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BIBLICAL DONKEY

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Abstract
The donkey is charged with a rich, important biblical symbolism. Usually the kings choose a strong and combatant animal for ceremonies – a thoroughbred horse, an imposing elephant or even a camel. David has a “royal she-mule”, Solomon is anointed as king on a “wild donkey”. And what does Solomon’s wild donkey signify? Christ enters Jerusalem on “the foal of a she-ass,” as the king of the Jews. How do we account for the fact that in Hebrew the ass’s foal is not a diminutive of the word ‘donkey’, as well as the fact that the she-ass signifies ‘slow pace’ and has nothing in common with the jackass? The paper replies to these curious questions and to the riddle as to why the king of the Jews rides “the foal of a she-ass” and the king is of the tribe of Judah, of whom Jacob/Israel prophesies that he will untie his donkey, just as the apostles set free the ass’s foal for which Jesus Christ sent them. To decode these biblical symbols I use linguo-semiotic approach.

1. Messiah’s donkey in Easter story
Why in first century A.D. Jewish population of Jerusalem decode as the king of the Jews and the Messiah a stranger who enters the town “riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”; and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass (KJV).
John and Matthew use a quote from the Old Testament:

as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!” John 12:14-15 (NRS)
People in Christian culture are so accustomed to Easter story that they did not realize how strange and unusual is that act. To understand it cultural significance, we must remember the following facts:

- The New Testament was written by Jews for Jews, first.
- The New Testament is a type of Judaism based on the culture and customs brought from the Old Testament.
- Therefore, we should know well the Old Testament.

Subquestions can help us:

- What are the Hebrew terms for foal, coat, mule, she-ass, he-ass, donkey?
- Why the king of the Jews rides “the foal of a she-ass”?
- What is the symbolism of the royal Jewish animal in case that usually the kings choose a strong and combatant animal for ceremonies – a thoroughbred horse, an imposing elephant or even a camel.

It is impossible to give complete and satisfactory answers to these questions in short text but let me try to start to answer.

2. The Hebrew terms for English Biblical terms foal, coat, she-ass, he-ass, donkey

John and Matthew quoted Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (NRS)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. (KJV)

2.1. The Old Testament prophecy about the ass’s foal of the Messiah and donkey-terminology

In Zechariah 9:9 the terms are:

- male donkey/male ass רומח [hamòr]
- colt רי"ע [air]
- pl. female donkey/female ass נותַא [atonòt]
- donkey’s foal, lit. son of female donkey בן נות [ben atonòt]

The Messiah’s foal is situated in the context of the particularly well-developed terminology in the Old Testament:

- male donkey רוחב [hamòr]
- female donkey נות [atôn]
What we see in English terms *ass, donkey* and *mule* is that female and male individuals are not in relationship of suppletion. We need to add to the same word the pronouns *she* or *he* as formants in a compound. But in Hebrew *she-donkey* and *he-donkey* are suppletive, i.e. they have different roots. In addition, a *young donkey* is one-word-term derived from a third root and more terms are used by the prophet. Suppletivism (‘adding’, ‘exchange’) is a way of expressing grammatical meanings of a word in which a relevant grammatical word form use another root. In clear words – semantically connected words has different roots. Suppletive forms need special attention – they are seen as “irregular” or even “highly irregular”.

Examples for suppletive facts: *good-better-best*; Bulgarian terms for *мъж* (man) and *жена* (woman) are suppletive.

We needed this definition for better orientation in Hebrew terms. In addition, there are some unknown to Europeans features of the Hebrew language and alphabet: In Hebrew the root consists of consonants and no vocals. In Hebrew Alphabet, there are no letters for vocals. The vocals are written with diacritics – dots and dashes.

### 3. The male donkey הָרֶמֶח [hamòr]

#### 3.1. Additional information from the extended semantics of the roots (logic, associations, and contexts)

Definition: The root is morpheme that carries the mutual semantic features among all word-derivates from that root. For example, there is something common between *book, booklet, book-shop, booking* etc., including literal and figurative meanings.

The information for the roots is from BibleWorks4.

Male-donkey *Het-Mem-Reish* הָרֶמֶח

I. ferment, boil, foam; II. be red [hamâr]

III. smear with asphalt (Exo 2:3, only)
- wine הֶמֶר [hèmer]
- bitumen הֶמֶר [hemâr]
- cement, mortar, clay הָרֶמֶח [hèmer]
- (he)-as הָרֶמֶח [hamòr]
- roebuck רָמַח [iahmùr]


From *Het-Mem-Reish* the verb to be red [hamâr] is formed, which only appears in Job, 16:16 in the form [hamarmerâ], meaning *to be reddish*. Classical (Библия, 1940) and current (Библия, 2001; 2002) protestant Bulgarian versions prefer to render [hamarmerâ] as “to bloat”.
Only the orthodox Bulgarian version is true to the original to become red (почервеня). The Septuagint prefers to render the prototype of macro-red, using the word συγκέκαυται, meaning burning in fire, suddenly set afire. According to BibleWorks4 this word is translated into Latin as comburere, but st. Jerome (347-420) does not use it in the Vulgata, preferring instead the word intumuit (‘to bloat’). The Slavonic translations in Russian, Polish and Czech keep to reddening – RST побагровело, BTP czerwone, BKR oduřavěla.

It becomes clear that the denotation of the male donkey comprises associations with macro-red and this type of macro-red is not loaded with positive semantizations and only with great difficulty could be taken as macro-light version of red. From the root of male donkey [hamòr] is also formed the word roebuck [iahmûr], where the internal motive clearly follows the line of reddishness.

3.2. The divine commandments and the male donkey חמור [hamòr]


3.3. The other meanings of the root Het-Mem-Reish

The meanings wine, bitumen, asphalt, cement, mortar, clay of the root of the word for the male donkey, Het-Mem-Reish, are derived from the semantic features ‘red’ and ‘material’, available in the original semitic root semantics. There are also other roots for these same words in Hebrew, but in Genesis, 11:3; Exodus, 2:3; Job, 4:19; Psalms 40 are used for derivations precisely from this root. Similarly, the non-standard word for wine, formed from the same root – wine [hèmer]. Hence, in Deutoronomy, 32:14 and Ezra, 6:9 a word from this root stands for the wine [hèmer]. According to BibleWorks4, two different roots should be considered here (one with the paradigm, become red, donkey and the other with wine, mud, clay, tar, mortar and stole), despite their complete concurrence.

3.3.1. bitumen/asphalt [hemàr] and mortar [hòmer]

Genesis, 11:3 narrates the building of the tower of Babylon.

They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. (NAU)

Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. (NKJ)

In this Genesis 11:3 tar/asphalt translates [hemàr], whereas mortar translates [hòmer]. Exodus, 2:3 tells about the basket in which Moses is left to swim on the river – daubed it with slime (KJV); covered it over with tar and pitch (NAU); daubed it with bitumen (RSV); plastered it with bitumen (NRS); daubed it with asphalt (NKJ). In Exodus, 2:3 from the root of male donkey is the verb daubed it with; [tahmerà]. Job, 4:19 uses the word [hòmer] in the expression houses of clay (Bul. къщи от кал) [batèi hòmer].
3.3. Wine [hèmer]

Deuteronomy 32:14 Curds of cows, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs, And rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the finest of the wheat-- And of the blood of grapes you drank wine. (NAU)

Ezra 6:9, Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, it is to be given to them daily without fail, (NAU)

3.4. Red and white donkeys.

The meanings wine, bitumen, asphalt, mortar and clay indicate the exclusivity of the white donkey, because the usual meanings of the root for the male donkey [hamòr] are realized in the paradigm of the meanings ‘red’ and ‘material’. If the meaning ‘wine’ can be regarded as a denotation of a sacral element, then the meanings of ‘bitumen’, ‘asphalt’, ‘mortar’, ‘clay’ can be considered as an indication of a realization of the root inverse to the sacral – toward ‘dark’, ‘earthly’, ‘low’, ‘material’, ‘transient’ and even ‘hellish’. Precisely these meanings are used when Moses is hidden in the resin basket, so as not to drown in the river of life, full of ‘Nile’s crocodiles’. In a figurative sense, Moses remains hidden under this symbolic cover of resin, symbolizing ‘earthly’, ‘low’ and ‘transient’ until that moment in his life when he leaves the Pharaoh’s family.

3.5. The lexical semantization of the male donkey is ‘a symbol of the material’

An important distinctive feature of the word for male donkey [hamòr] is that male donkey easily becomes a symbol of the material, because in contemporary Hebrew the word ‘material’ is formed from the root of ‘substance’ [hòmer], as well as the word ‘foam’ and the outdated smear with asphalt [hamàr]. Traditional and contemporary rabbinic thought confirm the idea that “the Judahic Messiah riding a horse, controls the material and physical” (Zohar, Bamidbar, 3:207a). Rabbi Ari Kahn (Kahn), a professor at the University of Bar-Ilan (Israel) recalls Zohar’s commentary in his popular lectures.

Moreover, in contemporary Israelite society, the idea of the relation ‘material – the Messiah’s donkey’ has various manifestations. For instance, Sefi Rachlevsky, in his book „Messiah’s Donkey” (Rachlevsky 1998) sustains the claim that the national religious movement attempts to replace the democratic Hebrew state by a religious theocracy, using the term “straddling” the institutions of the democratic state. The author shows that the religious Zionist Rav Kuk discusses laic pioneers and politicians who established and built a democratic Hebrew state, as the Messiah’s donkey. “Materialists” (there is a word-play with donkey [hamòr] and the related words matter, material, substance [hòmer]) have done the dirty work, so to speak, so that now the nationalist religious movement is designated by God to take over the state institutions in order to transform them into the nationalist religious ideal – the “essence of the Messiah”. Rachlevsky’s book crystallized secular Israel’s fear of ultra-Orthodox power ... from a religious community bent on destroying Israel’s democracy.

The material is precisely related to the word for male donkey, insofar as male donkey [hamòr] and matter, material [hòmer] are derivatives of one and the same root. This kind of commentary, however, expresses the general idea based on only one of the three “don-
key” terms used in Zechariah 9:9. This type of commentary omits details such as the element of elevation originating in Zechariah’s use of the word donkey’s foal ריו (air). The semantics of ‘elevation’ and ‘soaring’ is carried by the entire semantics of the root of the word donkey’s foal. The other omission is Zechariah’s elaboration that the donkey is “the foal of donkeys” (יונת יונת [ben atonot]). Briefly, this kind of religious nationalist claim (to put it mildly) “conveniently” omits the context of Prophet Zechariah’s words in this verse.

3.6. Denotative and connotative aspects

From contextual, storyline point of view he-donkey is a marker for decisive moments of the life of tribes of Issachar and Judah (Genesis 49:11), of Abraham (Genesis 22:4); Joseph (Genesis 42:27; 44:13); Moses (Exodus 4:20; Numbers 16:15); The conquest of Jericho (Joshua 15:18); The tribe of Judah takes possession of the Holy Land (Joshua 15:12-20; Judges 1:10-16); One of the first punishments for disobeying the Torah in the Holy Land (Judges 6:15); Gideon and Samson (Judges 15:15-16); The beginning of the end of the epoch of the Judges (Judges 19-21); The beginning of the monarchy (1 Samuel 12:1-3); Death of the nameless prophet (3 Kings 13:13; 23-24; 27); king David (1 Samuel 16:20; 25:18-25; 40-44; 2 Samuel 16, 1-4; 17:23); king Solomon (1 Kings 2:8-10; 36-44); The actions of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 4:22); The narrator is prophet Jeremiah, Chronicles and Kings (Jeremiah 22:19; 2 Chronicles 36:6; 2 Kings 24:6); The narrator is prophet Nehemiah (Nehemiah 7:65-68), Isaiah.

4. The Female Donkey נוֹתֲא (aton)
Historically, the female donkey was preferred to the male because of its milk and because it was better for riding. In BibleWorks4 it is shown precisely why the donkey is related to the tradition of pacification and the Messiah, as told already by Jacob. This is said in Genesis, 49:11, where chapter 49 is dedicated to Jacob’s legacy to his twelve sons. Verses 10, 11 and 12 are dedicated to the tribe of Judah, from which David is a descendant. The descendents of Judah are the only tribe which returned from Mesopotamia and the New Testament indicates Jesus Christ as a descendent of King David. In Jacob’s legacy in Genesis, 49:11, for the first time, key terms ass’s colt, foal are used which are also inherited by the New Testament:

Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: Genesis 49:11 (KJV)

foals of a donkey, lit. sons of female donkey יבג וֹנ ת [bnèi atonò];

binding his foal אָ יׅרְס א [osrì irò]

binding his ass’s colt אָ וֹנ ת [osrì bnèi irò]

4.1. The prototype of the Messiah’s white donkey
The white she-donkeys in Judges 5:10 are a highly significant symbol because it relates to the prophecy that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem on a donkey.

Judges 5:10 „You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on rich carpets, And you who
travel on the road – sing! Judges, 5:10 (NAU)
Judges 5:10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. (KJV)

The important notion in regard to the New Testament is “binding the ass’s colts”, where it is tacitly understood that there are “tied asses”.

4.1. Lexical and root information.
The root of the word נותא [aton] is not mentioned in BibleWorks4. According to Genesius, however, in Arabic there is a non-developed root Alef-Tav-Nun, meaning, ‘to walk with small steps’ which, with a preposition, can also mean ‘stand stable’, ‘stand firm’, ‘sustain’. This verb is close to the Arabic verb ‘refuse’ and, according to Gesenius, from this common, non-developed root derives the Hebrew word ass נותא [aton] (Genesius, 1996, p. 95). In full agreement with Gesenius, the Easton Bible Dictionary (EBD) asserts that the ass is called נותא [aton], because of its slow gait.

According to the The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE), the word has a different origin:

‘Athon, Assyrian ‘atanu’ and Aramaic ‘atana’, is derived from ‘atha’ “to come, “ “go,” etc. (Furst suggests that it may be derived from ‘athan, Aramaic ‘adhan, “to be slender,” “docile”, etc.) (Ass – ISBE)

Leaving the passage indicated in BibleWorks4 and to conclude, we should note that the donkey expresses the idea of ‘peace’ and ‘ordinariness’, as well as ‘God’s omnipotence who, if he wants to, makes something great of the most ordinary thing’. This is the sense commented in BibleWorks4, in the case of Numbers 22:21-28, where the donkey speaks to Balaam and becomes the carrier of divine providence. Let us recall that the idea of ‘ordinariness’ includes the most popular qualities of that animal – ‘stupidity’, ‘stubbornness’, ‘strong sexuality’.

Gesenius adds the meanings ‘walk with small steps’, as well as ‘refuse’, which have the potential to develop as ‘stand stable’, ‘stand firm’ and ‘sustain’. According to the ISBE-interpretation, the function of movement ‘going’, ‘coming’ is confirmed for denoting the female donkey.

We should note the interest in the term “white asses”. Dr. Thomas McDaniel, 2003 dedicates an entire monograph to this topic, including his interpretation. The book shows an impressive erudition in Semitic philology, knowledge of English translations and the Septuagint. The asses are not the focus of attention, but interestingly, McDaniel gives a completely different translation of Judges 5:10, omitting the female gender of the donkey and the “sitting ones” do not sit on rugs but on mules: Riders on young donkeys, those sitting on mules, and those walking along the way. The eccentricity of this translation may explain why the book was published by the author himself. In addition, the author has a series of original ideas.

The word donkeys נותא [atonot] is in the feminine plural.

The term white is not expressed by the standard Hebrew term for white color (לבן [laván]), but by a word from the root Tzadi-Het-Reish נזר. In the English and Bulgarian translations, however, white donkeys נזר יה נותא שנזר [atonot tzehorot] and white wool נזר צה [tzémer tzähar] are not translated as reddish-gray, tawny, but consistently result as white (female) donkeys (Bul.
4.1.1. White she-donkeys, the root Tzadi-Het-Reish and the closely related root Tzadi-He-Reish

The Hebrew word for white is תור חצ [tzehorìt] and the word’s root is Tzadi-Het-Reish רחצ. The root Tzadi-Het-Reish רחצ according BibleWoks4 has following meanings:

- reddish-gray, tawny (Ezek 27:18) [tzàhar]
- tawny (Jud 5:10) [tzòhar]

The word white designated by words formed from that root appears only twice in the entire Old Testament. The first time is in Judges 5:10 and the second – in the word-combination white wool רחצ רמש in Ezekiel, 27:18. Such a rare usage is significant in itself. In order to orient ourselves in regard to this meaning, we have to examine the full semantics of the root.

According to Gesenius 1996, the origin of רחצ [tzàhar] derives from an unextended root in the language, meaning bedazzle, knock, shine, blinded by bright light.

The paradigm of such a denotation of white in the Old Testament comprises only two cases – white she-donkeys תור חצ תונ תא [atonòt tzehoròt] and white wool רחצ רמש [tzèmer tzahàr]. A possible reading of the word white is ר חצ [tzòhar], but here I shall keep to רחצ [tzàhar].

Thus, the root relates to active transformations of the idea of light. The singular form of white, תור חצ [tzehorìt], is צ [tzahòr] and the main signification of that word is reddish-gray, tawny.

Consequently these translations depend on the tradition and on the amalgamation of this root with Tzadi-He-Reish רהצ which is close to it. The paradigm of Tzadi-He-Reish רהצ provides the donkeys’ color:

- I. noon, midday; II. roof (once, Gen 6:16) ר צ [tzòhar]
  - fresh oil ישר [itzhàr]
  - press oil ישר [tzàhar]

(TWOT in BibleWords4)

It is important to check whether Bibles in other languages “insist” on the translation of תור חצ [tzehoròt] as white, Bul. белу, since [tzahòr] denotes reddish-gray, tawny and is not the standard Hebrew word for white, which islav [lavàn]).

The Septuagint shows a leveling of two roots that are close, but different: Tzadi-He-Reish רהצ and Tzadi-Het-Reish רחצ, translating the word תור חצ [tzehorìt] with the meaning of the paradigm of the word ר צ [tzòhar]. Instead of the standard use of the term for white color (λευκός [leukòs]) or the standard word for light, Bul. светлина, Gr. φῶς [fòs], the Septuagint indicates the word μεσημβρίας [mesembrias], meaning noon. Thus the Septuagint differs from the Slavonic and English translations which use the standard term for white color — бело, белых, białych, white.

The word ר צ [tzòhar] is used once as a term for the window of Noah’s Ark (Genesis 6:16). That which allows the seventy translators to treat the two roots as synonyms, are the semes ‘light’, ‘noon-light, as something positive’ and ‘ritual purity’. This is how the window of Noah’s arc and the white donkeys from Judges 5:10 turn out to be in a common paradigm, suggesting ‘light’ and ‘purity’.
The Vulgata uses the word *nitēns*, meaning shiny and not one of the standard words for *white* or *light*.

All translations maintain the whiteness, lightness and shininess of the *donkeys*. In this regard it is particularly significant that the legend of the Septuagint attributes a rabbinic authorship to the Greek translation, and the St. Jerome (347-420) spent much time in the Holy Land, studying Hebrew and advising local Judaic rabbis. The first occurs three centuries before the New era and the second – four centuries after the New era. In this way the tradition consistently confirms this translation.

Of the same order is the riddle why the kings David and Solomon choose foals which are “children of the she-donkey” as the royal animal and not the horse. Judges 5:10 shows that the use of donkeys or foals as animals for riding and expressing abundance, power, influence etc., is a tradition in the Near Eastern monotheistic culture.

White she-donkeys from Judges 5:10 are related to the Messiah and his foal of a donkey, lit. *sons of female donkey*, from Genesis, 49:11.

5. *The colt* רַע [air]

BibleWorks4 distinguishes between two different roots *Ayin-Yud-Reish* ry[, which are spelled the same – ’yr I and ’yr II. From the first root derives רַע [ur] rouse oneself, awake, incite, as well as רַע [ir] excitement. From the second root derives רַע [air] he-donkey.

Genesius provides more information, the most valuable of which is the motive of forming the noun *wild donkey* רַע [air] – “The notion of being hot is applied in various ways: 1. to an ardent rapid course, or runing; a wild ass, so called from its rapid unrestrained running”. Interestingly, Genesius does not indicate the meaning of the root *rouse oneself, awake, incite* רַע [ur].

From this review of the root in BibleWorks4 and Gesenius, we can draw the following complex conclusion:

The cognitive, sub-consciously flowing relation of the word colt רַע [air] has five aspects, resulting from the colt’s qualities as well as of the extended semantics of the word’s root. The first aspect is that the colt lacks the association with strong sexuality, typical of mature donkeys, i.e. here the ‘lack of strong sexuality’ is at hand. The second aspect is a complete onomatopoeia with *town* רַע [air]. The third aspect relates the colt to ‘flaming’, ‘ardent’, since they form the meanings ‘speed’ + ‘peace’. The fifth aspect is the relation with the verbs rouse oneself, awake, incite רַע [ir]. This last aspect transmits linguistic consciousness and sub-consciousness of a journey to exaltation.

6. *The wild donkey* בַּיְיתוֹ [pirdâ] is the royal animal

In the Hebrew world-view the wild donkey is differentiated from the domestic one with quite different words. There are two denotations for wild ass/wild donkey.

One is בְּיִיתוֹ [pèred] / בָּיִיתוֹ [pirdâ] and the other is בְּיִיתוֹ [père] / בָּיִיתוֹ [père]. The term for the royal parade animal is king’s she-mule (Bul. царското муле) בְּיִיתוֹ בָּלֶם [pirdât mèleh].

In this context there are several uses – in Jeremiah, 2:24, Job, 11:12, 39:5. Isaiah, 32:14 – where the second word for wild donkey is used for mule, with the textual semantization ‘wild’, ‘natural’, uncivilized’, ‘non-monotheistic’ and ‘absence of people’.

BibleWorks4 indicates the meaning “wild donkey” for the word בְּיִיתוֹ [père] / בָּיִיתוֹ [père]. The internal form of the term royal donkey/mule בְּיִיתוֹ [pèred] is from run, run fast בָּיִיתוֹ [pâra]. On the other hand, the same root, according to Gesenius, comprises the verb carry weight, support, carry, bear בָּיִיתוֹ [parâ]. This word should not be confused with its homophone – בָּיִיתוֹ [parâ], meaning young cow. The verb בָּיִיתוֹ [parâ] means carry, give birth quickly, run. Clearly, the two
verbs מַרְפָּא [parà] and וֶרְפָּא [parà] are close enough – in sound and meaning.

Besides signifying ‘wild’, ‘natural’, ‘uncivilized’, ‘non-monotheistic’, the wild donkey is also a sign for ‘nobleness’ and ‘royalness’. This appears in the different descriptions in 3 Kings of Solomon’s anointment as king, where the word מַרְפָּא [pirdâ] is used.

Zechariah does not use the lexeme מַרְפָּא [père], used in Solomon’s anointment as king in 1 Kings:33; 38; 44 (3 Kings, 1:33; 38; 44), yet on the other hand, in the New Testament the apostles indicate that Christ entered Jerusalem as a Jewish king, riding a mule (Bul. осле). The founders of the Hebrew monarchy – David and Solomon – prefer the mule as their ceremonial animal. The term is king’s mule מֶלֶךְ מַרְפָּא [pirdât mèleh]. Solomon’s anointment as king occurs on a king’s mule (Bul. царското муле). The word formation king’s mule מֶלֶךְ מַרְפָּא [pirdât mèleh] is a smihat-form which unequivocally indicates that the royal mule is female. The term is used in three verses telling about Solomon’s anointment as king, done while David is still alive – 1 Kings 33; 38; 44.

The king said to them, „Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 1 Kings 1:33 (NAU)

According to the Bulgarian explanatory dictionary, муле (mule) as a general term is a cross between a donkey and a horse. The dictionary distinguishes between the concrete terms – a mule is born of a she-ass and a horse, whereas a hinny is born from a donkey and a mare (BED 1963, p. 423). In the context of the Messiah and his genealogical tree related to King David, the question of the “royal mule”/ “David’s mule” is not without significance, as well as the term “colt, born of an ass”. This term is used both in the Old and the New Testament when it needs to be specified.

All of David’s sons ride she-mules [pirdâ]. Solomon’s anointment as king with such a female mule changes the spectrum of semantizations of this word: from the usual animal ridden by the king’s sons in times of peace, this kind of donkey is transformed into a royal animal.

7. The Aramaic wild donkey דוֹרָא [aròd]

The word occurs in Job 39:5.

According to Genesius, the word colt יַעֲרָא [aìr] has an Aramaic origin, from the root Ayin-Yud-Reish and is an element of the paradigm of macro-red – macro-light יֵר [ur] to be hot, ardent, rouse oneself, awake, incite יֵר [ir]; to make hot, to heat נִר [heir]; יֵר [ir] excitement.

Job’s poetic style is distinctive due to his brilliant command of Hebrew, as well as the large number of loan-words. Thus we can find the Aramaic word next to the Hebrew word in one and the same verse. This is precisely the case with the Aramaic word for wild donkey דוֹרָא [aròd], which is next to the Hebrew word מַרְפָּא [père] in Job 39:5.

Usual explanation for the many non-Hebrew words in the Book of Job, including the couple דוֹרָא [aròd] – מַרְפָּא [père] is that the use of non-Hebrew words serves poetic manipulation (Greenstein 2003; Ginsberg 2007).

The Bulgarian translations of this word and the poetical parallelism of the Aramaic and Hebrew words for wild donkey are illustrations of the correctness of Greenstein’s claim.
8. Conclusions

— There are five different Hebrew roots for terms for English Biblical foal, coat, female donkey, he-ass.

— Logical and associative relations in Hebrew, established by the polysemy of different roots of names for the donkey are untranslatable into Indo-European languages.

— From color point of view the he-donkey רומֶח [hamor] is in the area of macro-red and macro-black, while the foal of the Messiah is macro-white.

— The white she-donkeys in Judges 5:10 are a highly significant symbol because it relates to the prophecy that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem on a donkey. In this sense, the word denoting the color of the donkey is significant.

— White donkeys are related to the meanings ‘light’, ‘noon-light as something positive’, ‘ritual purity’, following the derivation of their semantics from the root, as well as from the biblical context. That is why they are the prototype of the Messiah’s donkey.

— Zechariah’s prophecy is incarnate in the gospels of the New Testament, is cited with precision by the apostles and Jesus enters Jerusalem as a Hebrew king, on a white colt, the ass’s foal.

— Kings ride mules with difficulty, but apparently this is not the case of the most important Judaic kings who are not worried to express ‘peace’ by means of this symbol.

— Kings David and Solomon choose colts “the ass’s foals” as royal animal and not the horse. From Judges, 5:10 is clear that the use of donkey or colt as an animal for riding expresses wealth, power, influence etc., but not ‘solidarity with poverty’, ‘simplicity’.

— The analysis of the extended semantics of the proto-image of Christ’s white colt – the white asses from the call to Court by Debora; the lexemes of Zechariah’s prophecy; the symbols of Jacob’s legacy for the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49; the tradition established by David and Solomon that kings should ride mules – show different levels of the relation between the New and Old Testaments.

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