. 27) is unlikely to develop scurvy, since mother’s milk contains ascorbic acid (were the mother herself scorbutic...
she probably could not have given birth). Furthermore, the protasis of our text says nothing of scurvy’s main manifestation, dermatological and neurological symptoms of the extremities; oral disturbances, which the protasis does mention, are never observed in an edentate mouth in scurvy. Cramps, also mentioned in our text, are not associated with leprosy, scurvy, or diphtheria.

In TDP 228:97, the association of bušānu with an infant suggests the possibility of a congenital condition. I. Ship (see n. 25) notes that the symptoms in this text are fully consistent with cleft palate, which, in addition to the basic oral condition, causes both abdominal pain due to excessive swallowing of air and malodor from frequently regurgitated food caught between the palate and the nose. Although this interpretation is not consistent with other descriptions of bušānu, TDP 228:97 seems unique among cases of the latter in several respects, and if the term refers to several different afflictions, consistency is not to be expected.

The most that we can say about “heaviness” of mouth is that it refers to oral manifestations of several possible syndromes. It is unquestionably a medical symptom. Although the oral symptoms described in the Akkadian texts may indeed hamper speech in adults, that is not demonstrably the manifestation the Akkadian texts have in mind. In TDP 228:97, referring to an infant, a speech defect is implausible.

Sumerian Evidence

Although I have found no certain example of “heavy mouth” used in a medical sense in Sumerian, the metaphorical extension of “heavy” to describe nonfluency in a language is attested in the disputation text quoted above: eme-ger₃,šē al-dugud e me-ni s inu-ub-sā, “in the Sumerian tongue he is heavy, he cannot keep his tongue straight.” The latter expression calls to mind eme-si-sā, the “straight tongue,” which is the designation of the normal Sumerian dialect. Inability to keep the tongue straight is literally an expression of abnormal or defective speech, just as egēru, “be twisted, garbled,” said of the tongue, refers to a speech defect (see n. 14). The application here of “cannot keep his tongue straight” to nonfluency in a language is close to that of e mesišīm: lisānu egru in the Hammuramāpi inscription quoted near the end of the first section above. The parallel “heavy” thus points back to an underlying medical usage, confirming Kramer’s translation of the clause: “you stutter (your) Sumerian” (1963: 223). Whether this reflects native Sumerian usage or the idiom of a Semitic-speaking author I cannot say.

The above survey shows the use of “heavy” as a medical symptom. It is used with so many parts and functions of the body that its meaning is likely to be more general than specific (cf. CAD K: 15a). Among the organs so described is the mouth, as in Hebrew. In Arabic “heaviness of tongue” describes partial paralysis which can impede speech. The effect which such oral symptoms can have on speech leads in one Sumerian text to a figurative description of nonfluency in that tongue as being “heavy” in it. This figurative extension of the medical symptom corresponds to a similar development of other terms for speech defects into idioms for ignorance of or nonfluency in a language, precisely as in Ezek 3:5-6.

Moses’ Speech Difficulty

As it happens, the two interpretations of kbd ph wkbd lāwīn and ेर špym mentioned most frequently in the earliest exegesis of Exod 4:10 and 6:12 and 30 are (1) a speech impediment, often said to be caused by a structural defect or injury of the mouth, and (2) a linguistic problem. The first view is reflected in the ancient versions wherever they are not literal or equivocal and predominates in rabbinic and medieval Jewish exegesis (see n. 1). The second is the only other view to enjoy more than sporadic support (see n. 3). In its various forms, this view holds that Moses has forgotten his Egyptian or does not speak the language(s) used at Pharaoh’s court. In this view, Moses’ objection is tantamount to pronouncing himself an ेlīgy, ajanī, timītimū, or bātbarōs, “speaker of a foreign tongue.” In the Middle Ages, Rashbam advocated this view on the ground that it is impossible to believe that “a prophet whom God knew face to face and who received the Torah from His hand was a stutterer.” But earlier proponents of this view show no sign of being motivated by any such embarrassment. Their statements and those expressing other nonmedical views contain no explicit rejection of speech impediment, and certain sources actually present medical and non-medical views simultaneously, some giving one
for “heavy of mouth” and the other for “heavy of tongue.” The rabbis’ equanimity toward the possibility of a speech defect in the father of the prophets is underscored by the midrash in which some ascribed an impediment to Amos as well. As we have seen, those who spoke of a linguistic handicap were as faithful to ancient idiom as those who spoke of a speech impediment; their view cannot be dismissed as the mere evasion of an embarrassment.

But is their view correct? Ibn Ezra (1976 ad loc.) rejected it on the ground that God’s answer in v 11, “Who gives man speech . . . makes him dumb or deaf, sentient (pqqh)” or blind . . . ,” has in mind a physical impediment. This objection might be overcome by assuming that God’s answer is a maximal expression of his powers, designed as the basis of an a fortiori argument: since he controls even bodily handicaps such as dumbness, he can certainly overcome the problem of nonfluency in a language (cf. Cyprian in ANF 5: 64, 10, 501-2 § 10). But is it plausible that the narrative supposes Moses to have forgotten his Egyptian? This view is based on the impression given in Exod 2:11-12 (J) that Moses fled Egypt in his youth or early manhood, combined with the explicit statement in 7:7 (P) that he was now eighty, so that he was absent from Egypt for something like sixty years (see Ramban 1962 at Exod 2:23). The elements of this impression are derived from different sources. J knows that Moses was absent for “a long time” (ynym rhym, 2:23a), but the phrase need not refer to more than a few years (cf. 1 Kgs 18:1). The same J narrative which suggests that Moses fled when young implies that his marriage and fatherhood took place soon after, yet represents his son as still young when Moses returned to Egypt (4:20, 25; cf. Driver 1911 at Exod 2:23), and Exod 18:2-4 (E or R.JE) and 5 (E) imply that both sons are still young at the exodus. P does not mention Moses’ flight and absence. This does not exclude its having known of them, but even a presumption that it did need not imply that it considered the absence long. At any rate, the narrative in Exod 2:11-chap. 4 by itself has the appearance of covering only a few years. The impression of an absence long enough to cause Moses to lose facility in his childhood language arises only from the combination of sources which brings Exod 7:7 to bear upon Exod 2:23. The exertion required to defend the impression is exemplified by Ramban (1962 at 2:23), who was compelled to argue that Moses fled while young but arrived at Midian, married, and fathered children when nearly eighty, having spent the interval as a fugitive elsewhere. The imagination of haggadists was, to be sure, not at a loss to fill in the interval (see Ginzberg 1909-38: II, 283-95 and notes). The compiler of the present text was presumably aware of the gap he had created, and he may even have hinted at it in the text. The text viewed as a whole supports the impression of a sixty-year interval, and the generations of exegetes who have assumed the text’s unity have been justified in drawing inferences from such an impression. But in seeking to understand the primary meaning of a phrase in one of the original documents, we cannot rely upon inferences arising from the compilation which fly in the face of the impression given by the immediate context. In this case, we cannot allow the understanding of Exod 4:10, which occurs in a context suggesting a few years’ absence, to be colored by the impression created by the juxtaposition of 7:7 that Moses was absent for sixty years. Consequently, while the view that Moses claimed to have forgotten his Egyptian is tantalizing in light of the semantic development traced above, it does not appear to be the intended meaning.

Although the other alternatives to speech impediment — ineloquence, unpersuasiveness, and the like — find no support in ancient idiom, the possibility of a novel use of “heavy of mouth and tongue” should not be ignored. Such views might draw support from God’s statement “I will tell you what to say” (4:12): if this is what it takes to overcome Moses’ problem, the problem must be not knowing what to say. But such a problem is expressed adequately by Moses’ opening remark “I am not a man of words,” and there is no escaping the impression that “I am heavy of mouth and tongue” adds a specific reason.

What then of the objections to the view that the reason is a speech impediment? Since Rashbam’s time, to my knowledge, objections have been expressed only by Luzzatto and Benno Jacob. Luzzatto argued that if Moses’ speech was really impeded, then God either healed him — in which case Moses would have sensed the change immediately and would not have continued to object as he does in 4:13 — or else he did not heal him, in which case 4:11 (“Who gives man speech?, etc.”) would be a mockery. To this B. Jacob added that God’s answer in 4:11-12 does not promise to cure a speech defect, nor does Moses
even ask this. But these objections rest on the false premise that if Moses’ speech was impeded, he must request cure and God must grant it. Some commentators have felt such a request to be implicit in Moses’ complaint (Kasher 1949—: VIII, 173, n. 42 [MS Midrāḥ Hāḥēpēs] and 174 no. 48; Abarbanel 1959), but in fact it suits Moses’ purpose to remain unhealed—he wishes to avoid the mission in any case (Ramban 1962 at 4:10)! And apparently it suits God’s purpose, as observed by many commentators, not to cure Moses.35 Whether God intends thereby to display his own power, to highlight the divine power behind Moses, or to prevent the exaltation or deification of Moses, is debated.36 For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that these views suppose what is in fact the most natural reading of v 11, “If your speech is defective, it is because I have made you that way.”

The prospects for identifying the precise type of defect claimed by Moses seem dim. We have been unable to define the Akkadian equivalent of “heavy of mouth.” Exod 4:10 uses two separate terms, suggesting imprecision, and Exod 6:12 and 30 use a third. Ancient medical terminology was frequently imprecise in identifying speech defects, tending to describe all types as stammering (Eldridge 1968: 5-6; cf. Habermann 1967: 224). The versions (see n. 29), midrashim,37 and commentaries38 which adopted medical interpretations used widely varying terminology to render the Exodus passages. The present study permits us only to endorse the medical view in general, but not any particular version of that view.

To Rashbam and Luzzatto the thought of a stammering Moses was ludicrous and verged on blasphemy. This objection agrees in spirit with the view of Maimonides that bodily no less than spiritual perfection is a prerequisite of prophecy (Maimonides, Miṣneh Tōrā, Hilkōt Yēsōdē Hattōrā VII, 1; cf. Hilkōt Sanhedrin II, 6 [kindly called to my attention by J. Goldin]). In the Bible, such an unblemished state is demanded only of priests and sacrifices, not prophets (Lev 21:16-24; 22:21-25; Deut 15:21; cf. m. Bek. 7; Lieberman 1962: 153-63; Gaster 1962: 156-57). That man’s gift to God must be flawless is agreed on all hands (at Lev 21:18 Rashi compares Mal 1:8b and Sforno compares Esth 4:2b). Post-biblical sources expected the same of God’s representatives to men (b. Šabb. 92a; Ned. 38a [quoted by RaN who is quoted by Abarbanel]; cf. b. Šabb. 30b and Pesah. 117a). But the tradition of Moses’ speech impediment persisted, witnessing even in Philo the cure of allegorization. The present study supports that tradition. The objections voiced by Rashbam, Luzzatto, and Jacob to Moses’ claiming a speech impediment are unpersuasive. Context and ancient idiom support the oldest known interpretation of Exod 4:10. History has known other creative geniuses and national leaders, from Demosthenes to Felix Mendelssohn and Churchill, who worked their effect on humanity despite speech impediments. The Bible viewed Moses as an agent of God whose success owed nothing to his natural endowments, but only to the persuasion worked by the words and deeds he uttered and performed under divine direction.

NOTES


2For a representative collection of sources, see Kasher 1949—: VIII, 172-74, nos. 42, 46, 48, 49, and notes to nos. 38 and 42; in English, see Kasher 1953—: VII, 123-28, 197-98; Ginzberg 1909-38: 11, 274, 322-26, and V, 402, 421-22. Cf. Deut. Rab. 1, 7 end (Lieberman 1964: 5) and parallels; Midr. Šekel Tōb (Buber 1900-1: 26); Philo, Who is the Heir, §§ 3-4; Theodoret, cited by McNeile 1931 at Exod 4:11 (cf. Kasher 1949—: VIII, no. 49). For Islamic and medieval European reflexes of the interpretation and the legend, see the Qur’ān, 20:27-28; 43:52; Lommatzsch 1910: 352-57; Hamilton 1912: 129-59; see also Lieberman 1972-73: 48-49. (Some commentators on Wis 10:21 find in it a reference to Moses’ impediment, but in view of the context [crossing the Re(e)d Sea], the passage is more likely related to Mek. Širārē 1, end, and parallels cited by Goldin (1971: 85-86). Medieval commentators who see a speech impediment in the phrases are Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, Ramban (but see his commentary at Exod 6:12, near the beginning of the comment), Abarbanel, RaN (cited by the latter), Bahya, R. Hananel (cited by the latter), Saadia (at 6:12, 30), and Bekor Shor.

3The translations mostly equivocate, except for Moffatt 1926 at 4:10 and SBJ at 4:10 and 6:12 (ineloquence) and Yehoash and Yehoash and Yehoash and Yehoash and Yehoash and Yehoash 1962 at 6:12 (impediment).

4Leqah Tōb (ed. Buber 1880: 22); Šekel Tōb (ed. Buber 1900-1: 26, on heavy of mouth only); cf. Tanhāmā Deut. § 1 (Buber 1885: § 2) and the Genizah fragment cited by Kasher.
494— VIII, 172, n. 38; Rashbam; Ibn Ezra 1926: 28 (on heavy of tongue only); Hizquni; cf. Ehrlich 1908 at 6:12. In modern times this view was followed by Freud 1955: 37-38.

4Philo, Life of Moses 1, § 83; cf. The Worse, XI, § 38. Inelucence must be the meaning presumed in Midrāt Ḥaggadātī Exod 4:10 (Margulies 1967: 63 lines 12-15). Quite similar are the views expressed by certain patristic writers to whom my late colleague, Robert F. Evans, kindly directed me, such as Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian (in ANF 5:64, 10, 501-2 § 10) and Origen (in SC 16:102ff.). Among modern scholars the views of Luzzatto 1965, Noth 1962, and Cassuto 1959 (all at Exod 4:10) are representative.

3Among the few modern scholars who choose speech impediment are Segal 1967: 5 and Speiser 1964 at Gen 48:10.

2Ibn Ezra at Exod 6:12 and 1955 (Yésod Môrâ', Gate 7): 12; Qimhi, Ṣeper ḥasărâšîm (ed. Biesenthal and Lebrecht 1847: 279) s.v. ṣrî; Kahana 1906 and Dillmann 1880 (both at Exod 6:12). Rashi notes that this use of “uncircumcised” reflects the nature of the foreskin as a cover (cf. the footnote of JPSV 1962 at Lev 26:41; Brim 1936: 31, 49, 100-1). Akkadian also refers to malfunctioning organs as covered: BWL 42:3; 86; 52:3; 24; Leichty 1970: 57 line 38; Civil 1965: 2; n. 11; Biggs 1967: 45 line 9.

1Preuss 1923: 87, n. 14. The Talmudic passage interprets 2 Sam 19:36 (cf. ANET 412b), b. Nid. 2b, 9a, 63b; Sanh. 46b.

1bIbn Janâh, Ṣeper ḥasărâšîm (Bacher 1896: 209), s.v. ṣdrâ, compares, inter alia, Exod 17:12. Cf. Ehrlich 1910 at 1 Sam 4:18. Ehrlich notes that recovery from “heaviness” is described with the root ṣl; cf. m. Sanh. 9:1 and below, n. 20.


1One might associate the use of ṣmq here with the sense “mysterious” in Job 12:22; Dan 2:22. On the other hand, Wieder 1965: 163 connects the word with Ugaritic ṣmq “strong” and Akkadian ema en “strength”; this produces a semantic equivalent of Aramaic ṣmq lyšn (Tg. Ṣpq. Exod 4:10; for this ṣmq in Aramaic, cf. Greenfield 1967: 89) and ʾṣmr ml (Tg. Yer. I Exod 4:10) and Akkadian pîd dan and ššnnm dnnmt (CAD D: 6c, 93d, 94b). In English idiom, the meaning would be “hard” as in “hard of hearing.”


1As Akkadian qingu-qingu, which may mean “quack-quack,” see Lambert 1970a: 114/5:10.

1For Akkadian qingu-qingu, which may mean “quack-quack,” see Lambert 1970a: 114/5:10.

1Ben-Yehudah 1959: IX, 4486. For a suggestion that [f[w]g phph and ravel phph in the Dead Sea Scrolls refer pejoratively to Mishnaic Hebrew, see Rabin 1957: 68-69.

1See the lexica s.v. For a similar case in Egyptian, see Bell 1977: especially 63, 74-75.

1CaD E: 41f.; Ahhv, 190bc; cf. the derivative igurū (CAD I:J: 295d sub b); for Sumerian gIII (Greenfield 1967: 89) and qSy phph, see the study of hgr by Sperrling 1970-71.


1Franz Rosenthal kindly called my attention to this passage; for discussion of several details, I am indebted to Joel L. Kraemer.

1Cf. Wright 1966: 478Ab: “... the onset [of a stroke] may be manifested by a series of transient ‘little strokes’ during which the patient may experience weakness and numbness of an arm, leg, or the side of his face.” Cf. Kleffner 1966: 200Cc.

1In the Qur’ān (20:27) Moses asks God to “loosen the knot (ṣqdâtu) from my tongue.”

1Cf. Ahhv 416c; CAD K: 15f.; Kührer 1904: 136 noted the connection with Hebrew kbd; the Akkadian passage on which he commented, however, actually refers not to the mouth but the breath of the mouth (or nose?), [n]p-piṣ KA-ṣû (cf. CAD K: 15d). For Sumerian dugs, see Hallo 1968: 83/85, line 27.

1Recovery from heaviness of the ears and of the limbs can be described by qalClu “become light” (Thompson 1931: 9; 1937: 268, lines 8-11; Kraus 1965: 292a; Ahhv 893b sub 3); cf. n. 8.

2But on p. 31b, CAD K reads KA-ṣû DUGUD in a different passage as pâlu kabît.

2Thompson 1934. Thompson translated, “if a man’s mouth hurts” (p. 2:11), though earlier he had recognized that with the ear or hearing kâbût meant “dull” or “difficult.” Meissner 1925: 296 (ref. courtesy of W. W. Hallo) confused the symptom with napiṣ KA-ṣû kabit, which is the title symptom of a different series (AMT 55/5, 6 [colophon] in Thompson 1934: 21) dealing with a separate symptom (AMT 51/2:8 in Thompson 1934: 17; Küchler 1904: pl. XV, i, 50).


2[EMJE “tongue” (Akkadian lišānu) is also possible. Thompson 1926: 73 read [Z]IʿU “tooth” (Akkadian śīmu), but Stuart T. Messinger, D.D.S., considers “heavy tooth” an implausible symptom.

2The flowing saliva and bloody teeth call to mind similar...
manifestations in *huʾšānu*, the disease with which “heavy mouth” is associated in the text to be quoted immediately; conceivably, the present text is also describing *huʾšānu*. Lest the looseness of teeth be taken to confirm the interpretation of the latter as scurvy, I am informed by Irwin I. Ship, Professor of Oral Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine, that recent research casts doubt upon looseness of teeth as a symptom of scurvy. I am indebted to Ship for extensive consultation and independent research undertaken on my behalf, and to Henry P. Cohen, D.D.S., of New Haven, for advice on dental matters at an early stage of this study.

24Following the oral presentation of this paper, I learned that Hayim Tawil had independently compared this passage to Exodus 4:10 in his dissertation, just then being completed at Columbia University. See now Tawil 1974: 61-62, which also points out the Akkadian parallels to certain other biblical and Aramaic idioms noted here (n. 10 and n. 29).

25 TUR = laʾā (AHw 540d); this reading (contra CAD B: 350d), is assured by the tablet’s incipit, where the ideogram is glossed la-aʾ-š-us (cf. AHw, loc. cit.). Note the tablet’s references to nursing and to babies in the first three months of life.

26In *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (Kramer 1952), lines 502-3, there is a possible case: kin-giš-a KA NI duqgu šu nu-mu-un-da-a-n-gia-giš, which Kramer rendered “the herald was heavy of mouth, could not repeat it” (i.e., Enmerkar’s message); as a result of this disability, Enmerkar invented on the spot the practice of writing messages on clay tablets (cf. Kramer 1952: 2). If this reading is correct, we have a parallel of sorts to Exodus 4 where Moses is unable to deliver a message for the same reason, so that an alternative method must be sought — in Exodus, a companion messenger rather than a written document. However, Kramer’s reading is admittedly uncertain (1952: 51); for the latest study of the text, see Cohen 1973.


28Besides the midrashic collections which incorporate varying views (e.g., *Deut. Rab.*, *Midr. Haggadot*, Yal.), we may mention *Šekel Tôb*, a Genizah fragment, and Ibn Ezra (all cited in n. 3). Philo, in addition to the medical view (n. 1), also presented nonmedical ones (n. 4).


30Note Ramban’s acute observation on 2:15 in his comment on 2:23. Cf. also both Ramban and Driver on 2:23’s “many.”

31 Other terms for speech impediment develop figurative meanings, but the meanings are quite specific: *gmgm* comes to mean “speak uncertainly”; *hk ṵ “hesitate” and “deride”; ḫʾ and ḫʾ tʾ (cf. Arabic taʾʿaʾa “stammer”) “mock.”

32Jacob n.d.: 106-9, where further arguments may be found. Luzzatto likewise adds further arguments. The extent to which one must go to find a promise of healing in God’s answer is illustrated by R. Simon in *Exod. Rab.* (Vilna ed.) I, 15, who derives ḥwvrtyk from hrḥ “conceive” and gives it the meaning “re-create you.”


35 Some rabbinic texts term Moses (πιγρὸς)psyllős, which refers to a severe disability in articulating certain sounds (*Deut. Rab.*, Lieberman 1964: 5 and 134-35; Kasher 1949—: VIII, 172, n. 38; on the Greek term, J. Goldin calls my attention to Lieberman 1942: 63, n. 226; for illustrations of the meaning, see the passages from the Jerusalem Talmud cited by Jastrow 1950: 1195 s.v. psylws). An articulatory defect is also presumed in the legend about Moses’ tongue being burned. R. Hananel, quoted in Bahya and followed by Abarbanel and Ramban, goes so far as to specify the sounds with which Moses had difficulty (*z, š, r, s, and ž*, to which “heavy of mouth” referred, and *d, t, l, n, t*, to which “heavy of tongue” referred). Arabic sources (including Saadia’s *Tafsir* at Exodus 6:12, 30) which use the term *ʾiljei* for Moses’ affliction apparently presume a difficulty with *s* (see Hamilton 1912: 135; cf. n. 11). On the other hand, *Šekel Tôb* (ed. Buber 1900-1: 26), influenced by an incorrect etymology of *hg(w)r* in some of the targums (see nn. 14, 29), saw shortness of the frenum in “heavy of tongue” (cf. the use of *mattir* “unbind” in *Deut. Rab.* 1, 1); cf. also the Qurʾān, 20:27 (n. 18).

36 The meanings of *ʾlg* and *gmgm*, used by many of the commentators, are not unequivocal: see the entries in Ben-Yehudah 1959 for these words, and cf. Rashi at Amos 7:14.

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