

Bene Pareza: A new talmudic lexeme

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Abstract

The Persian lexeme *pahrēz-*, *pahrēxtan* (inf.), “to avoid, to abstain” and also “to care, to protect”, is found in Jewish, Christian, and Mandaic magical literature. It is also current in Mandaic works, and is found in some Geonic works in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. It has not yet been found in the Babylonian Talmud itself. In this article I discuss a recently discovered occurrence of this word in a reconstructed codex of chapters of Babylonian Talmud, found in the Cairo Genizah (GM). I begin with a reading of the talmudic *sugiya*. I then discuss other uses of *pahrēz* in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, in other dialects of Eastern Aramaic, and in Middle Persian. I end with a re-reading of the talmudic *sugiya* in GM in light of the meaning of *pahrēz*.

Keywords: Talmud, Loanwords, Aramaic, Magic, Persian

Introduction

The Persian lexeme *pahrēz-*, *pahrēxtan* (inf.), is found in Geonic literature written in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. It is also found in Jewish, Christian, and Mandaic magical artefacts,¹ and current in Mandaic. In this note I discuss two recently discovered occurrences of this word in the Babylonian Talmud.

The first occurrence is found in a reconstructed codex of chapters of Babylonian Talmud tractates *Sanhedrin* and *Megillah*, found in the Cairo Genizah (GM), recently published in an extensive study by Shlomi Efrati.² It is not found in the rest of the textual tradition of this chapter of the Talmud.³ GM is a rare single-quire copy of talmudic chapters, from separate tractates, which circulated together.⁴ Like some other single-quire codices, the width of the inner pages is smaller than those of the outer pages, which would have

- 1 For the Persian lexeme in Middle Persian see MacKenzie 1971: 64; Nyberg 1964: 148; Boyce 1977: 70; Durkin-Meisterernst and Sims-Williams 2004: 274–5; de Blois and Sims-Williams 2006: 138; for New Persian see Steingass 1957, 246; de Blois and Sims-Williams 2006: 109. See also the extensive discussion in Humbach and Skjærø 1983, 3.2: 86–91.
- 2 GM is the signature given to this codex by Sabato 1998: 18–9; it was published in two parts: Efrati 2017 and 2018.
- 3 See Kwasman (2015) for a list of loanwords in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.
- 4 On single-quire codices of early Christian literature, see Nongbri (2018: 29–36). On Hebrew single-quire codices see Efrati 2017: 66, n. 4. The original extent of GM is unclear, but it is currently known to include most of BT *Sanhedrin* chapter *Helek* (chapter 10 in MSS of the Mishnah and in MS Jerusalem Herzog 1, and chapter 11 in other MSS of the Babylonian Talmud), and *Megillah* chapters 1 and 3.

produced a relatively flat edge. It preserves a textual tradition that differs, in many details and also in some structural fundamentals, from the tradition reflected in all other known copies of these chapters.⁵ Efrati (2017: 68) believes that GM preserves a textual tradition of the Babylonian Talmud that diverged from the majority tradition at a very early stage, prior to the existence of a fixed text. Importantly for the purposes of this article, it preserves two Persian loanwords. Efrati discussed one, גוארא, Persian *gōhr*.⁶ He did not discuss the other, פריזא, Persian *pahrēz*, which is the subject of this note.

Working on this occurrence of the word, I encountered a second one, hiding in plain sight, attested (with very slight corruptions) in the majority of textual witnesses to a sentence in BT *Pesaḥim*.

I begin with a reading of the *sugya* in BT *Sanhedrin*. I then discuss other uses of *pahrēz* in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic: first, in geonic literature, and then the overlooked occurrence of *pahrēz* in BT *Pesaḥim*. I then turn to other dialects of Eastern Aramaic, and point to some relevant Middle Persian examples. I end with a re-reading of the *Sanhedrin sugya* in GM in light of the new identification of פריזא with *pahrēz*.

Sanhedrin 10

Among other matters, chapter 10 of Mishnah Sanhedrin discusses the rebellious city of Deuteronomy 13:13–19. This scriptural pericope describes the procedure to be undertaken when an entire city is persuaded to turn to idolatry. It is to be destroyed completely: its inhabitants must be killed with a sword, its property burnt in its central square, and its site abandoned. The Mishnah's discussion of the matter departs from its usual apodictic style and instead incorporates an exegetical source. It is a running commentary on the entire pericope, complete with lemmata.⁷

The Mishnah which is the cue for our talmudic discussion expounds Deuteronomy 13:16, “All of its spoil you shall gather into its square (רְחֹבָהּ); then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt-offering to the Lord your God. It shall remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt” The Mishnah reads the latter half of the verse thus:

And burn the city and all its spoil – its spoil, not the spoil of heaven. From here, they said: ‘the consecrated things in it shall be redeemed, the heave-offerings shall rot, and the second tithe and holy books shall be hidden away (יִיגָזוּ).’

5 Efrati 2017; 2018.

6 Efrati 2018: 261; Ben-Shammai 2012. “Substance, essence, nature; jewel; stock, lineage” (MacKenzie 1971: 36). The ancient Jewish sources use it only with the meaning “jewel”. Aramaic גוהר, as a nominal form, is used in Targum to mean “gem” or pearl (TargJ Gen 6:16, TargEsth 1:4, TargLam 4:7, TargSong 7:2), alongside the form גיהר (TargSong 5:14). See (Levy 1867, 1: 329a; Kohut 1878, 4: 114b).

7 This commentary is earlier than both Tannaitic midrashim on Deuteronomy, Sifre Deut. and Mek. Deut, since they both quote it using the formula מִיְכָן אֲמַרְוּ, “from here, they said”. Similarly, it is earlier than the redaction of the Mishnah, since it was incorporated into the latter work without modification, including apodictic sources that the exegetical source cites with the same term. See Kahana 2015: 38, n. 124. On the term generally see Paz 2012.

The Bavli (b. San 112b) connects a Tannaitic source to this Mishnah, which includes the following dictum, attributed to Rabbi Simon (second. c. CE): “Rabbi Simon says: *its livestock* (Deut 13:15) – and not firstborn and tithe livestock. *Its spoil* (Deut 13:16) – and not consecrated monies and tithe monies”. This teaching is the subject of the following talmudic discussion, which I quote from the first printed edition (Barco, Italy, 1498–1499):

ר' שמעון או' בהמתך ולא בכור: במאי עסקי', אילימי בתמימין? שלל שמים הוא. אלא בבעלי מומין? שללה נהו. אמ' רבינא: לעולם בבעלי מומין, ומי שנאכל בתורת "בהמתה" יצאו אלו שאין נאכלי' בתורת "בהמתה" אלי' בתור' בכור ומעשר.

Rabbi Simon says: *its livestock* (Deut 13:15) – and not firstborn and tithe livestock. What are we dealing with? If you say, with unblemished animals (תמימים) – it is the spoil of heaven! But if [you say] with blemished animals – it is its own spoil [and thus liable for burning]. Ravina said: [we are dealing with] blemished animals, [and Rabbi Simon is discussing] those animals which are eaten as *its livestock*, to the exclusion of those which are not eaten as *its livestock* but as firstborn and tithe livestock (b. San. 112b).

This *sugya* highlights a discrepancy between Rabbi Simon's reading of the verses and the Mishnah's. Rabbi Simon reads “spoil” to mean “coins”, and thus “its spoil” excludes holy coins, which the residents of the city do not own. Similarly, the possessive form “its livestock” excludes certain kinds of holy animals. The Mishnah however reads “spoil” as all manner of property. “*Its spoil* – not the spoil of heaven”, includes sacrificial animals. No other verse is needed to ground the law that sacrificial animals are not destroyed.

If the Mishnah's reading of the verse is given, Rabbi Simon's teaching becomes superfluous. As the *sugya* points out: if the animals are unblemished, fit for sacrifice, then they are “the spoil of heaven”, and are not burned with the property recovered from the city. If they are not fit for sacrifice, then they are assets like any other, they belong to the townspeople and are thus destroyed with the rest of “its spoil”.

Without positing a dispute between R. Simon and the Mishnah, what could he be teaching by pointing to the words “its livestock”? Ravina (fifth c. CE) offers a resolution: Rabbi Simon explicitly singles out blemished *firstborn and tithe animals*. These, says Ravina, are not merely an example for sacrificial animals, but a stand-alone category. These animals are not fit for sacrifice, and yet are not completely profane. Their holiness cannot be redeemed with money. They can be eaten in a profane context and slaughtered at home, but their carcasses must be buried, and their remains, such as bones and hide, cannot be used for other purposes. They are not consumed as “your animal”; even in their blemished state, consuming them is a ritual act.⁸

8 The Mishnah distinguishes firstborn and tithe animals from all other sacrificial animals at m. Tem. 3:5.

In ed. Venice (and subsequent editions, down to ed. Vilnius) there is an additional

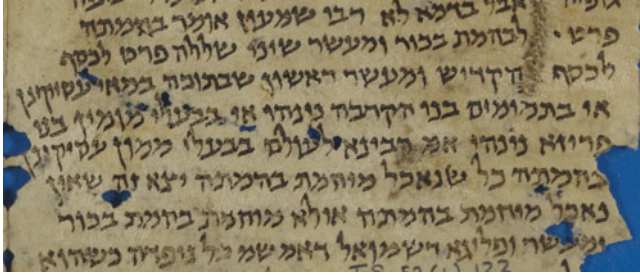


Figure 1. T-S F2(1).122, 2v, ll. 26–33. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

This is the reading of the majority of the textual witnesses of this *sugya*, with two exceptions: (1) the shared textual tradition of MS Jerusalem Herzog 1 and Genizah fragment T-S F2(1).130 (**T**), and (2) Genizah fragment T-S F2(1).122 (which is part of **GM**, see Figure 1). The **T** tradition does not have a Persian loanword, and so it is not material for the purposes of this note. Instead I will turn to the version of the *sugya* found in **GM**, which features the curious form פריזא:

במאי עסיקין? אי בתמימים בני הקרבה נינהו. אי בבעלי מומין בני פריזא נינהו. אמ' רבינא לעולם בבעלי מומין עסיקין. בהמתה – כל שנאכל מיחמת בהמתה. יצא זה שאין נאכל מיחמת בהמתה אילא מיחמת בהמת בכור ומעשר.

What are we dealing with? If [we are dealing] with unblemished animals, they are to be sacrificed. If with blemished animals, they are *bene pareza*. Ravina said: we are dealing with blemished animals. *Its livestock* – all that is eaten because it is its livestock, to the exclusion of what is not eaten because it is its livestock, but because it is firstborn and tithe livestock.⁹

The structure of the *sugya* is the same: the question “what are we dealing with” is followed by a binary choice, each of which leads to *aporia*. Ravina resolves this *aporia* by offering a reading of Rabbi Simon’s tradition. This version of the *sugya*, notably, does not attempt to hermeneutically reconcile Rabbi Simon’s reading of the verse with that of the Mishnah. It does not connect the animals to the reading of the word “spoil”. Instead, **GM** interprets the Mishnah as rendering Rabbi Simon’s reading of the verse redundant: if the animals are unblemished, then they should be sacrificed, and thus should not be burned with the property of the rebellious city. If they are blemished, then they have another

clause added to Ravina’s statement: “which are the spoil of heaven”. This clause seems to undermine this argument somewhat, re-connecting the firstborn and tithe animals to the distinction between “your spoil” and “the spoil of heaven”. Because it is found only in Ed. Venice and in subsequent printed editions, I disregard it here.

9 T-S F2(1).122v, l. 30; (Efrati 2017: 138).

status, the precise meaning of which is as yet unclear. Ravina's resolution is roughly the same as in the majority text of the Talmud: the words *its livestock* in Deuteronomy are read to mean that you must burn all the animals, consecrated or not, which, when eaten, are eaten as the property of their owners. This excludes firstborn and tithed animals, which are never eaten as the property of their owners.

The meaning of the *sugya* in **GM** hinges on the cryptic phrase בני פריזא. What does it mean that blemished consecrated animals are בני פריזא? What is the meaning of פריזא in this context? To answer this question I turn to other related Aramaic corpora.

Pahrēz and *Parhēz* in other corpora

JBA: Geonic literature

I propose that the form פריזא is a nominal form, derived from the Persian nominal form *pahrēz*. The spelling פריזא is an emphatic status Aramaic nominal form.

Prods Oktor Skjærvø showed that the cognate verbal form *pahrēz*- has three basic meanings: "1. *Versari* (English 'abide, dwell, stay, live, be.>'); 2. protect; 3. abstain, stay away (from)".¹⁰ Aramaic verbal forms derived from this verbal stem are found in some Geonic works.¹¹ In these works they connote both "protect" and "avoid". Thus, in the *She'iltot*:

מימר אמור רבנן יאסיר לאיניש לקבולי לשון הרע' למיעבד ביה מעשה, אבל למיחש ליה בעי, **לפרהוזי נפשיה** מיניה? [...] היכי דמי. כגון דאמרו ליה. פלניא קא מסגי בהדך בניכלא. מיבעי ליה למיחש ליה **ולפרהוזי נפשיה** מיניה [...]?

When the rabbis say that a person may not accept "evil speech", is this to the extent that he acts upon it, but should he fear for it, **to protect himself** (*le-parhuzei napšeh*) from it [...] How so? If they said to him: "So-and-so is walking treacherously with you". Should he fear for this and **protect himself** from him [...]?¹²

The form of the verb is an Aramaic infinitive, in which פרהז is a quadrilateral root. The object of the verb *pahrēz*, spelled פרהז in the *She'iltot*, is oneself.¹³ The spelling פרהז is similar to that used in New Persian (پرهیز; *parhīz*), and in Classical Judaeo-Persian, as well as in Parthian.¹⁴ In early Judaeo-Persian

10 Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 3.2: 86–91; and a short summary in Skjærvø 2010: 197.

11 Epstein 1922: 367; Shaked 1993: 154.

12 *She'iltot* 149, ed. Mirsky 5: 51, according to MS Cincinnati Hebrew Union College, 136. Cf. the translation of this sentence in Sokoloff 2002: 929a.

13 Cf. the phrase *pad xwēš pahrēz* (MM i, 14), discussed in Humbach and Skjærvø 1983: 3.2: 89.

14 Steingass 1957: 246. For Classical Judaeo-Persian, see e.g. Bacher (1900: 75), quoting the fifteenth-century Persian–Hebrew lexicon, ספר המליצה, MS London, BL Or. 13872, fol. 201r; MS NY Jewish Theological Seminary 2930, 263r. For Parthian see Henning 1947: 50, 56; Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 3.2: 89.

texts, however, the spelling פהרו is used.¹⁵ Both medieval commentaries on *She'illot* gloss the expression לפרהווי נפשיה with the Hebrew לשמור עצמו or לשמור נפשו.¹⁶

Similarly, in the Geonic work *Halakhot Pesukot* (HP) we read:

וכד טבלא צריכא למיבדק נפשה בקמטין. [...] וצריכא לפרהווי נפשה משיכנא

And when [a woman] immerses [to purify herself after menstruation], she needs to check herself in her crevices. [...] and she needs to **protect herself** from slime.¹⁷

HP rules that a woman should make sure that her body is clean when immersing. If the water does not touch all of her body, the immersion is not effective. Thus, she should “check her crevices”, i.e. armpits and groin, when immersing, and she should make sure that slime, or mud, not stick to her body during the immersion itself. HP calls this an act of caution לפרהווי נפשה, to protect herself.

Two Hebrew translations of this latter pericope in HP have survived. One is an Oxford MS known as *Hilkhot Re'u* (HR),¹⁸ and the other is a Genizah fragment published under the name הלכות קטנות (HK).¹⁹ Each translates the verbal form לפרהווי נפשה differently.

:HP	וצריכא לפרהווי נפשה משיכנא
:HK	וכשטובלת צריכה לשמור עצמה מן הטנופת ²⁰ והטיט
:HR	וצריכה להרחיק עצמה מן הנמור ²¹

Ostensibly, each translation offers a different meaning of *pahrēz*: HK uses “protect”, whereas HR uses “distance”, or “avoid”. These two translations are,

15 In the *Tafsīr* of Ezekiel, the verb פהריז, פהריכתי, is used to translate BH ז-ה-ר; see the *Tafsīr* ad Ezek 33:4–5, 178:8–28 (Gindin 2007: 1:213–4, ET, 2:358–9.) See also MS St Petersburg, Russian State Library, Yevr-Arab. I 4611 5r l 32, Friedberg Genizah Project (FGP) no. C646267.

16 The Medieval dictionary *Arukh* (s.v. פרהו; BL Add. MS. 26681, 310v, l 33) derives the word from an erroneous Arabic etymology: “a diligent (זריז) person is called פרהו in Arabic”. The correct etymology is in Kohut 1878, 6:415; additional etymological information by Bernard Geiger is found in Krauss 1937: 337b s.v. רהווי.

17 HP ed. Sassoon, 355; ed. Etz-Hayyim, 243 l. 12. Both works follow the only complete MS of HP, Toronto, Ms. FR 3-002, formerly London, Sassoon Ms. 263. On שיכנא, “slime”, see Sokoloff 2002: 1135b; Kaufman 1974: 102.

18 Oxford MS Huntington 501, Cat. Neubauer, 780. (Published Schlossberg 1886: 104; Epstein 1922: 367.)

19 Oxford MS Heb. e. 75/57r, ll. 19–20, FGP C473109. (Published Lewin 1930: 8.)

20 A gloss in the MS translates אלוהל, “the mud”; see Lane 1893, 2:3030, s.v. وحل.

21 נמור = גמור, i.e. the woman must keep away from the harbour. This is not a correct translation of HP and is likely the result of a misunderstanding of the word שיכנא (see above n. 17). The translator reconstructed the instruction using the dictum following, “a woman should not immerse in a harbor (גמול)”. See now (Breuer 2020, 443 s.v. פרהו). Thanks to Robert Brody for discussing this word with me and for sharing a section of a forthcoming review of Breuer’s book, which includes corrections to Sokoloff’s discussions of the word. Brody suggests that פריזא is not Persian but derived from a Semitic root פ-ר-ז, “to set apart”, known in Arabic (Lane 1893, 2:2366 s.v. فرز).

however, semantically proximate, and the original likely connoted both meanings to the audience.²² An Arabic translation has survived as well, which translates the phrase bolded above “**ותתחפד מן אלחמא**”, i.e. “and she should keep herself from the mud”.²³ Geonic texts do not use פרהו to mean *versari*.

JBA: An overlooked talmudic occurrence

Working on פריזא in BT *Sanhedrin* I encountered another talmudic occurrence of פרהו. It is found in most witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 111b, including all printed editions. It was, however, overlooked by the lexicographic tradition of the Babylonian Talmud, from the tenth-century dictionary *Arukh*, down to the latest dictionary, by Michael Sokoloff. In ed. Princ. Venice (1520–1523) we read:

אמרה ליה שידיא לברא, פירחי נפשיך מכרו משא

The female demon told her son: *pirhi* yourself from the service tree.²⁴

The textual tradition of the Talmud here has multiple forms for the phrase “*pirhi* yourself”, which can be divided into two groups: one group (7 direct witnesses) has forms associated with the letters פ-ר-ה; the other (4 direct witnesses) has Aramaic verbs of caution: אזדהר and חזי.²⁵ *Arukh* and Sokoloff, 1,000 years apart, both used MSS which had the verb אזדהר, and so did not

22 Cf. Sokoloff 2002: 928b, s.v. פרהו; Müller-Kessler 2012.

23 Oxford MS Heb. e. 46/3r, l. 4, FGP C470904. See Danzig 1999: 83n73. In the classical orthography, תתחפטי, i.e. تتحفظ. For this use of חפטי see Lane 1893, 2: 602, s.v. حفظ V; M.A. Friedman 2016: 292, s.v. חפטי VIII). On the shift from טו to ט see Blau 1961, sec. 16; Blau and Hopkins 2017: 26, 43.

24 אמרה ליה שידיא לברא should be read as one word, כרומשא. All other MSS write it as one word, although some corrupt it somewhat.

25 I examined digital photographs of all MSS and early editions using the Friedberg Genizah Project and the Friedberg Project for Talmud Bavli Variants, both housed online at <https://fjms.genizah.org>, and The Saul and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank at the Jewish Theological Seminary, housed at <https://www.lieberman-institute.com>, except for MS Oxford Opp. Add. Fol 23, which I examined using a scan from a microfilm at the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National Library of Israel, graciously provided by Hanan Mazah:

Branch 1, forms with the letters פ-ר-ה:

1. Ed. Venice and subsequent printed eds: פירחי נפשיך
2. MS Vatican Ebr. 125: פרהא נפשך
3. MS Munich BSB Cod. Heb. 95; MS NY, Jewish Theological Seminary 1608; MS Vatican Ebr. 134; Oxford Opp. Add. Fol. 23: פרחין לך
4. MS Vatican Ebr. 109b: פרחין מיניה

Branch 2, Aramaic verbs of caution

1. MS Munich BSB Cod. Heb. 6: חזאי מיניה
2. Genizah fragment CUL T-S F2 (2).16: חזו מיניה
3. MS NY, Columbia University, 294–295; MS NY Jewish Theological Seminary Enelow 271; (and *Arukh*): אזדהר (Genizah fragment Jerusalem, NLI 4⁰ 577.4.26 has a lacuna at this point).

discuss this word.²⁶ Modern dictionaries based on the printed editions derived it from Aramaic פ-ר-ה, “fly away”.²⁷

In two unrelated fragmentary copies of the chapter, however, a St Petersburg genizah fragment (P) and a Modena fragment embedded in a book binding (M), the word פרהיז is clearly spelled out:

P: דאמרא ליה שידתין לברה פרהיז מכרמושא
M: דאמי ליה שידתון לבריה פרהיז מ' מ' [..].²⁸

The female demon told her son: *parhēz* from the service tree.²⁹

פרהיז is also found in a citation of this sentence in the early modern work *Menorat ha-ma'or* by Isaac Aboab. This citation features a Persian-Aramaic digloss:

אמרה ליה שדתינ לברה: פרהיז איזדהר מסילויה דכרמושא

The female demon told her son: *parhēz* (Persian), beware (Aramaic) of the thorns of the service tree.³⁰

The reading פרהיז found in three unrelated witnesses shows that the various readings with the letters פרהח, i.e. פרהח, פרהי, פרהי, are all minor graphic corruptions of פרהיז or פרהז: the final ז morphed into a ן or י (or a graphic combination of the two, א). Weak glottals and visual similarity both account for the interchangeability of ח/ה. Some witnesses add the object of protection: “yourself”, (לך, נפשיך); others add מיניה, “from it”. אזדהר, “beware”, is an Aramaic translation of פרהיז, and חזו/חזאי, “take care”, is likely one too. Both replaced the Persian word in part of the textual tradition.³¹ The orthography here features the radical ח/ה. As in the Geonic texts (and in New Persian), it is spelled פרהז and not פהרז. The semantics are also proximate, “beware” falling between “protect yourself” and “stay away from”.

This is another example of how Persian words in the Babylonian Talmud were corrupted in the process of textual transmission, and how the oral transmission of the Babylonian Talmud naturally lent itself to the insertion or omission

26 See *Arukh* BL Add. MS 26881 fol. 95r l. 4, with Kohut 1878: 4:333, s.v. כרמושא; Sokoloff 2002: 400a s.v. זהר.

27 Levy 1867, 2: 108b; Rapoport 1852: 249, s.v. אשמדאי; Jastrow 1903: 1223, s.v. פרח; Melamed 2005: 425, s.v. רהין.

28 מ' מ' is a line filler, indicating that the following word, which is no longer extant, was מכרמושא.

29 P: St Petersburg, Russian National Library, Yevr. III B 969 8v l. 21, FGP C494455 (Katsch 1975: [פא]); the transcription פרהין (p. 93), is incorrect. M: Modena, Archivio Storico Comunale, Fr. ebr. 26.2, l. 6, (Perani 2004: 30 T.XI.2); photograph on lieberman-institute.com; the transcription פרהין on the same website is incorrect. For the form שידתינ, “female demon”, see Sokoloff 2002: 1133a, s.v. שידתינ.

30 *Menorat ha-ma'or*, ed. Constantinople, 1512–1513, 155d; ed. Venice, 1544, 125a; ed. Jerusalem, 1961, p. 726.

31 See above, n. 25. The forms חזו/חזאי may be a corruption of פרהז as well, preserving only the last two letters of the word, with the first two being assimilated into the previous word, ברה, either phonetically or by haplography.

of loanwords, especially as knowledge of Persian dwindled among reciters. Some loanwords disappeared from the textual tradition quickly; others were only corrupted into oblivion in modern editions of the Babylonian Talmud.³² A loanword might remain part of the textual tradition throughout, become appended to it in transmission, or be lost as part of the same transmission. Both the oral nature of the Talmud in its formative stages and the fluidity of its textual transmission in its later stages offer the possibility of Persian words entering and exiting the textual tradition.³³

The Aramaic magical tradition

It is notable that the verb in *Pesahim* is used in a conversation between a female demon and her son, because the root פרהז is much more common in the Eastern Aramaic magical tradition than in the Talmud.³⁴

Verbs and nouns derived from the root פרהז are found in the magical tradition, in three dialects of Eastern Aramaic: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandaic. The currently known occurrences of the root in Syriac are confined to the magical tradition.³⁵ The uses in Mandaic are broader and not found only in magical texts. In the magical tradition, too, פרהז does not connote *ver-sari*, and it tends closer to “protect” than to “avoid”.

In the Eastern Aramaic magical tradition the root פרהז is used in conjunction with other verbs of protection. Thus in a JBA bowl from Borsippa:³⁶

[...] אינון (10) נינטרוניא ונשיזבוניא וניפ<ר>חזוניא וניכלכלוניא לכיניחיי בר חתאי מן עינא בישתא ומן מסכיתא חסמתא ומן מהשב ליבא ומן מללת לישנא.

They (10) will guard and save and **protect** and maintain Keyaniḥaye bar Ḥatai against the evil eye and the envious gaze and the thought of the heart and the word of the tongue.

This reading follows an emendation suggested by Müller-Kessler, corroborated by two Mandaic Amulets which read *n' nṭrwnh wn' prḥzwnh*, as well as in Syriac

- 32 E.g. *dārišn* (Sokoloff 2002: 310b, s.v. דארישן; MacKenzie 1971: 25, s.v. dāštan; E.S. Rosenthal 1971: 187–93). A similar process of corruption is apparent with the word *bāzyār*, “falconer”, found in b. Shab. 94a (Sokoloff 2002: 128b, s.v. באזיאר; Kohut 1878, 2: 1, s.v. באזיאר), which should have been found in the plural form as באזיארין, באזיירן, or with the defective spelling בזיירן, but became ביזרן (Bologna, Arc. Stat. Fr. ebr. 183), בי זירן (Bologna, Arc. Stat. Fr. ebr. 612; MS Munich, BSB, Cod. Ebr. 95), בי זיירן (MS Munich Cod. hebr. 436/17), בי זייר (MS Vat. Ebr. 108), בי זיירין (Oxford Opp. Add. fol. 23), בי זיירן (ed. Venice), and finally the hardly recognizable בי זיידן (ed. Vilna).
- 33 For example, in the often-discussed story of Rav Kahana in b. Bab. Kam. 117a–b, Persian elements are preserved only in part of the textual tradition. See Gafni 1980; Sperber 1982; Schremer 1997; S.Y. Friedman 2006; and cf. Brody 2019; Herman 2008.
- 34 Müller-Kessler 2012; Morgenstern and Ford 2017: 218; Herman 2019: 139. All three publications assume it is completely absent from the Talmud.
- 35 Syr. Am. 3 (Gignoux 1987: 28–34; Moriggi 2014: 32:8, 16:11).
- 36 The first publication of the Borsippa bowl is Harviainen 1981. Additional scholarship, a re-reading, and emendations are found in Müller-Kessler 2012: 20, sec. 54.

bowls (AO 17.284:8).³⁷ A similar formula is found in a pair of Jewish Aramaic bowls (VA.2496 and VA.2575), which also feature angels with names derived from the same verb: פרהזיאל and מפרהזיאל.³⁸

Nominal forms derived from the root in the magical tradition are more rare. One noun form is found in a Jewish Aramaic bowl, VA.2423, to refer to the form of the incantation that is to follow:

הדא פרהזתא דלוטתא ונידרא ודשיקופתא

This is a **protection against** curses and oaths and afflictions (Levene 2014: 38, ll. 16–17).

Levene notes (2014: 42): “The verb פרהז is [...] not however previously attested in the nominal form in any of the Aramaic dialects”. A nominal form of פרהז is also found in the Borsippa bowl, following the reading of Morgenstern and Ford:

הלין מלאכי ניהוין פרהזני ומיצרי ביני טב לביש

These angels will be **protectors** and boundaries between good and evil.³⁹

The radical ה/ח is almost always found in the verbal and nominal forms in the magical tradition. However, in two bowls we find: פרהזן ירור בישתא מן ביתה, without the radical ה/ח, just as in the form פריזא found in GM. This likely reflects a phonetic spelling, combined with a weakening of the glottal ה/ח. (In this phrase, the meaning is closer to “keep away (from)”, rather than “to protect”, as revealed by the other verbs in the sentence, which connote distance, and the object of the verb, the demon Yaror).⁴¹

The Mandaic magical tradition uses פרהז like the Jewish and the Syriac traditions. In two published amulets, פרהז is used in conjunction with verbs from the root כ-ל-ל, “to surround” and נ-ט-ר, “to protect”.⁴² For the literary tradition, Drower and Macuch’s *Mandaic Dictionary* offers several examples for uses of verb forms of the root פרהז in Mandaic literature, which connote protection or avoidance of a person from something (e.g. water; “this and that”;

37 Greenfield, Naveh and Shaked 1985: 3, l. 8; Müller-Kessler 1998: ll 49–51.

38 Levene 2014: 62–5, l. 12.

39 This is the (correct) reading in Morgenstern and Ford (2017: 218), although it is possible that the bowl reads פרהזני. Harviainen (1981: 14) reads פרהזני; Müller-Kessler (2012: 20) emends this to פרשוני.

40 BM 131669, 1953-10-10, 17; (Müller-Kessler 2001: 121, bowl 020A) VA 2424, l. 13; Levene (2014: 58) translates: “keep away the evil Yaror from the house” of the client, Baṭa son of Maḥlafta; Müller-Kessler similarly translates “abhalten”. On Yaror, a name for certain animals as well as a demon, see Levene (2014: 7, n. 30); Sokoloff (2002: 541); Lieberman (1955: 2:652). As Sokoloff notes, Demonic Yaror is also found in the Babylonian Talmud (b. San. 59b), coupled with גאלא, “incubus”. Thanks to Avigail Manekin Bamberger for discussions about Yaror.

41 Cf. also the use of *parxēz-* in a Parthian Manichaean amulet (Henning 1947: 50, 56; discussed in Humbach and Skjærvø 1983: 3.2: 89).

42 Greenfield, Naveh and Shaked 1985: 99, l. 8; Müller-Kessler 1998: 340, ll. 50–51. Ohad Abudarham informs me that this is the case in two other unpublished amulets (personal communication, 13 August 2019).

“creatures of darkness”) or from someone else (“keep away from her”).⁴³ Drower and Macuch do not list a nominal form for this root.

The Eastern Aramaic magical tradition and Geonic texts feature both nouns and verbs derived from the quadrilateral root פרהו. The basic meaning in both these corpora is “to protect”, and sometimes “to avoid”. This is the meaning in BT *Pesaḥim* as well. The meaning *versari* is not attested.

Middle Persian

As noted above, in Middle Persian (MP) there is both a verbal form, *pahrēz-*, *pahrēxtan*, and a nominal form *pahrēz*.⁴⁴ Some instructive parallels from Middle Persian literature that I have found are:⁴⁵

1. *Šāyest nēšāyest*, Supplementary texts 15: 6
kē pahrēz ī ēn har haft hammōxtēd xūb kunēd ud šnāyēnēd ā-š haḡriz ruwān ō xwēšīh ī ahreman ud dēwān nē rasēd ka-š pahrēz ī awēšān kard ā-š pahrēz ī ēn haft amahraspandān kard bawēd
 Whoever teaches **care** for all these 7 (creations of Ohrmazd in the material world mentioned in the previous paragraph – just people, cattle, fire, metals, earth and virtuous women, water and plants – AG) does well and pleases (the *Amahraspands*); then his soul will never arrive at kinship with Ahreman and *dēws* (demons – AG). When he has **cares** for them (i.e. the creations), then the **care** of these 7 *Amahraspands* is for him (trans. Kotwal 1969: 59).
2. *Greater Bundahišn*, chapter IVa [2; 6]
 [2] *gōšurun [...] ō ohrmazd garzīd ku-t sārārīh ī dām [...] ku hēd ān mard ke-t guft ku dahēm tā pahrēz be gōwēd [...]*
 [5] *u-šān pas frawahr ī zardušt be nimūd ku be dahēm ō gētīg ku pahrēz be gōwēd.*
 [2] Gōšurwan – that is, the soul of the sole-created cow – [...] complained to Ohrmazd [...]: “To whom have you given authority over creation [...]? You said: I will create a man who will **protect** you with his words. Where is he?”
 [5] Then Ohrmazd showed it (i.e. Gōšurun – AG) the *frawahr*⁴⁶ of Zoroaster, and said: “I will create him in the material world and he will **protect** you with his words”.⁴⁷
3. A Pahlavi medical text
abar [...] čē ēwēnag pahrēz ī aburnāyag pad gāh<wārag> ud bandišn ud xwābišn ud parwarišn pānagīh
 On [...] the manner of **cares** for the child in the crib, swaddling, sleep, nurture, and protection.⁴⁸

43 Drower and Macuch 1963: 378.

44 Humbach and Skjærvø (1983: 3.2: 86–91) offer examples of all meanings and uses of the verb forms, in MP, Parthian, and the Manichaean variants of both.

45 I chose texts that were edited, published, and translated by others. The translations are unmodified.

46 “Man’s immortal soul, guardian angel during his lifetime” (MacKenzie 1971: 33).

47 Trans. Agostini and Thrope 2020: 32; see also Shaked 2001: 580.

48 Trans. Adhmi 2011: 337. The text, embedded in *Dēnkard* book 8, is a synopsis of a now-lost scientific text, which discussed embryology, obstetrics, and fertility.

4. Ardā Wirāz Nāmag 37.4

gōwēd srōš-ahlaw ud ādur-yazad ku ēn ruwān ī awēšān mardōmān hēnd ke-šān pad gētīg āb ud ātaxš ne pahrēxt ud rēmanīh ō āb ud ātaxš burd ud pad nigerišn ātaxš ōzad

Srōš the pious and the deity Ādur say: these are the souls of the people who in the material world were not **careful** about fire and water. They brought impurity to water and fire, and deliberately killed (i.e. extinguished) fire.⁴⁹

In these texts, *pahrēz* is “care” or “protection” of something in the material world, whether the creations of Ohrmazd, the spirits, animals, a child in the crib, or fire and water. *Pahrēz* is something one does to someone else, according to certain rules and procedures. Children, for example, need to be swaddled, put to sleep and nurtured; fire needs to be kept pure and never be extinguished. Animals, especially bovines, need to be cared for properly, and slaughtered in the proper way, because they have souls.⁵⁰ In these examples, *pahrēz* connotes care and protection which are to be afforded to divine or important things. In some of these examples, the person who offers this protection is to be protected too, as in the Aramaic magical texts.

Back to the Talmud

We can now translate the words *bene pareza* in BT *Sanhedrin* using meaning (2) of *pahrēz*, “care, protection”:

If [we are dealing] with unblemished animals, they are to be sacrificed. If with blemished animals, they are **to be protected**. Ravina said: we are dealing with blemished animals. *Its livestock* – all that is eaten because it is its livestock, to the exclusion of what is not eaten because it is its livestock, but because it is firstborn and tithed livestock.

This version of the *sugya* does not assume that blemished animals are part of the property of the city and might need to be consigned to destruction. On the contrary: it rules that first-born and tithed animals would not be destroyed, in any case. If they have no blemishes, they are to be sacrificed; if they are blemished they need to be protected. In **GM** Rabbi Simon’s reading of the words *its livestock* is not contradictory to the Mishnah, but redundant, because it provides no new information: the animals would not be destroyed in any case!

Ravina’s resolution is to modify the Talmud’s understanding of Rabbi Simon’s dictum: the words *its livestock* (בהמתה) teach that all animals which can be eaten because they are private property are burned if they belong to a rebellious city. This includes blemished sacrificial animals, but excludes first-born and tithed animals, which are not destroyed because they are not private property. Blemished sacrificial animals must indeed be protected, and they are *bene pareza*; but this does not exempt them from being destroyed with the

49 Trans. Shaked 2012: 406. Shaked excerpted the text from Gignoux (1984) and Vahman (1986).

50 Shaked 2001: 579.



Figure 2. T-S F2(1).122, 1r–2v
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rebellious city. What does that is the special ownership structure of firstborn and tithe animals. Rabbi Simon’s dictum is no longer redundant.

Blemished sacrificial animals, or blemished tithed and firstborn animals, are in this version animals to be protected and cared for. Much like fire or water, infants, Amaharaspands or beneficent immortals in the Middle Persian texts, these sacrificial animals must be protected, and not used for mundane purposes.

Bene pareza in **GM** seems to be a technical term. The Talmud opposes it to *beni ha-kerba*, which describes unblemished sacrificial animals. Like that term, *bene pareza* refers to a known series of prescriptions regarding the manner in which people should relate to an animal that is the object of special protection: they cannot be used for work, it is forbidden to partake of their wool, milk, and offspring, and they must be buried after death.⁵¹ This technical term is absent from the rest of the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic corpus. I have also been unable to locate an exact corresponding term in other dialects of Aramaic or in Middle Persian. *Pahrēz* does, however, capture quite well the status of the blemished

51 See, for these protections, m. Hul. 10:2; m. Bek. 2:2.

sacrificial animal: while it cannot be offered for sacrifice, it needs to be protected and cared for properly, and may not be used for mundane purposes.

Conclusions

The verb *pahrēz-*, *pahrēxtan* garnered scholarly attention because it is ostensibly absent from the Babylonian Talmud.⁵² In that respect, both talmudic examples discussed in this article are instructive: additional textual evidence of Bavli can yield words supposedly missing from the lexicon of the Talmud. Similar words have been found in other textual witnesses, including in **GM** itself, as I noted above.⁵³ Other Persian lexemes are currently found only in Geonic works but not in the Talmud.⁵⁴

Bene pareza in **GM Sanhedrin** stands out as an especially flexible and innovative use of a Persian loanword in this fluid process of textual transmission. It is deployed as a technical term for the treatment of disqualified sacrificial animals, a field of knowledge that was useful only for scholastic talmudic discussions. Further study is needed to understand whether this might be an importing of Zoroastrian mores of protecting animals and its attendant terms and language, to the Jewish sphere of caring for sacrificial animals, which at this time existed only in the imagination of scholars.⁵⁵

T-S F2(1).122, 1r–2v is reproduced in [Figure 2](#).

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52 See above, n. 34.

53 E.g. *gōhr* (above, n. 6); *arzānīg* (D. Rosenthal 1992).

54 E.g. *girān* and *nīrx* (M.A. Friedman 2000: 471; *Girān* was preserved in Neo-Aramaic as well; see Assis 2010: 323–4).

55 Shaked 2001: 578–87.

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