

Decoding of the Voynich Manuscript 2

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Abstract

This document is a continuation of the paper “Decoding of the Voynich Manuscript”, which is already published on the enspace.net site. In its first part we introduce the transcription and the translation of the second text passage, placed around the central image of the foldout - pages 85v-86r – of the VMS. Thereby, we make use of the alphabet and decrypting method presented in the anteceded paper. Some terms and names used in this text passage demand a short explanation, as they are closely connected to the Hebrew bible written record. In the second part we again investigate the acrostic included in this passage in detail. Here, we make a short draft of the common practice of acrostics incorporation in the scribal lore of the ancient Near East.

1 Second part of the central rosette text

In Sefer Yetzirah, Book of Formation, attributed in its writing to Rabbi Akiva, a leading scholar and sage of Jewish mysticism (50 – 135 CE, killed by the Romans during the Bar Kochba rebellion), we can read in chapter 1: *ten are the numbers, as are the Sefirot, and twenty-two the letters [of the Hebrew alphabet], these are the Foundation of all things*. Of these letters, three are 'mothers', seven are 'double', and twelve are 'simple'. For a scribe or coder committed to this mystical Jewish tradition, these readings were not merely a description of the existent Hebrew or Aramaic alphabet, but in our opinion, an advice on how to proceed in composition of a secret ciphertext. The seven 'double' letters point to seven letters, which can be read in two different ways. We identified following seven Voynichese glyphs which stand for two different phonemes each:

Table 1: Voynich glyphs 1










count	character	name
1		beth/waw (at the end of a word transcribed as -h, pronounced -w)
2		mem/nun
3		daleth/lamadh
4		heth/kap(qop) (qop always spoken k, sometimes transcribed as ch)
5		taw/tsade (there is a variety of pronunciation options for tsade)
6		teth/pe (can be easily confused with zain)
		zain
7		shin/semkath (semkath sometimes with one longer leg)
		semkath with a longer leg

Table 2: Voynich glyphs 2

character	name
	<i>glyph 1</i>
	<i>glyph 2</i>
	<i>glyph 3</i>
	<i>glyph 4</i>
	<i>glyph 5</i>
	<i>glyph 6</i>
	<i>glyph 7</i>
	<i>glyph 8</i>
	<i>glyph 9</i>
	<i>glyph 10</i>

The glyphs specified in *Table 1* appear in the midst of a word or at its end, some having a diverse image at its beginning or as second last syllable. In the second case they appear as the famous gallows, possibly as emphasis on the second last syllable. Exemplary, as for the numerous occurrences of beth/waw in Aramaic texts, we can find *glyph 1* at the beginning of a word, and *glyph 2* as gallows. Short vowels are not present in old Aramaic spelling. Nevertheless, we identified that as for long vowels like a” and o” the glyphs *glyph 3* and respectively *glyph 4* are used. In parallel these two glyphs stand sometimes for the Greek letters *Alpha* and *Omega*. For sequential occurrences of the same consonant there is a special notation for some letters, as indicated in the previous paper.

The *glyph 5*, which can be found at the beginning of a word, appears in slightly different modes (*glyph 6*, *glyph 7*, *glyph 8*, *glyph 9*), from an open form at the top to a form which builds a roof or canopy over the mostly following *glyph 10* letters. In our opinion, this glyph stands

for the family of similar tones such as qop, gamal, kap (sometimes transcribed as ch) whose pronunciation confuse some European languages until this day. We cannot rule out that the different modes indicate different phonemes from this family, yet we were incapable to make out this difference so far. The *glyph 11*, which regularly follows in one or multiple occurrences, stands presumably for a form of the phoneme dalet /l/ with an initial sound waw /w/, then /wl/ or /l/.

Table 3: Voynich glyphs 3



character	name
	<i>glyph 11</i>
	<i>glyph 12</i>



Figure 1: Decrypted text of the central rosette page

The following second part of the main text around the central image reads counter clockwise:

'az 'achar ella' (awz-akh-ar'-ale-law')

YHWH lebab (yahwe-lay-bawb')

YHWH guwphah (yahwe-goo-faw')

'owlel taba' (o-lale'-taw-bah')

then hereafter/afterwards above

(of) YHWH soul/heart/mind/spirit

(of) YHWH body/corpus

a boy child sunk down

'aph kar bath 'ab (af-kar-bath-awb')

Bithyah (Bith-yaw')

yir'ah ha-lebab (yir-aw'-ha-lay-bawb')

q@¹butсах (keb-oo-tsaw')

rather/much more a lamb, daughter of God (as father)

Bithyah²,

fear of soul/heart/mind/spirit³,

a gathering/assembly

zuw palag sheba' (zoo-paw-lag'-sheh'-ba')

rahaḥ ba'uḡ (raw-haw'-baw-o')

saba' (saw-bah')

qalal 'alam ts@buw (kaw-lal'-aw-lam'-tseb-oo')

which/who divided by seven/sevenfold,

feared/be afraid (by) request/petition

to be sated/to be weary of

treating with contempt/to curse the dumb/tongue

tied/speechless/mute,

a matter/a purpose/an affair

¹@ stands for a long e (eh)

²The meaning of the first name Bithyah is daughter of Jahweh so together with bath 'ab the phrase forms a reduplication or tautology. In our view, Bithyah symbolises here the New Jerusalem as a promise for the righteous

³With the definite article ha-(the), yir'ah ha-lebab means fear of the spirit (of God) or fear spirit

'ay zan (ah'ee-zan)

t@la'ah (tel-aw-aw')

galal koh radiyd 'abah (gaw-lal'-ko-raw-deed'-aw-baw')

'azan (aw-zan')

which/what kind/sort/form of

pain/hardship/sorrow/toil/tribulation/distress/weariness/trouble

to lift/roll together/remove thus/so the wide veil/large expanded veil (before those) willing

to hear/listen (to God)

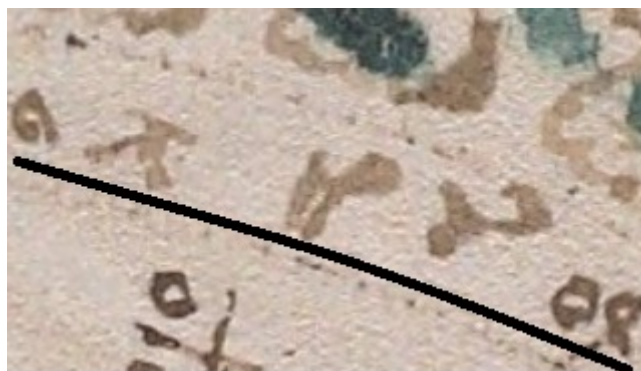


Figure 2: The final phrase of the central rosette page text

shib'athayim (shib-aw-thah'-yim)

sevenfold/seven times

(or)

saba' 'Athariym (saw-bah'-'ath-aw-reem')⁴

satisfied/fulfilled in tracks/stepwise

A translation stripped of the synonyms reads then following:

then afterwards above of YHWH spirit, of YHWH body a boy child sunk down,

rather a lamb, daughter of father (of God) Bithyah, the fear spirit (of God), an assembly

which divided sevenfold, feared by request to be weary of treating with contempt the speechless,

a matter,

what form of tribulation, to lift thus the veil (before those) willing to listen (to God)

⁴Aramaic 'athar (ath-ar'): site, place, track

sevenfold (such fulfilled stepwise)

First observation is that the poem does not scan. The metrum apparently did not play an important role for the author. The rhyme schema changes between AABB and ABAB with the final stanza ABBA. In the foreground lies the unfolding of a vision. Announced is a revelation in seven steps, as it is known from the Greek counterpart.

The final chord can be read in two different ways, each having its justification. In our opinion, both should have been recognised and appreciated - the first letter of *glyph 12* is not clearly a shin nor a semkath and leaves room for different interpretations. In this manneristic ambiguousness the reader should uncover the secrets by himself and find his way of comprehension. The last word is written in separate, big letters which express a native note of exclamation. Consider for instance the stages of escalation steps of a simple oral instruction, given to a child in case he disobeys the calm and serene declaimed instructions:

Boy, do not disturb your sister!
Boy! Do not Disturb! Your! Sister!
Boy! Do! Not! Dis!-Turb! Your! Sis!-Ter!

This manner how to stress urgency or importance seems constitutional. We must not forget that while dealing with ancient or medieval recipients of messages and visions, we are faced with oral societies. Written religious texts as means of communication did not address a reader in today's sense but in fact were written down to be declaimed or recited by a priest or messenger to the contemporary audience. Exemplary, historical research assumes an alphabetization rate of 6-7% (at the top) as for the late ancient population of the Near East.

The pure revelation text is enclosed in brackets. The word outside of the brackets refers to the nature of the poem as al-roba'iyat (quatrains).

The tenor of this passage is not dissimilar to what we know from the Book of Revelation of John. The admonition directed to the mute and speechless, to people who are not firm in their believe, and the phrase stating that the veil covering the future will be lifted for those who are willing to hear, reminds of the words: he who has ears, let him hear. And, regarding the contribution of the medieval illustrator as far the images on this page are concerned, we could add: he who has eyes, see the signs and portents of the end times.

The number seven, the divine number of completion, plays a distinguished role in the entire Jewish tradition. Among other sevenfold factors, the passage alludes to Yahweh's sevenfold ministry of the Spirit which is assembled before God. The sevenfold ministry of the Spirit was first depicted in the Book of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear, and He will delight in the fear of the Lord* (Isaiah 11:2-3). Including the Spirit of the Lord, these are the seven Spirits, which are before the throne of God. These seven Spirits are represented as seven lampstands in the central image of the foldout.

Regarding the designation of the origins of this text, we put our trust hesitantly in the information found in the inbuilt acrostic, of which we will give a detailed description in the following chapter.

2 Acrostic

The ancient authors before the age of Hellenism commonly did not sign their work and mostly stayed in anonymity. The scribal technique to incorporate acrostics into the text and leave there a hint about the author or even authors name was, however, an occasional practice among scribes in the Near East. There are a few examples where an acrostic contains a name. The Mesopotamian author Nabu-usebsi left his name in a sophisticated acrostic built into a composed prayer addressed to God Marduk. It uses both, first and last letters of each line to form the sentence: by Nabu-usebsi the exorcist, the servant who proclaim your lordship, the servant who deferentially prays to you. Acrostics in the Hebrew Bible served a different purpose. They were rhetorical features rather than a hidden text. Here, the scribes mostly used Hebrew letters in alphabetical order at the beginning of every verse. In this way they covered the subject in a proverb, in a psalm, proverbial from 'A' to 'Z'. These alphabetic acrostics dominate in poems of Aramaic tongue, like Syriac. Ephrem provides examples of strophic alphabetic acrostics but there are a few, which spell out Ephrem's own name in the beginning stanzas as well. Targum⁵ Esther Sheni contains alphabetic acrostics, like some other targums do. The so called targumic poems contain different types of acrostics. They served as introductions to the Torah readings for the festivals, or for special Sabbaths in the Palestinian liturgy tradition. On Sabbaths that preceded the Passover Festival the regular Torah readings were interrupted on these occasions, and special readings were parenthesised, which were often introduced by Aramaic targumic poems. One of the most celebrated introductory poems was Go Moses, which tells the story of Moses ordering

⁵Targum – Aramaic translation of Books of the Hebrew Bible

the Sea of Reeds to split before the Israelites. This acrostic poem was identified on a 4th-5th century papyrus and proves an already ancient custom in composition of such Aramaic acrostic texts.

The acrostic identified in the VMS passage is of a different type. It reads in our view as following, which is slightly different to our previous indication:

Table 4: Acrostic

word	transcription	meaning	explanation
Zefat	Zefat	Safed	
Bayith	bah'-yith	house	
'Ach	akh	brethren	
'Achuzzam	akh-ooz-zawm	possessor	a descendant of Judah through Caleb
Chuppa'	khoop-paw'	canopy, chamber, divine protection	a priest of the 13th course in the time of David
Yakiyn (Jachin)	yaw-keen'	he will establish	the 4th son of Simeon and founder of the family of Jachinites; a priest and the head of the 21st course in the time of David; a post-exilic priest in the time of Nehemiah; name of the right-hand pillar before Salomon's temple
Zaza ⁶	zaw-zaw'	brightness, fullness	one of the sons of Jonathan, descendant of Jerahmeel (brother of Caleb), on his part son of Hezron and great-grandson of Judah (as given in the extended genealogies) a Levite, son of Bukki and father of Zerahiah in the line of the high priest although apparently never high priest himself

continued

⁶Zaza, this word shows a phonetical proximity to Azazel or Zazel, one of the presiding spirits, that of the intelligence of Saturn

Table 4: Acrostic

word	transcription	meaning	explanation
Uzzi	ooz-zee'	strong, strength	son of Tola and grandson of Issachar; a Benjamite, son of Bela and head of a family of Benjamin, son of Michri and father of Elah and an ancestor of a family of returned exiles settling in Jerusalem; a Levite, son of Bani, and an overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah; a priest, chief of the father's house of Jedaiah, in the time of Joiakim the high priest, one of the priests who helped Ezra in the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem
Bo'az	bo'-az	fleetness, swiftness, vitality	ancestor of David, kinsman-redeemer to Ruth; name of the left of two brazen pillars, erected in the porch of Solomon's temple
Yowyada' (Joiada)	yo-yaw-daw'	Yahweh knows	son of the high priest Eliashib in the time of Nehemiah; son of Paseah, who assisted to repair the old gate of Jerusalem
Ephah	ee-fa'	gloominess, darkness	a son of Midian; a Judaite, son of Jah-dai
Yachz@yah (Jahaziah)	(Ja- yakh-zeh-yaw'	Yahweh views, will behold	son of Tikvah, apparently a priest and leader during the time of Ezra

continued

Table 4: Acrostic

word	transcription	meaning	explanation
Pashchuwr (Pashur)	pash-khoor'	freedom	a priest, son of Malchiah and one of the chief princes in the reign of king Zedekiah of Judah, father of Zechariah, and ancestor of Adaiiah who did the work of the temple in the time; a priest, son of Immer, chief governor of the temple, and the one who struck and then put the prophet Jeremiah into the stocks in the reign of king Jehoiakim of Judah; head of a family of returned exiles
Yitschaq (Isaac)	vits-khawk'	he laughs	son of Abraham by Sarah his wife and father of Jacob and Esau
Tiytsiy	tee-tsee'	thou shall go forth	an inhabitant or descendant of an unknown Tiz; descriptive title of one of David's heroes
G@riziym	gher-ee-zeem' from garaz ⁷	cutting off	Gerizim may mean mountain of the Gerizites, a tribe in the vicinity of the Philistines that, according to the Hebrew Bible, was conquered by David, mountain in northern Israel in Ephraim near Shechem from which the blessings were read to the Israelites on entering Canaan and a site of the main Samaritan temple (the etymology for Gerizim would have the meaning of mountain cut in two)

continued

⁷garaz (to cut, to cut off), this word shows a phonetical proximity to karath and hairesis (heresy)

Table 4: Acrostic

word	transcription	meaning	explanation
Sheba'	sheb-aw'	seven or an oath	son of Joktan and a descendant of Seth; son of Raamah, grandson of Cush, and a descendant of Ham; son of Jokshan, the son of Abraham by Keturah; a nation in southern Arabia
Hilphai (Halfi); Greek Alpheus or Clopas; Aleph; 'eth	il-fay (al-fee); a'-lef; ayth	first; with, together with, with (of relationship)	Alpheus husband to Mary of Clopas and father of James; Alpheus was also the name of the father of Matthew the Apostle; the Aramaic name Hilfai, or Hebrew name Halfi have been proposed by a variety of sources
'Aram	a-rawm'	exalted	Aram or Syria the nation, the Syrian or Aramean people; fifth son of Shem; a grandson of Nahor; a descendant of Asher;
'aran	ar-awn'	joyous	a descendant of Esau; sometimes son of Seir the Horite who settled at Mount Seir known as Edom, later Amalekites settled there and Amalek is considered as grandson of Esau as well (enemies of Israel cursed by Yahweh)
'aron	aw-rone'	ark, coffin	usually translated with Ark of the Covenant

Listed are 15 biblical names, referred to as a house of brethren. Are these member nicknames of a real ancient brotherhood? Among the biblical names predominant are names of historically handed down priests or men connected to the temple. Devotion to them would suggest a Pharisaeic origin of the text and a brotherhood, similar to this of the disciples of Hillel the Elder or of a later ancient rabbinic school. The biblical names carry a meaning and constitute a sentence stating that:

The house of the brethren possesses divine protection and will establish (resp. Yahweh will establish) brightness/strength and vitality

Further that:

Yahweh knows the gloominess but will behold freedom (in Israel/on earth)

And eventually that:

Yahweh laughs and commands: thou shall go forth cutting off the oath with Aram/Aran

The last phrase leaves space for varied interpretations. One could be the story of the Edomites. They were considered as Hebrew - Yahweh appeared in Edom as well - and settled in the Seir Mountains. The names of Aram and Edom are often confused, which is caused by the similarity of the Hebrew letters of Daleth and Resch in the old scriptures. Esau is considered as an ancestor of the Edomites so is Amalek, a grandson of Esau. Amalek occurs in the Holy Writ as an opponent of Moses and Joshua during the Exodus. He raided the exhausted Israelites on a rock spring and the Amalekites became a synonym for sworn enemies of Israel. Flavius Josephus refers to Amalek as a 'bastard' in a derogatory sense. According to the prophets of the Tanach, Amalekites are incarnations of evil and recurring enemies of the Israelites.

However, the last phrase of the acrostic may refer to Aram in a more contemporary sense for the author, than in a context of the old testamentary exegesis. In this case, the first question to clarify would be the reference of the word. Aram could mean all people of Aramaic tongue, non-Hebrew people of Aramaic tongue, people of Aram-Syria or people speaking Aramaic in all territories outside of Israel, the Gentiles. An interesting motive in this connection is that of a brotherhood, which enjoys divine protection, but in which one name of a member stands for a person (Aran/Aram) who should be cut off of the oath and, therefore, excluded and punished for assumptive misconduct and wrongdoing.

Another interesting mentioning in the acrostic is that of the three names Yakiyn, Zaza/Uzzi and Bo'az ('he will establish brightness/strength and fleetness'). The name Zaza resp. Uzzi occurs in-between the two names Yakiyn and Bo'az, which depict the two brass or bronze pillars in the porch of Salomon's temple. This prominent place, the place of the temple gate between two

pillars in this image, alludes to the importance of the family of Jerahmeel/Zaza resp. Uzzi (Uziel, Uzziel). Some Hebraists found chief elements of Israel's origin, religion and history in Jerahmeel. The epithet of Jericho, 'city of palm-trees' could be a corruption of 'city of Jerahmeel'. A part of the Jerahmeelites was absorbed by the Israelites. According to these Hebraists⁸, they reawakened their religious traditions and incorporated some elements into the 'Hebrew faith'. Yet in the period of the Kings the main branch of the Jerahmeelites contested the Israelites. Jerahmeelites had been displaced by Babylon too and shared the fate of the exile. The author could feel a spiritual connection to or considered himself as a descendant of this ancient folk. On the other hand, the name Uzzi was passed down as a name of different priests and high priests, mostly Levites, and would allude to a family of temple dignitaries.

Considering the notation of the last phrase of the acrostic, we took into account that not only the letters as such are written broad but that they build three groups which are separated by extra space among themselves (see figure 3). In our opinion, every glyph contributes to the acrostic as for these three groups. Generally, we must consider all irregular spaces between glyphs for the determination of glyphs, which are putative constituents of the acrostic (see the offset before the marked glyph beth in figure 4).

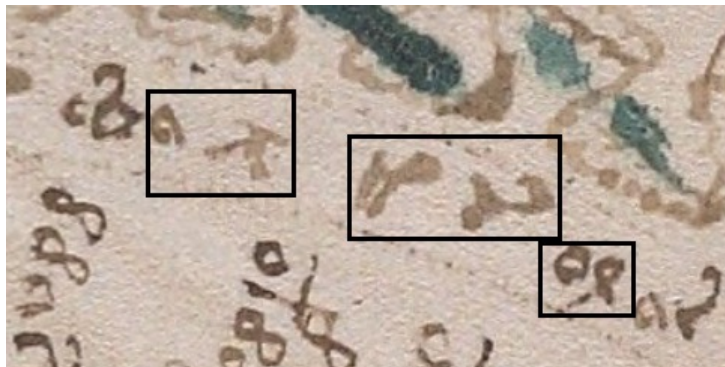


Figure 3: Wide spaces between words in the final phrase of the rosette's main text

Our compendious explanation of the acrostic does not comprise the other listed protagonists. Instead, we take a swift look at acrostics as a product of scribal practice in Aramaic texts.

Several mediaeval Aramaic liturgical texts contain sophisticated acrostics. One of the best-known liturgical hymns is Akdamut Millin (Introduction), which was chanted to a traditional melody on the first day of Shavuot. Composed in Aramaic by Meir ben Isaac Nehorai, a cantor in Worms during the eleventh century, it is an acrostic of ninety lines. The initial letters of each line of

⁸E.g. Thomas Kelly Cheyne



Figure 4: Spaces between words relevant for the generation of the acrostic, here: Yakin, Zaza, Bo'az

the first half of the piyyut⁹ are in a dual alphabetical order. The acrostic of the second part spells out the author's name, followed by a benediction: *'Meir son of Rabbi Isaac, may he grow in Torah and in good deeds. Amen. And be strong and of good courage'*. Each line ends with the syllable *ta*, the last and first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, symbolizing the continuous cycle of Torah study. Akdamut Millin was originally sung as a prelude to the reading of the Targum on the theophany at Mount Sinai, following the first verse (Exodus 19:1) of the scriptural reading¹⁰.

Other hymns in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the late ancient Jews, were interwoven into readings of the verses of the Torah. In the times as Aramaic became the everyday language of the Jews, a meturgeman might have introduced the readings with a composed poem or a lyrical tale as preface, like this one of the debate Jonathan ben Uzziel had with a heavenly voice, when Jonathan completed the translation of the Prophets into Aramaic (Targum Jonathan) and desired to reveal the secrets of the Hagiographa, but was forbidden doing so by the voice.

Exemplars of introductory acrostic poems were discovered in various collections, collections embracing the ancient times until the times of Hebraist circles of Johannes Buxtorf or kabbalistic circles of Shabtai Sheftel ben Akiva ha-Levi Horowitz or Antonia von Württemberg. Acrostic

⁹A piyyut or piyut is a Jewish liturgical poem, usually designated to be sung, chanted, or recited during religious services

¹⁰The Shavuot Anthology, edited by Philip Goodman

poems seem to constitute a very broad field of research.

3 Conclusion

The announcement of a sevenfold revelation gives us a foretaste of what content to expect in the other circular passages on these pages - the eighth passage being presumably the episode which begins at Revelation 10:1. Here the visionary is instructed to eat a book, which will be 'bitter in his stomach but sweet as honey in his mouth'. A vision of receiving a book or scroll from God, together with the order to eat it, so that the prophet may henceforth speak in divine words, does not originate from the Book of Revelation, but is Ezekiel's vision of the call to be a prophet (Ezek 2:8 onwards). The author then takes an old motif and re-uses it in a new context.

According to biblical scholars the creation of Bible texts was accompanied by incorporation and adaptation of older scriptures in a new political or religious context. In this respect, we may ask where the version of the Apocalypse in the VMS ought to be placed. Larger parts of the text must be decoded, before a detailed scrutiny can take place. As for now, it cannot be ruled out that the text is pseudepigraphic, despite the uncovered acrostic. The Hebrew and Christian apocalyptic literature embraces a period from the time of the Babylonian exile down to the end of the Middle Ages. This version of the Apocalypse may then be a precursor of later versions, or a Hebrew version deliberately stripped off the Christian elements in the Greek version.

As the nature of prophetic literature and oracles should always grant some free space for interpretation, ambiguousness and obscurity can be seen as its volitional intrinsic characteristic. Moreover, this fact complicates an exact historical allocation. Our historical placement is based on the acrostic in the main circular text of the foldout pages 85r-86v. Further decoding may reveal new aspects, which once disclosed have to be taken into account.