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III.

ZEUS IN MISHNAH, TALMUD AND MIDRASH.

We read in the Mishnah¹: "The blasphemer is not guilty unless he pronounces the name of God. R. Joshua, son of Korcha, said: 'The whole day (as long as the examination of the witnesses lasts) we deal with the witnesses by using the expression יבֵּה יוֹסֵה אֵת יוֹסֵה, "Jose smote Jose." When judgment is promulgated, we do not sentence by using a surname, but we dismiss every one (of the audience that they should not hear the blasphemy) and say to the first witness: "Tell exactly what did you hear," and he says it,' &c."

In explaining this Mishnah, the Talmud² says: "We have learned in the *Boraitha*, he who did not pronounce God's name is not guilty till he pronounces God's *proper* name. Where is this proved? Samuel says, "For it is written³: 'And the son of the Israelitish woman blasphemed the Name and cursed,' and the verb *nakeb* means to pronounce God's proper name." In accordance with this explanation, no death penalty can be executed upon any blasphemer but in the case of his pronouncing God's proper name, the Tetragrammaton. Now, in order to avoid the useless repetition of the blasphemy during the examination of the witnesses, the tribunal introduced a circumlocution, serving as a substitute for the unutterable Name of God. R. Joshua, son of Korcha, thus transmits the formula of this substitute, being the following words: יבֵּה יוֹסֵה אֵת יוֹסֵה. The reading יוֹסֵה is maintained by some sources⁴ while others⁵ have יוֹסֵי. As to the expression itself, it is a *crux interpretum*. Rashi⁶ thinks the word has no meaning and was chosen only on account of its having just four letters, and thus recalling the four letters in God's proper name. There is still another reason, namely, that the value of these four letters יוֹסֵי expressed in an equivalent of numbers, amounts to 86, the number equivalent of the word אֱלֹהִים. The latter reason, however, is of no great import, as the blasphemer was not considered to be guilty until God's proper name (יהוה) was pronounced by him. R. Nathan ben Jehiel differs from Rashi, inasmuch as the former suits his explanation to the reading of either

¹ *Synh. Mishnah* V., ch. vii.

² *Synh.* 56^a.

³ *Levit.* xxiv. 11.

⁴ Munich MS., *Jerus. Talmud, Sifra*, ch. xviii. of *Emor*.

⁵ Our editions. R. Nathan has both readings of our *Aruch Completum*, iv. 219, and cf. p. 119.

⁶ *S. nh.* 56^a.

יהוה or יוסי. In the first case, the four letters remind us of God's proper name, consisting likewise of four letters, three of which (יה) being common. In the second case, three letters of the word יוסי, viz.: יי amount to the number 26, which is at the same time the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton יהוה.

Now it seems improbable to assume that the Mishnah, in choosing the formula above quoted, did so by counting the value of the letters. Moreover, this play with the so-called Geomatria belongs to a later period of Hagadic exegesis.

Another question is, why should just the verb יכה convey the idea of a blasphemy?

J. Levy¹ offers another explanation. He takes יוסי in the double meaning of a Greek and a Hebrew word. The first he thinks υἱός = son, the second is יוסי = יוסף, i.e., Joseph, the father of Jesus, so that "Jose smote Jose" imparts the idea: The son smote the father, implying that the son is mightier than the father.

There have been still other attempts to set aright the difficulties, but with the same unsatisfactory results.²

In my opinion יוסה is certainly a foreign god, used as a substitute for the Tetragrammaton. The choice is suggestive, as the four letters recall the mystic number, *four*, of יהוה, three of which being identical, as R. Nathan explains. The choice was furthermore a happy one, as Zeus (יוסה), the chief deity of the Greeks, was well-known all over Asia, and the witnesses, in order not to repeat the blasphemy, could with impunity cast their contempt at him. The verb יכה, conveying the idea of blasphemy, is also appropriate and in accordance with the Biblical expression,³ "And he smites the earth with the rod of his mouth."

The meaning of "Jose smote Jose"—that is, Zeus smote Zeus—is therefore that he blasphemed the highest deity with⁴ the highest deity, whereby the highest Jewish deity being expressed by the highest Greek deity, and יהוה substituted by Jose (Zeus), the blasphemy was made a fitting subject of discussion during the examination of the witnesses. That יוסה is not chosen by a mere chance, but for a substitute of יהוה, is expressly remarked by R. Acha b. Jacob in the Talmud,⁵ and that blasphemy was only punishable when יהוה by

¹ In *Koback's Jeshurun* iv., 4.

² See Rahmer's *Literaturblatt*, vol. viii.

³ Isaiah xl. 4.

⁴ The particle את in the sentence, יכה יוסה את יוסה, is therefore to be translated "with." See Gen. xv. 18; Exod. i. 1; Judges i. 16; 2 Kings vi. 16.

⁵ *Synh.* 60^a.

יהוה was blasphemed, or, speaking in our formula, Zeus with Zeus (Jose with Jose), has been already mentioned.

A strong confirmation of the view that יוסה alludes to Zeus we find in another passage of the Talmud.¹ Quoting the expression of the Mishnah,² "He who curses with a curse," R. Josef says:—"This means יוסה את קוסם אה, 'he who blasphemed with an oath his Kos,'³ where Kos, equal to Zeus, is again substituted for יהוה. Kos comes nearer to the word Zeus, besides being a surname of the same, who was called *Zeus Kásios*, and known by the Romans as *Jupiter Casius*.⁴ This name occurs also in a Nabatean inscription as קציין.⁵ The Midrash⁶ mentions בתי קוצין, houses devoted to the worship of Zeus Kasios, after whom, or in whose honour, the city En Kos was called En Koz.⁷ This deity was worshipped also in Idumea. Josephus⁸ writes as follows:—"Costobarus was an Idumean by birth, and one of their principal dignitaries, and one whose ancestors had been priests to the Kose,⁹ whom the Idumeans had esteemed as a god."

Benjamin Mussafia¹⁰ goes so far as to maintain that the name of the small coin זוז was called thus for bearing the profile of Zeus, and therefore R. Menachem bar Simai never looked at this coin.¹¹ Zeus' name being so widely spread, we can easily understand why it served as a typical substitute in the case we have been considering.

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¹ *Synh.* 81^b, 82^b.

² *Synh.* 81^b.

³ This is the proper reading, to be found also in the Munich MS. ; our editions have wrongly קסמו.

⁴ *Plinius* v. 14.

⁵ *Zeitschrift der D. M. G.* xix. 639.

⁶ *Midr. Samuel*, ch. xiv.

⁷ *Jerus. Abod. Zara* iii. 43^a; *Tosephta Ab. Zara*, ch. vii. See, too, *Aruch Compl.*, Article עין כל.

⁸ *Antiquities* xv. 7, 9. ⁹ Kožé. See, too, *Brüll Jahrbücher* i. 140.

¹⁰ Article זוז. A similar view is held by Mussafia with regard to Pallas. See Art. פלם 2.

¹¹ *Aboda Zara* 50^a.