ON THE MEANING OF šg/l

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INTRODUCTION
The verb šg/l occurs in Deut 28:30, Isa 13:16, Zech 14:2, and Jer 3:2, and the noun šg/l in Ps 45:10, Neh 2:6 and Dan 5:2, 3, 23. The verb has been relegated to the category of “unmentionables,” but the noun šg/l found its place in royal company. That a root used in the Hebrew Bible could have opposite meanings is not in itself an unusual phenomenon. What is intriguing about the verb šg/l is that already in ancient times it was considered so obscene as to merit first place in the list of such notorious obscenities as עפלים, חוריונים, חורייתם, and שעיניהם (TB Megillah 25b). Moreover, in the Ketib (K) and Qere (Q) system of the Hebrew Bible, grammatical forms of שכב have been invented to serve as the Qere euphemisms for the corresponding forms of שגלה, so offensive was the verb שגלה considered.

The list of obscenities to which we referred is in the Talmudic passage:

This passage states that all the obscene words in the Bible are to be read

1 ברך (curse – bless); חסד (kindness – disgrace); שלט רע (shout for joy – moan (Lam 2:19)); נוהר (revelry (Am 6:7) – lamentation (Jer 16:5)); נפל (distinguished, Arab. (2Sam 25:20) – despicable); קלס (mock – praise), in the Bible and Ben Sira 11:4 only “mock” but in post-biblical Hebrew and Syriac “praise”; בוקק (disturb – be at rest); מסמא (luxuriant (Hos 10:1) – empty, waste (Isa 24:3)); מתחפש (despise (Am 6:8) – desire); עזב (leave, forsake – assist, strengthen), both meanings in Ex 23:5; נופל (leap – limp); etc. Cf. R. Gordis, “Studies in Hebrew Roots of Contrasting Meanings,” JQR 27 (1936), XXX.
2 The verb שגלה is transitive, but שבך is intransitive everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible.

using proper language. Thus, ישגלנה (Deut 28:30, Isa 13:16, Zech 14:2, Jer 3:2); תשגלנה (1Sam 5:9, 5:6, 12, 6:4, 5); should be read תשגלנה (Deut 28:27, 1Sam 5:9, 5:6, 12, 6:4, 5); should be read should be read should be read (2Kgs 6:25); should be read (2Kgs 18:27); should be read should be read should be read (2Kgs 18:27, Isa 36:12); and should be read should be read should be read (2Kgs 10:27). In each of these cases the Reader is enjoined to substitute a word of milder force for a word in the text, which might sound too coarse when read in the synagogue.

Gordis averred that in all instances mentioned in TB Megillah 25b, the difference in meaning between K and Q is very slight. This is not immediately obvious nor can it be deduced from the fact that the list of “unmentionable words” is part of the K-Q system. The K-Q system contains many cases where the K and Q are words having completely different meanings. Thus, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the K words without reliance on their euphemistic substitutes. Our focus in this study is the verb שגל. In particular, we are interested in exploring its meaning, obscene content and offensiveness to the listener. It is hoped that this analysis will also shed some light on the noun שגל and the remaining members in the list of “unmentionable words.”

3 H.M. Orlinsky, “The Origin of the Kethib-Qere System: A New Approach” VTSup 7 (1960) 186–187. There are no references to the specifics of the K-Q system in either the Talmud or Jerome. The passage in TB Megillah 25b perhaps served as a prototype for the development of the K-Q system and was later incorporated into it. Gordis (29–31) argued that the Tetragrammaton and substitution of euphemisms for indelicate expressions were the first elements of the K-Q system. It is generally believed that the K-Q system consists of variant readings (“collation model”) or corrections of what was perceived to be an error (“correction model”).


5 For instance, there are many cases (Lev 25:30, 1Sam 2:3, 2Sam 16:18, Isa 49:5, Ps 100:3, Prov 19:7, Job 13:15, Ezra 4:2, 1Chr 11:21, etc.) of changes interchange in the K-Q system. Often the gender or person in the K and Q differ. For instance, we find רעה instead of רות (Gen 32:8); 2Chr 11:18 יב instead of עובדת (K) but יבת (Q); 1Sam 15:16 אפרים instead of אפרים (K) but אפרים (Q); 2Sam 12:24 ותקרא instead of ותקרא (K) but ותקרא (Q); 2Sam 22 זבכ instead of זבכ (K) but זבכ (Q); 2Sam 21:3 יח instead of יח (K) but יח (Q); 1Kgs 17:15 היה instead of היה (K) but היה (Q); 1Kgs 17:15 היה instead of היה (Q); 2Kgs 22:49 נוער instead of נוער (Q); and, 2Kgs 20:4 עז instead of עז (Q).
EARLY TREATMENT OF שגל

The verb שגל, in the three grammatical forms Qal, Niph’al and Pu’al occurs in Deut 28:30, Isa 13:16, Zec 14:2, and Jer 3:2 as Ketib, and the corresponding Qere is the verb שכב, unnaturally in the same three grammatical forms. Deut 28:30 is publicly read as part of a weekly Torah reading. Zec 14:2 and Jer 3:2 are each publicly read as part of a lectionary. Thus, concern with excessive obscenity and improper language in public use seems justified. That the verb שגל posed significant difficulties becomes clear when one reviews earlier efforts to decipher its meaning. We shall discuss each instance separately.

Deut 28:30

The Septuagint translates εἴσεκχει αὐτήν “shall have her,” and similarly the Targum Neofiti and Peshitta render “shall take her.”\(^6\) Gordis believes that the Septuagint read here the Qere ישכבנה.\(^7\) This is, however, debatable. The phrase “shall have her” is general enough to cover a broad range of sexual intercourse with a woman. Targum Onqelos’ literal translation יישקביה (“will have sexual intercourse with her”), while somewhat more explicit, is still far from being an obscenity, and so is the Vulgate’s dormiat cum ea, which seems to follow the Targum Jonathan. Orlinsky notes that “in Deut. 28:30, Jer 3:2, and Psa. 45(44):10, Aquila has reproduced the obscene שגל (K), disregarding the “guide against obscenity.”\(^8\) Aquila renders the K, using the same root (synkoiotos) as he does for שגל in Ps 45:10.\(^9\) These translations reflect some ambivalence about the meaning of שגל and do not offer any insight into the obscene content that made שגל unmentionable.

The ambivalence with respect to the meaning of שגל can be also felt in Rashi’s treatment of this verb. In Deut. 28:30 Rashi says: ישכתנה, לשה פלגש, פלגש נמה לשה וישכתבנה (宣告 the) והיתוך שמיר הוא וה.\(^10\) The

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7 Gordis, Biblical Text 84.
8 H.M. Orlinsky, “Problems of Kethib-Qere.” JAOS 60 (1940) 33
9 Gordis, Biblical Text, 64.
10 The interpretation of פלגש probably rests on the occurrence of שגל in reversed order, in the last three letters of פלגש.
commentary on Rashi (شرح חכמים) explains that Rashi means אשה פלגש, i.e., a concubine. The חכמים is in the other person’s taking her formally as a concubine and not as a prostitute: שלהלכו אלא שאוה בה פלגש. Yet, this sense would better follow from ישגלנה.

Rabbinic sources testify to a number of places in the Scripture in which the text was corrected by the scribes (תקונים) to preserve the honor (הכבוד מפני). These are very distinct cases and few in number. Thus, there are two problems with Rashi’s considering ישגלנה a תקון: (a) this case is not mentioned among those considered as such; and (b) if ישגלנה is a תקון then it is the corrected text and does not have to be replaced by ישכבנה, in contradiction with the statement in TB Megillah 25b. We cannot say that the words תקון סופרים היא הז is extraneous since the commentator חכמים שבתי refers us to his own explanation of this term used by Rashi in Gen 18:22 (which is in the list of תקונים סופרים). Perhaps Rashi intended to say that reading ישכבנה instead of ישגלנה has been enacted by the סופרים, taking the term תקון סופרים in its broader rather than technical sense. Yet, he does not follow this practice in other K-Q cases. Does Rashi’s add on תקון סופרים היא הז indicate a positive understanding of ישגלנה?

Rashi’s explanation leaves us with considerable misgivings as to the onerous and unmentionable nature implied in the transitive verb ישגל. It seems that even Rashi’s commentator (شرح חכמים) had a hard time culling from Rashi’s explanation what precisely is the advantage of the Q language and he created a hodgepodge of both.

11 A popular supercommentary on Rashi’s Torah commentary by Rabbi Shabtai Bass (1641–1718).
12 A. Geiger, Uberschrift und ubersetzung der Bibel in ihrer ahnlichkeit von der inner entwickelung des Judenthums (Breslau: J. Hainauer, 1857) 309f. There are 11–18 תiqqune Sopherim in the various lists found in rabbinic sources.
13 There are various lists of Tiqqunei Sopherim that have reached us. Some have 7, 11, 13, 15, or 18 entries. For instance Tanhuma on Beshalach 16 mentions Zec 2:12, Mal 1:12, 1Sam 3:13, Job 7:20, Hab 1:12, Jer 2:11, Ps 106:20, Hos 4:7, Job 32:3, Gen 18:22, Num 11:15, Num 12:12, 1Kgs 12:16, Lam 3:20, 2Sam 16:12, Ez 8:17. It is reasonable to assume that there were other instances of Tiqqunei Sopherim that were forgotten. Cf. Mekhilta Sirata on Ex 15:5, Sifre on Num 10:35, and the Masorah on Num 1:2 and on Ps 106:12.
14 S.J. Fin, האוצר, vol. III, (Warsaw: Achiapaf, 1912) 490. In modern times this ambiguity continues to persist. Fin says, [It does not seem that the Sopherim dealt with it] for the sake of speaking in clean language, but because of another reason unknown to us. In all this, in the language of the Talmud the noun ישגל became obscene).
On the Meaning of šgl

Ibn Ezra says, לשכיבה המוכנה שגל וכנוי לשכיבה (is a term for 'sleeping with' and so שגל is a woman who is ready 'for sleeping with'). This interpretation would make the verb שגל much too passive. It is interesting to note that the commentary on Ibn Ezra says: (Ps 45:10) וכבלת של ימין (as a bitch is ready to your right). Does this commentator suggest that שגל is a woman ready to copulate as a bitch?

**Isa 13:16**

In Isa 13:16 the Septuagint consistently renders תִּשָּגַלְנָה “shall take.” The Targum’s לשכיבה is in line with the tradition (TB Megillah 25b) and consequently with the Q. However, the Peshitta’s (“ravished”) and Vulgate’s (violabuntur) suggest a more aggressive sexual encounter. Metzudot expresses this sense more directly, saying (and they shall rape their women”). Surprisingly, Rashi has nothing to offer. Ibn Ezra repeats that השכמנה is an appellation for the act of sexual intercourse, and that the term השכמנה is more respectful. Kimchi apparently just states the K-Q fact, confusing the terms: בהר השכמנה ויהיה יפה והשכמנה. We note that none of these medieval Jewish commentators make any attempt to explain why שגל was obscene.

The Isaiah Scroll (1Q Isa'), 13:16, seems to incorporate the euphemism השכמנה, not found in the Ketib of MT.15

Luzzatto (1800–1865) felt that the obscenity of שגל stems from the fact that it is an intensive verb, expressing something that the “man does and the woman receives” (מקבלת והנקבה עושה שהזכר). On the other hand, שכב is a passive verb; thus when it is used for male and female it is not obscene. Luzzatto was baffled by the fact that the queen is called שֵגַל in Ps 45:10 (וַיהֲלָם אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהָם נָשׁוֹת שַׁגְּלָה). 16

**Jer 3:2**

In Jer 3:2 the Septuagint renders שֻגַּלְתְּךָ ἐξεφύρθης “thou has been utterly defiled,” and is followed by the Peshitta (“you have defiled yourself”). Targum’s תֹּחַבָּר ("you associated, you joined") does not reflect the

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16 P. Shlesinger and M. Hovev, (eds.), *S.D. Luzzatto’s Commentary to the Book of Jesaiah*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1970) 117–118. Luzzatto mentions the opinion of Gussetius (1635–1704) that the root of שגל is derived from של by adding a ש as in שלב, thus meaning indecent exposure. Similarly, Rabbi Yehudah Arie (1717) argued that של = של שגל. Luzzatto rejects these opinions because של by itself has no sexual connotations.
passiveness of the subject (woman) implied by the *Pu’al* in MT. A similar objection can be raised with respect to Vulgate’s *prostrata sis*. Both the Targum and Vulgate attempt to capture the situation alluded in ישבה לדה but miss the aggressive intrusiveness into the subject (woman) expressed in the *Pu’al* of שגל. Rashi almost mechanically repeats פלגש, even though this sense does not fit the context in which the woman (Israel) waits for customers or hopes to be violated. Kimchi notes that the prostitution is ritualistic, part of the idolatrous practices (يشכבנה להם ישכבנה העכו העריה איש והשכיבה הזנותפרשנו ובבר נקיה ם). 

**Zec 14:2**
In Zec 14:2 the Septuagint renders γηλνήσσαντα ἐσπαράκλητη “ravished,” and so does the Peshitta. Targum’s ישתכבן (as in Isa 13:16) seems to be in line with the tradition (TB Megillah 25b) and consequently with the Q. However, the Septuagint’s and Peshitta’s (“ravished”) and the Vulgate’s (*violabuntur*) allude to a more aggressive sexual encounter. Rashi and Kimchi skip explanation of שגל. Ibn Ezra’s statement that למטה המוכנה והככה המעשה expresses his basic approach to the verb שגל and to the noun שגל. Ibn Ezra consistently translates the verb שגל as the act of copulation, and the noun שגל as being ready for copulation. While this approach closely ties the verb and the noun, it would seem awkward in Ps 45:10, Neh 2:6, and Dan 5:2, 3, and 23.

It seems that the *Versions* and earlier Jewish commentators struggled with the interpretation of שגל, and were baffled by its prestigious aspects and offensive connotations.

**MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON שגל**
The etymology of שגל continues to be obscure in modern times. Haupt felt that the verb שגל originally meant “to pour,” like the Arabic *sájala*. In Arabic *mā’ u dákarin*, “water of a male,” denotes *semen virile*. Thus, שגל would mean “deposit semen.” Feigin identifies the Akkadian *rehû*, “pour” and “cohabit,” as the corresponding term. He claims: “since the meaning ‘cohabit’ is not preserved in the Arabic and neither is ‘pour’ for שגל in Hebrew, we may regard the word original Hebrew and not connected with *sájala*.”

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Feigin tried to link שגל with שגר, noting such interchanges as תצרום/תנעל, הרבר/ نها, שרשרת/שרשרת, וחבל/חלץ 등. In his view שגל is the same as שגר, “womb.” He says, “This makes it clear why the verb שגל was regarded unworthy to be pronounced in the synagogue and was substituted by שכב (Tosephta, Megillâ, toward the end). The verb in the Old Testament has the meaning ‘to rape,’ to act as a beast, in distinction from human intercourse.” Yet neither the concept of access to a woman’s womb nor that of rape is banished from the synagogue, as is the verb שגל. For instance, we find רחמתי/רחם in Jud 5:30, and ענה in the obvious sense of “rape” in Gen 34:2, 2Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32, etc.

Mandelkern translates the verb שגל concumbere cum muliere (“to have intercourse with a woman”). He says, regarding the meaning of שגל, “It should be resolved according to the Arabic škl (an exchange of the type גיכ״ק), in the sense of ‘entwine’ and ‘mix.’ It refers to the embrace of a naked couple, and was changed to the more polite שכב.” What is offensive in the entwining is not clear. Clearly, any sexual act involves some “entwining.”

Surprisingly TDOT has no entry for שגל. Driver renders שגל, “to ravish,” noting that “the Hebrew word is a strong one, implying indelicate treatment such as might be expected at the hands of a captor.” Gordis considers “to ravish” an adequate translation of שגל. The commentary סופרים displays the previously noted ambivalence regarding שגל saying:

because he who weds will die in the war, or some strange edict. Anyone first to remarry would be had by a chieftain). One might wonder why was it necessary to have a Q if that were the case. Hacham says that שגל is “to have intercourse with a woman.” He notes that the verb is always used in situations of sin or curse.

Standard English translations have:

Deut 28:30 – “shall lie with her” (KJV, NKJV, RSV, ASV, Young, Darby, Webster, HNV); “will ravish her” (NLT, ESV); “will take her

19 Feigin, 47. Note that in the Hebrew Bible שגר is only used with respect to animals.
22 Gordis, Biblical Text, 167.
23 Ch. D. Rabinowitz, ירמיהו ספר (Jerusalem: Vardi, 1957) 359.
24 A. Hacham, ישעיהו ספר vol. I (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1984) 146 note 17
and ravish her” (NIV); “will violate her” (NASB); “will have her” (JB); “shall enjoy her” (NJS); etc.  

**Isa 13:16** – “ravished” (KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, RSV, ASV, Darby, Webster, HNV); “raped” (NLT, JB, NJPS); “stole” (Young); etc.**  

**Jer 3:2** – “laid with you” (KJV, NKJV, RSV, ASV, Young, Darby, Webster, HNV, NJPS); “defiled by your adulteries” (NLT); “ravished” (NIV, ESV); “violated” (NASB); “offered your body” (JB); etc.  

**Zec 14:2** – “ravished” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, ASV, Darby, Webster, HNV, JB); “raped” (NLT, NIV, ESV); “are lain with” (Young); “violated” (NJPS); etc.**  

While little consistency can be discerned in these translations, they still convey an understanding of the verb שגל as a violent sexual act. Can any additional characterization of this act be culled from the Hebrew Bible?  

### THE MEANING OF שגל

It seems that the critical verses for understanding the meaning of the verb שגל are Jer 3:2 and Deut 23:19. In Jer 3:2 the term שגלת is seemingly explained in terms of זנותיך and רעתך. This suggests some overlap of the semantic fields of זנה and שגל. In Deut 23:19 the noun כלב parallels the noun שגל. This suggests that the semantic fields of שגל and כלב might also overlap to some extent. However, as the parallelism in Deut 23:19 and ancient documents indicate, here כלב is probably not “dog” but rather “male prostitute.” In this context it would then seem reasonable to infer that the noun שגל is perhaps a woman that copulates as a male prostitute, and the verb שגל would then mean “to sodomize,” both Hebrew words being derived from the same root. The meaning “to sodomize” for the verb שגל eminently fits the violent context in which the verb is used in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, because the act was unnatural, painful, and performed at the anus, it was obviously so obscene that it merited a euphemism.  

It is possible that Mandelkern alludes to a similar chain of reasoning for the verb שגל in his cryptic comment in the כלב entry. He says, מתייהר כלב López ני כלב ב交易中心 (”a dog’s pay” according to our ancients, a nickname for the fee of a male prostitute. And one recalls their saying: What is שגל, a כלב ב交易中心).  

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26 Mandelkern, 559.
Mandelkern refers to TB Rosh Hashanah 4a:

It appears that the full meaning of šgl, a woman that copulates anally as a male prostitute (כלבתא) in an act of sodomy, was lost in the oral transmission. Rabba bar Lima only remembered the most essential part of a tradition that was transmitted to him via Rav. It was that šgl is a כלבתא. However, what כלבתא alludes to had already been lost by then. Consequently, the Talmud assumed that כלבתא is “bitch,” its primary meaning, and subjected the concept to its customary logical analysis. Feigin appears wrong in suggesting that “The strange explanation of שגל as כלבתא, ‘bitch,’ by Rabba bar Lima (TB Rosh Hashanah 4a) is possibly based upon a tradition that as well as שגר is a designation of a beast’s womb, thus שגל would be a beast. Since no other beast besides a dog was imaginable, this meaning was applied to it.” There is not an iota of evidence for a tradition that שגר (or שגל) designates a beast’s womb. While the dog was probably the first animal domesticated, it was

27 Feigin, 48.

not by any means the only one. In the royal context one could easily imagine a reference to the בינה של אישה (Nah 2:12).

My suggestion that šgl the noun is a woman that copulates through the anus, as a male prostitute, and šgl the verb is “to sodomize,” also finds support in the underlying characteristic of the members in the list of unmentionable Ks. All members of this list are in some obvious manner associated with the anus:

1. עפלים (K) and טחרים (Q) – In Deut 28:27 Targum Onqelos uses the Q. It seems from the Septuagint (εἰς τὴν ἕδραν) and Targum Jonathan that עפל is like עפל, and accordingly means that they were in the anus. Driver notes that “to judge from the Syriac טחורים would mean ‘dysentery’ (lit. tenesmi).” Vulgate has et parte corporis per quam stercora digeruntur (“and the part of thy body, by which the dung is cast out”). Mandelkern defines: mariscae haemorrhoidales, tumores ani (piles, tumors in the anus). Arabic ‘afl means tumor in the vulva or anus. Rashi in TB Megillah 25b explains: העפלים. לשה מפורשים זוה. لنיאו יותר מחותרים, ושנינוות בנקוב תר הריתר (un explicit language, more obscene than תלחים, and both are in the anus). While have been generally understood as “hemorrhoidal swellings” in the anus, Driver raised the possibility that “plague-boils” are actually meant. He bases this possibility “partly on the position of the word here between two other terms denoting afflictions of the skin, partly of the rapid diffusion of the עפלים among the Philistines (1Sam 5-6), and the fact that the mouse was regarded in antiquity as the emblem of a pestilence.” However, it is not clear that is an affliction of the skin. For instance, Ibn Ezra says, דבט גדם, ויהי של כל עין (according to many, is also in the eye). What exactly the role of the rats was in the spread of the disease is also not clear. Perhaps, Josephus (Ant 6:1) is correct in saying that עפלים was dysentery (as the Peshitta), which would agree with the other excrement-related items in the list of “unmentionables.”

2. חוריונים (K) and דביונים (Q) – The K term is a hapax legomenon. It has been understood by the Versions as “dove’s dung.” Septuagint renders בניה דבון, Targum ממא ורי דבון and Vulgate stercoris

29 Mandelkern, 905.
30 Driver, Biblical Text, 310.
Mandelkern seems to consider columbarum = יונים + חרייונים, being a constract form of "excrement".32 Rashi in TB Megillah 25b explains: "חרייונים, חרי וליין, ריעי, דבויום, מן דוינום, שלא הפרש שהיי יתרא, אלילית השופור (excrement) is what drips from the doves. So as not to mention that the Israelites were eating their droppings in Samaria). Gordis believes that the K, as two words, can only be translated “dung of doves.”33 Geiger suggested that we read the K as hiryonim “Menschenmist.”34

3. חריים/חריימים (K) and צואתם (Q) – Each of the forms, חריים (2Kgs 18:27) or צואתם (Isa 36:12), is a hapax legomenon. However, both appear to be variant spellings of the same word. Septuagint renders קopportον חראים and תרלאם חראים instead of חריים. Targum has “their excrement” (מַכְּפָרְתָם), Peshitta “their own dung,” and so the Vulgate (stercora sua), in both places. Rashi in TB Megillah 25b explains: "חוריהם את ח总体规划 (excrement that comes out through the anal ring). Gordis notes that the root חרי and חרא occurs in later Hebrew, Aramaic, and Mandaic.35 Arabic hari has the meaning “dung,” and currently hara means “excrement” in Arabic.

4. שיניהם (K) and רגליהם (Q) – The term שיניהם is essentially a hapax legomenon. Septuagint renders οὗρον שיניהם “their urine,” and so does the Peshitta. Gordis observes that the root שין “urinate,” or its cognates, is found in all Semitic languages.36 For instance, we find šânu in Akkadian, tun in Aramaic, mathana “bladder” in Arabic, etc. BDB translates šayin or šen “urine.” However, the fact that "urinating" occurs six times in the Hebrew Bible and is not considered obscene raises the question whether the sense “their urine” for שיניהם is adequate. Moreover, this K-Q is unique in replacement of a single MT word with

31 Ralbag has some difficulty imagining what use חרייונים could serve in time of famine. He surmises that the doves could not digest all the seeds that they consumed. Undigested seeds could be found in the doves’ excrement and were eaten by the famished. Cf. Kimchi ad loc. Josephus (Ant. 9:69) suggested that dove’s dung was used instead of salt. Relying on Akkadian, חרייונים was translated “locust beans” (NEB) and “carob pods” (NJPS). Cf. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor II Kings (AB 11, New York: Doubleday, 1988) 79.
32 Mandelkern, 422.
33 Gordis, Biblical Text, 167.
34 Geiger, 409.
35 Gordis, Biblical Text, 167.
36 Ibid.
two different words.\footnote{37} That may not have been the case for all the manuscripts. Indeed, it seems that the quote in TB Megillah 25b is from a manuscript that had מימי ושיניהם corresponding to the Q version שיניהם, which would make the meaning “urine” for שיניהם rather awkward. Rashi in TB Megillah 25b explains that "soft and watery excrement is called שיניהן מימי."

He understands שיניהם as secretion from the teeth-like glands that support the rectum, and so apparently do Kimchi and Qara (2Kgs 18:27). This understanding makes שיניהם מימי indeed obscene and unmentionable, and it better fits the context. Rashi’s interpretation, which seems to rely on an ancient tradition, also supports our suggestion that the obscene Ks are all related to the anus.

5. למחראות (K) and למוצעות (Q) – The word למחראות is a hapax legomenon. It has been understood by the Septuagint as λυτρῶνα “a draught-house”; Targum has פַּקְדַת לְבֵית עָנָשׁ; Peshitta renders למחראות "a public toilet-room"; and, Vulgate latrinas. In 2Kgs 10:27 Rashi simply says that מבטה וכתיב למחראות (Isa 36:12). However, in TB Megillah 25b he explicates the relation to the anus:

למחראות. מפסק לי כוכבים כותב בספר פולicipants. כי הוא יש לי ממציא רעי והא (למחראות refers in the Book of Kings to idol worship, because it is the ring of the anus from which excrement comes out), and so does Metzudot in 2Kgs 10:27. Kimchi says והענין שהוwyn (and it means that they relieved themselves there), as does Ralbag. Cogan and Tadmor translate למחראות “latrine” in line with the Septuagint and medieval Jewish exegesis, but suggest that it might be a “public dump” (cf. NKJV).\footnote{39}

\footnote{37}There are many instances in the K-Q system where a word is read as two words. These cases have all resulted from improper separation of the original text. For instance, Gen 30:11 but רבד זכרplementary (K) but וַיִּתְנָה אֶת בַּר (Q); Ex 4:2 מַעְרַה מַעְרַה (K) but וַיִּתְנָה אֶת בַּר (Q); Jud 16:25 מַעְרַה מַעְרַה (K) but נַכּוֹב (Q); 1Sam 9:1 וַיַּכֵּס מַעְרַה (K) but מֵית (Q); 1Sam 24:8 מַעְרַה מַעְרַה (K) but נַכּוֹב (Q); Isa 3:15 מַעְרַה מַעְרַה (K) but נַכּוֹב (Q); Isa 44:24 מַעְרַה מַעְרַה (K) but נַכּוֹב (Q); Jer 6:29 מַעְרַה מַעְרַה (K) but נַכּוֹב (Q); etc. Cf. Gordis’ (99–100) List 10 and List 11.

\footnote{38} Cf. Rashi and Kimchi on 2Kgs 18:27. Kimchi says on那里 לאכלו שיניהם there, it means to eat their excrement. Cf. also Rashi on Isa 36:12. He explains there, (it means to eat their excrement). He also Rashi on Isa 36:12. He explains there, (tabahie) שיניהם יש יאכילים, שיניהם. לאכלו שיניהם (soft excrement, teeth-like glands of the rectum. It is the rectum, called tabahie, supported by three teeth-like glands). Cf. TB Shabbath 82a "the rectum is supported by three teeth-like glands."

In all these instances the anus is the common element and apparent cause for considering them unmentionable in the synagogue. Consequently, it would seem reasonable to identify שגל as being also anus related, as I suggested. It should be noted that in TB Sanhedrin 95b, a diminutive of שגל, שגלונות, appear together with זונות in the camp of Sennacherib. This implies that in a later time, either by tradition or inference, שגל was considered to be in the same category as זונות, but different in some respect. My suggestion would conveniently accommodate this perspective.

In some cases in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 45:10, Neh 2:6, Dan 5:2, 3, and 23) the noun שגל has distinct royal characteristics. Some scholars raised the possibility that the verb may have an obscene meaning that the noun does not possess. Lagarde already suggested that שגל, in the biblical cases that were mentioned, is a distinct, borrowed root. Indeed, in the Hebrew Bible the noun שגל occurs only as a person of high rank in a royal court, and in all these cases, foreign nationals are referred to. It is possible that in each case the author refers to them using their foreign title or rank.

In his Mahberet, Menahem ben Saruk (910–970) interprets the noun שגל in Ps 45:10, Neh 2:6 and Dan 5:2 as “lady.” Rashi seems undecided between “queen” (מלכתא) and “bitch” (כלבתא). Akkadian ša ekalli “of the palace,” always written with the feminine determinative, has been proposed by a number of scholars as the origin of Hebrew and Aramaic שגל and SALÉ.GAL has been identified as the title of the king’s main wife. This title spread from the court of the Neo-Assyrian kings to royal courts in the west. Feigin found the usual explanation of שגל as ša ekalli, “queen,”

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40 In Sumerian šà-gál is “inside of the opening.” Feigin (48) suggests that šà-gál is an expression for “uterus” or “pudenda.” However, Sumerian has not preserved the meaning “womb” for šà-gál.
41 TB Sanhedrin 95b has וב מלכים ו_iosימ בךראת של זה וואמה שלונתם וותת.

implausible “since we have היכל for ĕ-gal; also here we expect ša hekalli.”

He prefers to consider yet another form of šigirtu. Like šigirtu, šגל would mean “lady of the harem.” There is certainly a problem with the etymology that rests on ša ekalli. If Aramaic adopted this term, sgl would have been expected rather than šgl. Millard suggests several possibilities of how Akkadian ša ekalli led to Aramaic šgl. One of these is that the Aramaic šgl in the Hebrew Bible should be read שגל “and the Massoretes’ pointing in the biblical texts changed, their understanding having been influenced by the unrelated root šgl ‘to violate.’”

Kaufman asserts that “in spite of phonetic difficulties, a loan is almost certain here. As demonstrated by Landsberger, the reading ša ekalli for SALÉ.GAL cannot be doubted, and the identity in meaning between the Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic could not be coincidental.”

Kaufman argues that Millard’s explanation cannot be accepted. He says, “The Biblical Hebrew term šgl, with no other known cognates, can hardly be anything but a denominative from šēgāl; but one cannot be forced to regard the loan as early merely because this verb seems attested in otherwise pre-Exilic Biblical Hebrew texts. It may even be that the Massoretic substitution of Qere škb for written šgl actually reflects an earlier substitution in reverse, when šgl was felt to be the euphemistic form.”

However, Mankowski rejects Kaufman’s position. He says, “there is little reason to think that the obscene verb של, is denominative from שלט. The semantic connection is tenuous, and, even if granted, one would expect the denominative verb to serve as a euphemism; but the Masoretes regarded the word as unutterable and supplied the Qere שלב for each occurrence. Moreover, if שלט in Jer 3:2 is really a Qal Passive (as seems probable, given the existence of a Qal active and the lack of a Pi’el), the occurrence of the root in this non-productive conjunction would all but rule out derivation from the loanword שלטינא.”

It seems that the borrowed term שלט (or שלטינא) referred to a female of

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46 Feigin, 47.
50 Ibid. See n. 335.

high rank in the court. The lesser status of a woman so titled in the Book of Daniel can be understood by the nature of the Persian court in which there were many women and concubines. At the same time, there seems to be a tradition, reflected in some Talmudic passages, which assigns an obscene sense to the noun שגל. Therefore, it would be prudent to adopt Lagarde’s position and consider שגל in Psalms, Nehemiah, and Daniel a borrowed word. The Hebrew שגל, verb and noun, could then be treated uniformly.
CONCLUSION
The etymology of שגל remains obscure. In the Hebrew Bible the verb and noun שגל occur a number of times, and suggest diametrically opposed meanings. There seems to be a strong late tradition for understanding the verb שגל as an obscene term for copulation.

We attempted to go a step beyond the general characterization of שגל as “an obscene term for copulation” and delve into the nature of its obscenity. Our analysis of biblical and Talmudic sources led us to the conclusion that the obscenity of שגל (verb and noun) stems from its relation to the anus. Specifically, the verb שגל is “to sodomize a woman” and the noun שגל is “a woman that copulates anally, as a bitch.” In some cases in the Hebrew Bible, which deal with foreign royalty, a borrowed Akkadian term שגל is used in the sense of “queen, lady.” The Hebrew שגל and the Akkadian term appear to be unrelated.

Our analysis also shed some light on the nature of the other items included in the list of biblical obscenities deemed too improper to be mentioned in the synagogue. All the items in this list obviously relate to the anus.

The indelicate nature of the topic discussed would appear to belong to a different and coarse realm, so unlike the assumed sublime ideational content of the Hebrew Bible. Tur-Sinai, who confronted a similar situation in the interpretation of קפ reife (Ex 28:32), took the position that “our ancients wrote whatever they wrote with pure and natural feelings, and with those same feelings we should accept their words.”

Biblical scholarship would probably be well served by following Tur-Sinai’s advice.

52 N.H. Tur-Sinai, הלשון וה扑 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960) 219–223. For many years Tur-Sinai withheld the publication of his research on קפ reife (Ex 28:32) because its scatological content, similar to that presented in this paper, would have been considered tasteless according to our norms. If we are correct regarding the characterization of the obscenity in the list of “unmentionables,” then Tur-Sinai’s suggestion that קפ reife = קפ + reife would seem rather doubtful. Had his suggestion been as obvious and natural as Tur-Sinai deems it to be, a euphemism would have been found for it.