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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 ^ḥ*aggādā* 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” (^ḥ*rl šptym*, 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 Egyptian,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 ^ḥ*rl*, when describing parts of the body, are often approximately synonymous,⁶ as shown by the following juxtapositions:

<p>a. Isa 6:10 ^ḥ<i>znyw hkbd . . . pn . . .</i> ^ḥ<i>znyw yšm^ḥ</i> “. . . make its ears heavy . . . lest . . . it hear with its ears . . .” (cf. Isa 59:1; Zech 7:11).</p>	<p>vs. Jer 6:10 ^ḥ<i>rl ḥznm wP ywklw lḥqšyb</i> “. . . their ear is uncircum- cised, so that they cannot pay heed.”</p>
<p>b. Exod 7:14 ^ḥ<i>kbd lb pr^ḥ, m^ḥn</i> “Pharaoh’s heart is hard (lit. ‘heavy’), he refuses . . .”</p>	<p>vs. Lev 26:41 ^ḥ<i>z ykn^ḥ lbbm ḥ^ḥrl</i> “Then shall their uncircum- cised heart humble itself . . .”</p>

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

CAD K: 15d; *CAD* I/J: 121d; *CAD* E: 196a).²⁰ Other faculties and parts of the body afflicted with "heaviness" are the head, knees, shins, feet, eyes, breath(ing), and lifting the eyes (*CAD* K: 15-16).

A number of Akkadian texts mention a symptom *KA-šú kabit*. In this phrase, the sign *KA* has usually been assigned its reading *pû*, "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" (*šumma amīlu pāšu [KA-šú] kabit*), but the entries dealing with the title symptom are missing. The extant parts deal mainly with the chest, epigastrium, 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 *pû kabit* is not one of the standard phrases in other texts (the terms include *ebētu*, *egēru*, *uquququ*, *šabātu kašāru*, *dannu*, *pardiš*, *parāku*, *hasu*, 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: [*šumma amīlu pāšu šabi*]tma *KA.DIB.BI.DA irtanašši*/[. . . *K]A-šu kabit illatušu ittanallakuma la parsa / [šinnāšu en]ša u damu ihilla. If the reading [K]A in line 2 is correct,²⁴ we may have an occurrence of *pû 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 lo]ose 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 [*napiš* *K]A-šú (= either pāšu 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: *šumma la'û libbēšu ebītu u pāšu (KA-šú) kabit bu'šānu iṣbassu*, "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" (*bu'šānu*) 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 *bu'šānu* 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:III, 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 *bu²šānu* 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 *bu²šānu*, *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,²⁸ the metaphoric extension of "heavy" to describe nonfluency in a language is attested in the disputation text quoted above: *eme-ger_x-šè al-dugud eme-ni si nu-ub-sá*, "in the Sumerian tongue he is heavy, he cannot keep his tongue straight." The latter expression calls to mind *eme-si-sá*, 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 *eme gilim: lišānu egru* in the Hammurapi 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 lšwn* and *rl šptym* 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 equivocal²⁹ 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 *illēg, ajamuⁿ, ṭimṭimuⁿ*, or *bárbaros*, "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."³⁰ 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 (*pqh*)³¹ 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" (*ymym rbym*, 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.³² 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.³³ 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,³⁴ 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 *Midrāš Hāhēpeš*] 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, *Mišneh Tôrâ*, *Hilkôt Yēsôdê Hattôrâ* VII, 1; cf. *Hilkôt Sanhedrîn* 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 *Pesaḥ.* 117a). But the tradition of Moses' speech impediment persisted, withstanding 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

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¹For 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: II, 274, 322-26, and V, 402, 421-22. Cf. *Deut. Rab.* I, 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 *Qurʾān*, 20:27-28; 43:52; Lommatzsch 1910: 352-57; Hamilton 1912: 129-59; see also Lieberman 1972-73: 48-49. (Some commenta-

tors 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. Širīā*³ 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), Baḥya, R. Ḥananel (cited by the latter), Saadia (at 6:12, 30), and Bekor Shor.

²The translations mostly equivocate, except for Moffatt 1926 at 4:10 and *SBJ* at 4:10 and 6:12 (ineloquence) and Yehoash and *JPSV* 1962 at 6:12 (impediment).

³*Leqaḥ Tōb* (ed. Buber 1880: 22); *Šekel Tōb* (ed. Buber 1900-1: 26, on heavy of mouth only); cf. *Tanḥūmā*³ *Deut.* § 1 (Buber 1885: § 2) and the Genizah fragment cited by Kasher

1949—: 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. Ineloquence must be the meaning presumed in *Midraš Haggādōl* 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.

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

⁶Ibn Ezra 1926 at Exod 6:12 and 1955 (*Yēsōd Mōrā*², Gate 7): 12; Qimḥi, *Sēper haššārāšim* (ed. Bienthal and Lebrecht 1847: 279) s.v. *ṣrl*; 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'.

⁷Preuss 1923: 87, n. 14. The Talmudic passage interprets 2 Sam 19:36 (cf. *ANET* 412b); *b. Nid.* 2b, 9a, 63b; *Sanh.* 46b.

⁸Ibn Janaḥ, *Sēper haššārāšim* (Bacher 1896: 209), s.v. *kbd*, 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 *qll*; cf. *m. Sanh.* 9:1 and below, n. 20.

⁹*Lev. Rab.* X, 2 (Margulies 1953-60: 197-98; cf. Rashi at Amos 7:14). Cf. Jastrow 1950: 1089 end. The parallel text in *Pesiq. Rab. Kah.*, *Naḥāmū*, § 4 (Mandelbaum 1962: 269 line 10), and the mocking public in *Lev. Rab.*, use the word *psylws*², i.e., Greek *psellos*, "stammerer." Such nicknames were actually in use. Cf. Josephus' ancestor "Simon, surnamed Psellus" (Jos. *Life* 1.3), the Roman cognomen *Balbus* (Lewis and Short 1962: 220), and, from the 9th century, King Louis (II) "Le Bègue" and the monk Notker "Balbulus." (Old French *balbu* is the very word used by Rashi in his commentary at Exod 4:10.)

¹⁰One 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 *emūqu* "strength"; this produces a semantic equivalent of Aramaic *ṣmyq lyšn* (*Tg. Onq.* Exod 4:10; for this *ṣmq* in Aramaic, cf. Greenfield 1967: 89) and *qšy mml* (*Tg. Yer. I* Exod 4:10) and Akkadian *pū dan* and *lišānu dannat* (*CAD D*: 6c, 93d, 94b). In English idiom, the meaning would be "hard" as in "hard of hearing."

¹¹Goldziher 1968: 99 (ref. courtesy of Joel L. Kraemer); Lane 1863-65: 1966-68 and 1878. Ali Zamuri informed me some years ago that in his native Tunisia the Jews are described as stutterers "like their father Moses" because they pronounce one of the Arabic sibilants abnormally. (I presume that the term he had in mind is *ṣilḡ*; see n. 37).

The reduplication of syllables in Sanskrit/Greek *barbar* and Arabic *ṭimṭim* is reminiscent of that in *qw* (*lqw*) and *šw lšw*, which imitate the "gibberish" of foreign tongues in Isa 18:2, 7, and 28:10, 13 (cf. the translation "murmur" in *JPSV* 1973). All of these must be at least partly onomatopoeic. (For another interpretation of the Isaiah passages, see Hallo 1958). Reduplicated syllables are also used to represent animal sounds, such as *qwqw* (= "croak, croak" according to Jastrow

1950: 1340; see Epstein 1960: 143 for several more examples). For Akkadian *qingu-qingu*, which may mean "quack-quack," see Lambert 1970a: 114/5:10.

¹²Ben-Yehudah 1959: IX, 4486. For a suggestion that *l[ṣw]g šph* and *ṣrw l šph* in the Dead Sea Scrolls refer pejoratively to Mishnaic Hebrew, see Rabin 1957: 68-69.

¹³See the lexica s.v. For a similar case in Egyptian, see Bell 1977: especially 63, 74-75.

¹⁴*CAD E*: 41f.; *AHW*, 190bc; cf. the derivative *itguru* (*CAD I/J*: 295d sub b); for Sumerian *gilim*, cf. Falkenstein 1959: 18, line 131. The Akkadian root is cognate to West Semitic *hgr* (*AHW*, 190b), whose derivative in Rabbinic Hebrew refers to lameness and whose Aramaic usages include *Tg. Yer. I* *hgr pwm whgr mml* at Exod 4:10. See the study of *hgr* by Sperling 1970-71.

¹⁵For completeness, I cite a fragmentary Ugaritic text published by Virolleaud 1965: 173, no. 124:1-2: *arḥ id rgm bgr / bpy ṣlgt blšny ḡr*. Virolleaud understands the passage to mean "the cow gives forth her voice from the mountain: 'in my mouth there is stuttering, on my tongue a mountain,'" taking the latter phrase as a picturesque expression of heaviness of the tongue. For discussion of the text, see Gordon 1965, Glossary, 19.1985; Dahood 1965: 68 sub 19.1985; Rainey 1965-66: 271 sub 19.1985.

¹⁶Franz Rosenthal kindly called my attention to this passage; for discussion of several details, I am indebted to Joel L. Kraemer.

¹⁷Cf. 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.

¹⁸In the *Qurʾān* (20:27) Moses asks God to "loosen the knot (*ṣuqdatu*) from my tongue."

¹⁹Cf. *AHW* 416c; *CAD K*: 15f.; Küchler 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*]a-piš KA-šú (cf. *CAD K*: 15d). For Sumerian *dugud*, see Hallo 1968: 83/85, line 27.

²⁰Recovery from heaviness of the ears and of the limbs can be described by *qalālu* "become light" (Thompson 1931: 9; 1937: 268, lines 8-11; Kraus 1965: 292a; *AHW* 893b sub (3); cf. n. 8).

²¹But on p. 31b, *CAD K* reads KA-šú DUGUD⁴ in a different passage as *pūšu kabit*.

²²Thompson 1934. Thompson translated, "if a man's mouth hurts" (p. 2:11), though earlier he had recognized that with the ear or hearing *kabātu* meant "dull" or "difficult." Meissner 1925: 296 (ref. courtesy of W. W. Hallo) confused the symptom with *napiš KA-šú 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).

²³Griffith and Mitchell 1937: 866. According to Plutarch, Demosthenes' speech defect included "a weakness in his voice, a perplexed and indistinct utterance and a shortness of breath, which by breaking and disjointing his sentences, much obscured the sense and meaning of what he spoke" (Dryden and Clough n.d.: 1025). See Eldridge 1968: 6.

²⁴[EM]E "tongue" (Akkadian *lišānu*) is also possible. Thompson 1926: 73 read [Z]Ú "tooth" (Akkadian *šinnu*), but Stuart T. Messinger, D.D.S., considers "heavy tooth" an implausible symptom.

²⁵The flowing saliva and bloody teeth call to mind similar

manifestations in *bu²šānu*, the disease with which “heavy mouth” is associated in the text to be quoted immediately; conceivably, the present text is also describing *bu²šānu*. 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.

²⁶Following the oral presentation of this paper, I learned that Hayim Tawil had independently compared this passage to Exod 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).

²⁷lúTUR = *la²û* (AHw 540d); this reading (contra CAD B: 350d), is assured by the tablet’s incipit, where the ideogram is glossed *la-a²-u₅* (cf. AHw, loc. cit.). Note the tablet’s references to nursing and to babies in the first three months of life.

²⁸In *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (Kramer 1952), lines 502-3, there is a possible case: kin-gi₄-a KA NI dugud šu nu-mu-un-da-an-gi₄-gi₄, 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.

²⁹LXX and Theodotion: *ischnóphōnos* “weak-voiced”; OL *impeditioris et tardioris linguae* “impeded and slow of tongue”; Vg. *gracili / tenui voce* “weak-voiced”; Tg. *Onq.* Exod 4:10 . . . *w^cmyq lyšn*; Tg. *Yer. I* 4:10 *hgr pwm whgr mmll* (cf. Peruš on Tg. *Yer. I*), 6:12, 30 *qšy mmll*; Tg. *Yer. II* 4:10 *hgwr pwm wqšy mmll*; Tg. *Neof.* 4:10 *hgr pwm *hgr mmll* (*margin *wqšy*), 6:12, 30 *hgr mmll* (margin *wqšy*); Peshitta 4:10 *l^cg mmllly w^ctl lšn²*, 6:12, 30 *l^cg lšny*. On the Aramaic terms, see n. 10, Sperling 1970-71, and Tawil 1974.

³⁰Besides the midrashic collections which incorporate varying views (e.g., *Deut. Rab.*, *Midr. Haggadol*, *Yal.*), we may mention *Šēkel Tōb*, 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).

³¹Cf. Isa 42:7, 20; see *Exod. Rab.* III, 15; Ibn Ezra 1926 at

4:10; Bekor Shor at 4:13 (cited by Speier 1960: 347); Moses of Coucy (in Kasher 1949—: VIII, 174, n. 49); Malbim 1956: 162; but contrast Lachs 1976: 249-50.

³²Note Ramban’s acute observation on 2:15 in his comment on 2:23. Cf. also both Ramban and Driver on 2:23’s “many.”

³³Other terms for speech impediment develop figurative meanings, but the meanings are quite specific: *gmgm* comes to mean “speak uncertainly”; *hkk* “hesitate” and “deride”; *l^cg* and *l^ct^c* (cf. Arabic *ta^cta^ca* “stammer”) “mock.”

³⁴Jacob 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.) III, 15, who derives *whwrytyk* from *hrh* “conceive” and gives it the meaning “re-create you.”

³⁵Kasher 1949—: VIII, 174, no. 49 = *Exod. Rab.* (Vilna ed.) III, 15 (cf. Maharzu ad. loc.); Kasher 1949—: VIII, 174, no. 46 and n. 49; Theodoret (n. 1); Bekor Shor; Ramban; RaN, cited by Malbim 1956: 161-62; Rylaarsdam 1953: 879; Greenberg 1969: 89.

³⁶Cf. Kasher 1949—: VIII, 174, n. 49 (on possible deification of Moses, cf. Lieberman 1952: 206, n. 74, and a forthcoming paper by Judah Goldin, “The Death of Moses”); Rylaarsdam 1953: 879 compares 1 Cor 1:27. According to Ramban, God did not cure Moses because Moses complained but failed to request a cure.

³⁷Some rabbinic texts term Moses (*piqrō*)*psillōs*, 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. Ḥananel, quoted in Baḥya and followed by Abarbanel and Ramban, goes so far as to specify the sounds with which Moses had difficulty (*z, š, r, s, and ṣ*, to which “heavy of mouth” referred, and *d, ṭ, l, n, t*, to which “heavy of tongue” referred). Arabic sources (including Saadia’s *Tafsir* at Exod 6:12, 30) which use the term *ṣilteḡ* for Moses’ affliction apparently presume a difficulty with *s* (see Hamilton 1912: 135; cf. n. 11). On the other hand, *Šēkel Tōb* (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 *matṭir* “unbind” in *Deut. Rab.* I, 1); cf. also the *Qur’ān*, 20:27 (n. 18).

³⁸The meanings of *l^cg* 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.

³⁹On Ezekiel’s “dumbness,” see Greenberg 1958: 101-5.

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