

Our Daily Bread Is At Risk: The Term *rōzīq/g* as *Vorlage* for ἐπιούσιος in Lord's Prayer

DAN SHAPIRA 

Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, shapiradan.apple@gmail.com

Abstract: This note proposes a new hypothesis, claiming that the word ἐπιούσιος of the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:11 and Luke 11:3 was an attempt to translate *rōzīq/g*, a Middle Iranian loan word in Jesus' Hebrew/Aramaic, meaning "nourishment provided by God's mercy day to day," and not merely "daily [bread], needed for the day/for today."

Keywords: Lord's Prayer, Pater Noster, Aramaic, Iranian loan words in Semitic, Middle Iranian, Middle Persian, Arabic, Swahili, risk, daily bread

The Lord's Prayer (*Pater Noster*) in Matthew's Gospel reads τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον (6:11). The word ἐπιούσιος does not appear anywhere in the Greek language except in the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:11 and Luke 11:3, as pointed out by Origen (*Or.* 27.7). The Latin translator, St. Jerome, also realized that there was a problem and was therefore uncertain as to the true meaning of the word (*Comm. Matt.* 1.6.10); he translated it as *cotidianum* in Luke 11:3, and *supersubstantialem* in Matt 6:11.

1

The examples of Origen and St. Jerome demonstrate that a crucial word in the most important Christian prayer was not clear for the first Christian generations, even for the Greek translator (oral interpreter?) of Jesus' Aramaic or Hebrew, or Hebrew-cum-Aramaic prayer, and the awkward ἐπιούσιος was an attempt to render a word lacking in the translator's/interpreter's Greek. Much ink was spilled trying to understand the meaning of ἐπιούσιος, but the literature on the subject is too vast to review here¹.

¹ For the *status quaestionis* see Carmignac, *Recherches*, 118–221; Gupta, *The Lord's Prayer*, 95–97; Black, *The Lord's Prayer*, 150–157.

2

The Syriac version in both Matt 6:11 and Luke 11:3 is *lahmā dā-sunqānā*[']n and the Armenian is *hac' hanapazord*, “bread of our need” (the Georgian is “of existence”). However, the Curetonian Gospels² use *'ammīnā*, “lasting,” somewhat reminiscent of Exod 17:12, וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֲמוּנָה, “so his hands were steady.” As a rule, new versions translate “daily” as “of today,” “of everyday,” etc. One Dutch translation stands alone with “that we need,” apparently grasping correctly that the original word must have been a substantive (as in Syriac and Armenian).

3

What is important about the Arabic translation is the remarkable fact that it did not exist before the rise of Islam: strange, however, since Arabic- and South-Arabian Christians of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula and adjacent countries must have already known the prayer (in which language did they say it?). Hans Winkler,³ on p. 244, juxtaposes the Greek Lord’s Prayer to al-Fātiḥah and the Lord’s Prayer in Arabic:

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Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς	بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ	ربنا الله الذي في السماء
1. Ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου·	لِلْحَمْدِ لَكَ يَا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ	تقدس اسمك
2. ἐλθάτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·	الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ	امرك في السماء والارض
3. γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς·	مَا لَكَ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ	كما رحمتك في السماء فاجعل رحمتك في الارض
4. Τὸν ἕρπον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον ἴδος ἡμῖν σήμερον·	إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ	—
5. καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν·	اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ	اغفر لنا حوبنا وخطايانا (انت رب الطيبين انزل رحمة من رحمتك وشفاء من شفائك على هذا الرجوع)
6. καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν,	صِرَاطِ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ	
7. ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.	غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ	
(Ἀμήν).	(آمين)	

² Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*; Kiraz, *Comparative Edition*, I-IV.

³ Winkler, “Fātiḥa und Vaterunser,” 238–246.

We can see here that what is missing in al-Fātiḥah is verse 4 of the Lord's Prayer, the Daily Bread (but see the variant reading of al-Fatiḥah, *al-Razzāq al-raḥīm*, instead of *al-Raḥmān al-raḥīm*⁴).

4

The Hebrew translation by Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890) reads לֶחֶם הַקֶּהֱנִי which can roughly be translated as “bread of our measure/law/justice/the-real-thing.” Obviously, this translation was based on Prov 30:8, הַטֶּרֶיפִּנִי לֶחֶם הַקֶּהֱי, “Feed me with the food allotted to me” (the Syriac is “Give me a living sufficient for me”).

5

The author of the Lord's Prayer must have had this verse in the back of his mind, but it is also clear that he did not use the Hebrew word from Prov 30:8, but rather another word with a similar – for him – meaning.

6

In my opinion, the original Hebrew/Aramaic word, in the eyes of the earliest Greek translator of the Lord's prayer, was an Iranism, *rōzīq/g*, an adjective form from the Middle Iranian word for “day,” *rōz*. This word, *rōzīq/g*, does exist in Judeo-Aramaic and in other languages in contact with Middle Iranian, such as Syriac, Armenian, and Arabic. Though derived from the word for “day,” the word *rōzīq/g* means “that which one has to work for in order to be fed / to provide provision needed on a *daily* basis/daily wage,” and the New Persian *rōzī* means “day's provisions” as well as “destiny/fate,” while *rōzīna* means “daily allowance / daily wages / of everyday.” For Jewish Aramaic, cf. *rōzīqā*, *rōzīnqā*, “daily bread,”⁵ clearly thus translated under the influence of *English* translations of the Lord's Prayer. Syriac uses *rōzīqā* and Armenian has *ročik*, “tägliches Unterhalt, Nahrung, Lebensmittel.”⁶

7

I firmly believe that I am not the first to realize that ἐπιούσιος is a translation of **rōzīq/g*. It was the Swahili translator, a learned missionary,⁷ who grasped, by Divine

⁴ Jeffery, “A Variant,” 158–162.

⁵ Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, 1063b–1064a.

⁶ Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, 234.

⁷ Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810–1881), a German Lutheran in the service of the Anglican Church Missionary Society, or the English Bishop Edward Steere 1828–1882)? See Vilhanova, “Biblical Translations,” 80–89.

grace and mercy, the semantics (and the root!) behind the Greek word ἐπιούσιος. Swahili has a word borrowed from Arabic, *riziki*, “what is needed for the living.”

8

The Arabic verbal root *rzq*, “to provide provision needed on *daily* basis / to provide with the means of subsistence (said of God) / endow, to bless,”⁸ *razaqa*, “to provide nourishment,” *rizq/arzāq*, “means of living, daily bread, boon, blessing (of God), wealth, fortune [cf. New Persian *rōzī* above, “day’s provisions” and “destiny / fate”], income, pay, wages,” and *al-Razzāq*, “the Maintainer, the Provider (one of the 99 attributes of God).”⁹ Through the vehicle of the Arabic *rizq*, a back-formation of the borrowed Persian **rōzīq*, the word entered the languages of Europe as *risk*, *Risiko*, etc.

9

The Iranian loan word, *rōzīq/g* רזיק/ג, used in Jesus’ Hebrew/Aramaic rhymes with another well-attested Middle Iranian loan word in Jewish Aramaic, *ṭōzīg*/טוויג, “picnic” (also seen in Armenian and in other languages, meaning “provisions for a journey”). Due to Iranian words in Qumran unattested previously (like נחשיר, “eschatological hunting”¹⁰) or unattested in the specific meanings used, the hypothesis seems quite convincing that Jesus’ word behind ἐπιούσιος was *rōzīq/g*, “nourishment provided by God’s mercy day to day while we take our risks to achieve it,” and not merely “daily-needed [bread].”

10

As a day-hire would say today in Arabic, *yā Rabb, jibnī rizqī/rizq yōmītī il-yom*, “O Lord, give me my day-worker’s wages/my living,” while using the Arabic *yawmiyeh*, from the word “day,” *yawm/yōm*, or *rizq*, “means of living, God’s blessing”.

⁸ The Arabic examples are quoted from Wehr, *Dictionary*, 336b–337a.

⁹ The fact that no Arabic translation known to me uses *rizq* for ἐπιούσιος indicates, in my view, that there were no pre-Islamic translations of the Lord’s Prayer into Arabic.

¹⁰ *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* I, 9–11, אַל לַפְנֵי חֹזֶק וְנַחֲשִׁיר קָרְבַּ כִּי־יִיָּם בּוֹ נִפּוּל וּבַיּוֹם, “on the day when the Kittim fall there shall be a battle and horrible carnage before the God.”

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