Chapter 15

Elucidating Talmudic suryaqe—an Exercise in Talmudic Lexicography

Shamma Friedman

For Joel—friend, poseq, gentleman

The word suryaqe/šuryaqe appears several times in the Babylonian Talmud.* This paper addresses the meaning and etymology of this term, with reference to the related entries in lexicons of Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic. In recent years, Talmudic lexicography has benefitted from Michael Sokoloff’s magnificent dictionaries devoted to Galilean and Babylonian Aramaic. In keeping with his rigorous standards, Sokoloff has ushered in a new era, from which the study of Talmudic literature has derived much benefit. In the nature of things, however, there are still basic contributions to be made in this field.

The task of a lexicographer of the Talmudic Aramaic dialects is an awesome one. Comprehensiveness can come at the expense of original research on difficult entries, as the lexicographer is at times forced to content himself with offering a plausible reading that emerges from the contextual occurrences of the term, without undertaking in-depth original research.¹ I maintain that to the extent that we can engage in self-standing studies of individual lexemes, their definitions and derivations, through exhaustive investigation into the individual passages and their literary inter-relationships, a task that does not fall within the parameters of the routine work of the lexicographer, we may be able to contribute significant complementary lexicographical clarifications.

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¹ Sokoloff expresses one aspect of these difficulties and the resulting limitations in his introduction to Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic [= DJBA] (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2003), 23, § 4.5.1. See ibid., 17, § 4.1.1.3.
I will begin by quoting the relevant entries from the dictionaries by Marcus Jastrow and Michael Sokoloff (in this order).

דָּרֵך, v. שָׁרָיִּים m. (ср. P.Sm. 2750) stripe, streak. Pes. 74b a streak (streaks) of blood.—Pl. 4b a streak (streaks) of blood. Ab. Z. 4b Ms. M. a. Ar. (ср. ט) red stripes (in the white crest of a cock); Snh. 105b (some ed. תורוק; 흰; Ms. O. תורוק; v. Rabb. D. S. a. l. note); Yalk. Is. 300. Hull. 47b white stripes or shreds. Ib. 93b red veins; B. Mets. 83b Ms. O. תורוק; Yalk. Ps. 668 פָּדְרָא.

יאָקיָיְרוּשׁ,׳ס n.m. perh. vein, streak (cf. Sy סֵיְרָאָה glare of the sun or fire BBah 1958:14) 1. vein: pl. השראים<source>סֵרָאָה</source> red veins of blood Pes 74b(42); כל הרבעcade עידנא thin veins of blood HG3 212:78; בֵּית פָּדְרָא red veins of all fat which has red veins will putrefy BM 83b(51) [Es: שֶׁבֶר; Ms. O. פָּדְרָא]; Hull 93b(11) [in testicles of a deer]; יֶשֶרַךְ יַמְעָה veins of the ileum NDGR 164:7; 2. streak: pl. כל שֶׁבֶרֶא את בֵּית פָּדְרָא white veins of the ileum NDGR 164:7; יֶשֶרַךְ יַמְעָה all the time (the rooster's crest) has red streaks in it. At that time it does not have red streaks in it AZ 4b(30) // Ber 7a(28; P) [F: פָּדְרָא] // San 105b(29) [K: פָּדְרָא]; יֶשֶרַךְ יַמְעָה white streaks Hull 47b(56) [in a lung]

In his entry for “šuryaqa,” Sokoloff concedes that “The meaning of this word is deduced from context.” As we will see below, the uncertainty regarding the meaning of the word has serious ramifications for establishing its etymology. A discussion of the interpretation of the quoted passages may result in the determination of a different base meaning, which in turn may lead to reconsidering the word’s etymology, anchoring the new meaning among cognates of neighboring dialects, and even determining an unmediated link to a simple Aramaic and Hebrew root.

The DJBA entry offers two glosses: 1. Vein, and 2. Streak. The suggested etymology is based on the Syriac “šuriqa”—“the glare of the sun or fire.” Note: <i>prima facie</i>, there is no direct relationship here to veins or streaks.

The word <i>suryaqa</i> appears in seven instances in the Babylonian Talmud, three of which are in identical contexts. The starting point for my inquiry is an account regarding R. Elazar b. R. Shimon in b. B. Meš. 83b. After R. Elazar

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3 DJBA, 1125.
was compelled by the authorities to accept a position that required him to hand criminals over to be punished, he was criticized by others and also felt the pangs of his own conscience. He sought validation that everyone he turned over indeed deserved punishment, and divine assurance that his actions were justified and his righteousness intact.

A

b. B. Meṣ. 83b, cod. Hamburg 165

Thereupon he laid his hands upon his belly and exclaimed: 'Rejoice, my innards, rejoice! If matters on which you are doubtful are thus, how much more so those on which you are certain! I am well assured that neither worms nor decay will have power over you.'

Yet in spite of this, his conscience disquieted him. Thereupon he was given a sleeping draught, taken into a marble chamber, and had his abdomen opened, and basketfuls of fat were removed from him and placed in the sun during Tammuz and Ab, and yet it did not putrefy.

But no fat putrefies!—Fat which contains red streaks does putrefy. But here, though it contained red streaks, it did not putrefy.

The motif of having faith in one's rectitude to the point that worms and decay have no power over the flesh can be found in the earlier Palestinian version of the story, which appears in Pesiqta de Rab Kahana. In the Babylonian Talmud, its usage is secondary and greatly expanded.

Pesiqta de Rab Kahana 11:23

As R. Elazar bar R. Shimon was wasting away, his arm once happened to get exposed, and he saw his wife both laughing and weeping. He said to her: As you live, I know why you are laughing and why you...
are weeping. You laugh because you said to yourself, “How happy am I with what has been my lot in this world! How happy am I that I have been able to cleave to the body of such a righteous man!” And you weep because you said, “Alas, such a body is going to the worms!” True, I am about to die, but worms, God forbid, will have no power over me. However, one worm is destined to bore behind my ear for once, as I entered a synagogue, I heard a man uttering blasphemy and I should have taken legal action against him, but I kept silent.

The passage from the Babylonian Talmud can be presented as having three layers. The first segment declares R. Elazar’s confidence in his own righteousness and the powerlessness of worms and decay over his body. In the formulation of the Babylonian narrator, this is a brief episode of self-confidence sandwiched between longer episodes of pangs of conscience.

The second segment introduces the novel contribution of the Babylonian narrator: It is possible to test one’s immunity to decay and decomposition by undergoing liposuction.

The third statement is something completely different. Into the smooth-flowing vibrant narrative jumps Sṭam Ha-Talmud, the now well-recognized pedantic, scholastic glossator of the Babylonian Talmud. He is less devoted to artful narration, and more interested in raising empirical difficulties, thus demanding that the story not deviate from anatomical facts: “But no fat putrefies!” The lack of putrefaction is no miracle, for, so he claims, fat will not putrefy even when left in the hot summer sun! There is no excuse for peppering literary creations—or even if it is historical documentation—with non-factual ‘facts’ that are easily refuted.

The resolution of the problem likewise expresses scientific sensibilities: If the fat contains red markings, suryage sumaqe, it will putrefy, and the fat that was removed from R. Elazar’s belly did indeed contain suryage sumaqe, but it nevertheless did not putrefy! Miracle restored.

What is the glossator’s source for this most technical expression suryage sumaqe that is used here as a substitute for “blood”? We will see that the answer

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4 The anatomical assertions of this passage reflect the science of the time. See S. Friedman, “Aristotle in the Babylonian Talmud?—A Scholastic Interpolation by the Talmud’s Anonymous Glossator,” And Inscribe the Name of Aaron: Studies in Bible, Epigraphy, Literacy and History Presented to Aaron Demsky (Maarav 21 [2014, published in 2017], pp. 311–317).
lies in the hyperlinks connecting passage to passage, invisible to the eye—a literary phenomenon. The search for the meaning of the elusive suryaqe begins with animal anatomy or, in Talmudic parlance, with the laws of ritual slaughter and preparation of kosher meat. Our journey begins with b. Ḥul. 47b, regarding the halakhic status of the lungs of slaughtered animals and the fluids found in them.

B

Once when R. Ḥananiah was ill, R. Nathan and all the great men of that age came to visit him. There was then brought in to [R. Ḥananiah] a lung whose substance [had decayed and] was tossing about within as [water] in a jug, and he declared it to be permitted. Rava said: Provided, however, the bronchial tubes within were intact. R. Aḥa, son of Rava, asked R. Ashi, How would we know it? He replied: We take a glazed earthen basin, [pierce the lung] and pour it out into the basin; if there are seen any white streaks (better: particles) it is trefah, but if not, it is permitted.

Rava limits the permissibility of an animal whose lung was “tossing about” to a case where the bronchial tubes remained intact. R. Ashi suggests a practical test to determine whether the fluid that remains in the lung contains pieces of the bronchial tubes: when the fluid is poured into a bowl, if there are “white streaks” (better: particles)—“suryaqe hiwre” in it—the animal is not kosher, but if not, it is kosher.

Maimonides, The Book of Holiness, Laws of Ritual Slaughter 7:9:

If white threads are visible, then it is clear that the bronchial tubes dissolved and [the animal] is a trefah. If not, then only the flesh of the lung has disintegrated, and [the animal] is kosher.

Rashi explains the Talmudic term with an Old French term that means “white spots.” Maimonides defines it as “white threads.” Suryaqe are the bits or remnants of the flesh of the bronchial tubes.

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5 Maimonides defines it as “white threads.”
Note that in this Talmudic passage, “ḥiwre” (‘white’) is used to modify suryaqe, denoting the color of bronchial tubes, and not “sumaqe” (‘red’) as in the previous passage. If the fluid poured from the lungs contains any white particles, it means that the bronchial tubes had dissolved by the time the animal was slaughtered, and the animal is not kosher.

Here, suryaqe are not “veins” or “streaks,” and they are not red. This mention of suryaqe by R. Ashi offers a practical method for applying Rava’s requirement that it be demonstrated that the bronchial tubes are intact before the animal can be deemed kosher.

Other instances of the word suryaqe relate to the prohibition against consuming blood. Jewish law forbids eating blood, including pieces of meat that contain blood. The following two laws address the examination of the organs of a slaughtered animal to determine whether they contain blood. Checking for suryaqe is suggested in context of the testicles of a kid (b. Ḥul. 93b):

C

Mar son of R. Ashi said: The testicles of a kid that is not yet thirty days old are permitted without having to peel off the membrane; thereafter, if they contain semen they are forbidden, if they do not contain semen they are permitted.

How does one know this? If they contain red streaks [in the membrane], they are forbidden; if they contain no red streaks, they are permitted.

Mar bar R. Ashi asserts that the testicles of a young kid that was slaughtered before reaching the age of thirty days may be eaten (even without peeling off the membrane), because they do not yet contain blood at that point. In contrast, once a kid is more than thirty days old, then if the testicles contain semen they are forbidden (unless the membrane has been peeled off), because they certainly contain blood. However, if they do not yet contain semen, they do not contain blood and thus may be eaten.

Maimonides codifies this law as follows (The Book of Holiness, Laws of Forbidden Foods 7:14):

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6 The blood is subsequently found in the membrane, see b. Hul. 93a; Maimonides, Laws of Forbidden Foods 7:13.
The testicles of a kid or lamb that is not yet thirty days old may be cooked without first being peeled; after thirty days, if fine red threads are visible in them, it means that blood has reached them, and one should not cook them until he peels them or cuts and salts them as we have explained. If red threads are not yet visible in them, they are permitted.

In Mar bar R. Ashi’s law, we once again have a practical ruling that distinguishes something that may be eaten from something that may not on the basis of a difference that is not readily discernible. The Stam wished to elucidate the test asserted by Mar bar R. Ashi, but actually proposes an even clearer sign. To that end, he repeats R. Ashi’s phraseology as in the previous passage (b. Ḥul. 47b). R. Ashi said that if there are suryaqe hiwre (white suryaqe) in the lung fluid, it means that the bronchial tubes had dissolved. Here, the Stam says that if there are suryaqe sumaqe (red suryaqe) on the testicles, it means they contain blood!7

From this point on, the Stam continued using this formulation in halakhic rationales and for various empirical tests in aggadic contexts. It appears as an halakhic justification in b. Pesaḥ. 74b.

D

[With regard to] raw meat, eggs, and the jugular veins, R. Aḥa and Ravina differ […]

Raw meat which turns red, it and its serum are forbidden; if it does not turn red, (it and) its serum are permitted. Ravina said: Even if it does not turn red, its serum is forbidden, [for] it cannot but contain streaks (better: traces) of blood.

The ruling at the beginning of this passage, which is the continuation of a statement by R. Aḥa, suggests that the kosher status of liquid that seeps from a piece of meat can be ascertained based on its color. If it turned red (ʾasmiq), it is forbidden; if it did not turn red (laʾasmiq), it is permitted. Ravina disagrees, taking a more stringent position: “Even if it does not turn red its serum is forbidden.”

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7 See below, progression within the Talmud.
The Stam adds an explanation for Ravina's stringent position: “it cannot but contain suryaqe d’dēma.” It is not possible that this serum contains no traces of blood. The sweeping prohibition results from the concern that some blood remains in this serum, even if unseen.

In the first two instances, the white or red color of the suryaqe was mentioned. Here, according to the original version of the text, no color is mentioned, only “suryaqe d’dēma,” ‘traces of blood’. We determined the original reading based on the following synopsis of primary textual witnesses.8 The longer secondary reading is “suryaqe sumaqe d’dēma”, ‘red traces/streaks of blood’; tradents regularly add text rather than delete. This reading results from a conflation of the original reading with suryaqe sumaqe, found in A and C. The halakhic concern is clearly about ‘traces of blood’, with no need to say ‘traces of red blood’.9

The reason for the absence of color is simple; the other instances describe visual inspection, for which color is crucial. If one sees white suryaqe, it means

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9 One of the outstanding features of DJBA is its controlled use of manuscripts. When necessary, there is extensive use of manuscripts, but the standard operating procedure is to quote one select textual witness for each tractate. In some cases, the decision of which MS is chosen has strong implications for determining the meaning of words, and thus on the etymology as well. The default witness for b. Pesah. is Cod. New York, JTS Rab. 1623/2 (EMC 271). Despite the great linguistic value of this manuscript, it should not be relied upon exclusively with respect to the textual tradition, as the Yemenite manuscripts of this tractate are known for additions and reworkings of the original text (cf. Shamma Friedman, Tosefta Atiqta: Pesah Rishon [in Hebrew] [Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002], 87–88, and literature cited there). Close scrutiny of Talmud text is best served through a thorough review of all primary textual witnesses, in synopsis format. This can be done far more easily today than in previous decades.
the bronchial tubes dissolved; if one sees red *suryaqe*, it means there is blood in
the meat. Here, however, in Ravina’s ruling, there is no visual inspection, only a
rationale for a sweeping prohibition. *Presumably* there are traces of blood, even
if they are not seen! Color plays no role. Blood is known to be red, so mentioning
the color is superfluous.

In the three cases that pertain to the laws of meat consumption, the term
*suryaqe* either teaches a method of inspection to determine halakhic status
or offers a halakhic rationale. The functional role of *suryaqe* in these contexts
implies that it refers to non-visible traces, or remnants that can appear as small
pieces or tiny marks.

From this point onward, it was easy for the redactors of the Talmud to export
the same view of reality and the same terminology from animal anatomy to
discussions of the human body and its soft tissue, as in the story of R. Elazar b.
Shimon’s belly—likewise in order to distinguish two eventualities by means of
a visual inspection:

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<tr>
<th>B. Meš. 83b</th>
<th>Ḥul. 93b</th>
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<tr>
<td>כל תרכות דאית ביה שוריאק סופק המסורת</td>
<td>לא איה ביה שוריאק סופק אסמן</td>
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<td>והיה אע”צ דאית ביה שוריאק סופק לא המסורה</td>
<td>לית ביה שוריאק סופק—שריין</td>
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Any fat that *contains red streaks* putrefies.  
If they *contain red streaks* they are forbidden.  
But here, though it *contained red streaks*, it did not putrefy.  
If they *contain no red streaks*, they are permitted.

The pedantic glossator dons his scholastic robes here, not only in following
the scientific opinion of his time, but also in reapplying idioms used in other
Talmudic contexts. The term under discussion was borrowed from its precise
meanings in laws of meat consumption and reapplied as part of an adroit effort
to reinstitute a miracle.

According to the science of the day, fat does not putrefy at all, whereas
blood putrefies rapidly. The Stam glossator had to produce blood within the
fat so that the immunity to putrefaction of the fat removed from R. Elazar’s
belly could be attributed to a miracle. The problem is that the same contem-
porary science asserted that no blood is to be found in fat.10 To resolve this, he

10 See above, n. 6.
enlisted *suryage sumage*, as if to say that there is indeed no blood, but there is something that approximates blood and that putrefies rapidly—yet even so, R. Elazar’s fat, miraculously, did not putrefy. The language *suryage sumage* and its use in distinguishing two cases by their presence or absence are likely to have been borrowed from the case of the kid (C), and serve the needs of the present passage clearly and efficiently. The contention makes sense. The presence of *suryage sumage* in human fat is not asserted on the basis of empirical observation, but results entirely of reuse of literary motifs appearing elsewhere.

In a further passage, the Stam applies these words to the context of divination by means of observing fowl. In the well-known passage that appears three times in the Babylonian Talmud,11 about determining the moment of each day during which God is angry (for “His anger lasts but a moment;” Ps 30:6), it is stated (b. Sanh. 105b):

**E**

Now, when is He angry?—In the first three hours [of the day], when the comb of the cock is white. But at all times it is white!—At all other times it has red streaks, but at that moment [of God’s anger] there are no red streaks in it.

This divinatory technique relates to the whiteness of the cock’s comb as the indicator of the moment of God’s anger. The Stam glossator intervenes with his challenge: “But at all times it is white!” Again, he supplies his own resolution. In response, the Stam suggests a manner of examination at the center of which stand “*suryage sumage*.” The resulting discourse resembles that of the story of R. Elazar b. Shimon:

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**The Story of R. Elazar b. Shimon**

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<tr>
<td>כל השעטים של אשת ביאר</td>
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<td>כל השעטים של אשת יבין סמי אט</td>
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<td>אשת יבין</td>
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The Story of R. Elazar b. Shimon

The Cock’s Comb (Sanh. 105b et al.)

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</tr>
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It is worth noting here that in the cock account, in place of "it has red streaks," some manuscripts read "red streaks remain in it." This variant well fits the notion that suryaqe are "remains" or "traces."

In this divinatory formula, seeing suryaqe serves a diagnostic purpose. However, in this case, to see them does not require slaughtering an animal or performing surgery; the suryaqe are visible to all on the comb of the live rooster.

Color-change in roosters’ combs is a real, objective phenomenon, regulated by testosterone levels, which, when lowered, cause the natural red to pale towards white.\(^\text{12}\) The divine anger is a cosmic event with a hormonal effect upon fowls. The scholastic challenge (“But at all times it is white!”) flies in the face of reality! It would appear that the availability of an excellent, ready-made solution, by now common stock, prompted the objection in the first place.

### The Intra-Talmudic Developmental Path

From a chronological perspective, the first appearance of suryaqe in the Talmudic corpus is in an exchange between two named Amoraim discussion (B): R. Aḥa asks R. Ashi how one can know whether the bronchial tubes had

\(^{12}\) "Spurs, combs and wattles in birds are, therefore, typical testosterone-dependent secondary sexual structures. Interestingly, when cocks fight they specifically attack one another’s combs and wattles. These structures may, therefore, be important signals during both male-male fighting and mate choice by females." (Ian P.F. Owens and Roger V. Short, “Hormonal Basis of Sexual Dimorphism in Birds: Implications for New Theories of Sexual Selection,” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 10 [1995]: 46); “Take the time to look carefully at the colour of their combs ... comb might become paler than usual, or might become a darker red or purple colour, or even blotchy” (http://www.darwinvets.com/poultry/common-chicken-problems-diseases).
dissolved, and R. Ashi answers that we spill the fluid from the lung and observe: if it contains suryae hiwre it is not kosher, and if not, it is kosher. The remnants of the bronchial tubes are small white pieces.

Thereafter, this word serves the Stam as a useful term for indicating remnants that are even less solid: traces of blood within a fluid (C), or the presumption that there may be traces of blood in a fluid, even when they are not visible at all (D). This exhausts the usage with respect to the kosher laws, but the usefulness of the term continues to serve the literary goals of the Stam, even in the aggadic contexts of the fat of R. Elazar b. Shimon’s belly and the cock’s comb. It would appear that the intra-Talmudic lexical development parallels its functional-literary progression. Of the three uses in context of kosher laws—suryaṣ ḥiwre, suryae sumaqe, and suryae d’dema—only suryae sumaqe was applied to the aggadic settings: R. Elazar b. Shimon’s fat and the cock’s comb.

**Definition of Talmudic suryae**

In my opinion, there is no justification for applying the definition “vein” to any one of the Talmudic instances. Yet the lexical entry in DJBA with which we began quotes three Talmudic passages under the first gloss, which lists “vein” as a meaning of suryae. The relevant line from the story of R. Elazar b. Shimon is translated there: “all fat which has red veins will putrefy.” However, “veins” are not implied in context. Rashi explains: “Red hues (gevanim), comprised of flesh.” The Soncino translation has “red streaks.” Moreover, we suggested, based on the science of the time, that the passage in fact implies that there is no blood in fat, and so certainly there are no veins. There are only suryae, some type of weakly defined red marks.

Regarding Ravina’s statement in b. Pesaḥ. 74b (D), “Even if it does not turn red, its serum is forbidden, [for] it cannot but contain [red] streaks of blood,” only the three words “suryae sumaqe d’dema” are quoted in the above-mentioned entry, and they are translated as “red veins of blood.” Even if we adopt the variant that includes “sumaqe,” which, as noted, is a secondary reading, there is no room to ascribe “vein” as its meaning based on context. The concern is for the presence of unseen suryae in the serum, which is a liquid. The unseen matter in the liquid is blood, not veins. Even the expanded phrase, as represented by three textual witness, should be translated “red traces of blood,” and not “veins.”

We may therefore delete the ascription of the meaning “veins” from all Talmudic contexts.
The second sub-entry in DJBA, bearing the definition “streak,” is comprised of the remaining two Talmudic occurrences: the cock’s comb (E) and the bronchial tubes (B). Apparently, it made little sense to locate veins in the cock’s comb, and “streak” is substituted, resulting in the translation: “all the time, (the rooster’s crest) has red streaks in it. At that time it does not have red streaks in it.” Likewise, the meaning of “veins” could not be ascribed to suryaqe ḥiwre, and the line is therefore translated: “white streaks [in a lung].” In truth, as we have seen, they are not “white streaks in a lung,” but white pieces of the flesh of the bronchial tubes found in the fluid poured from the lung.

The meaning “veins” cannot be derived from any of the Talmudic passages quoted in this entry, nor from their context, from Rashi, or from the Soncino translation. Every instance of this term in the Talmud can be explained by ascribing a single general meaning: “something tiny,” and in context, something tiny that is separate from a solid or liquid medium and can either be discerned by observation or whose presence can be deduced without being seen.

Linguistic Development

Our journey with the term suryaqe is not yet complete. Linguistic development will not be stopped by bringing down the gavel; rather, the term suryaqe sumaqe continued to be applied in the post-Talmudic period, and the Ge’onim used it in contexts fitting their legal discussions. The geonic authors moved the term suryaqe to a further developmental stage, in order to express their additional clarification to the Talmudic law.14 Attached to the ileum is an array of small, hair-like blood vessels that are difficult to remove, and thus led to the prohibition of the ileum for kosher consumption. Halakhic nomenclature

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13 Expanding on b. Ḥul. 113a which discusses whether there is a presumption of blood being found in intestines, Halakhot Gedolot (largely ascribed to R. Shimon Kayyara, first half of the ninth century) indicates that the ileum is prohibited, due to הגרות חיטות דנה אכדית הב—the “narrow suryaqe of blood which are in it” (Hildesheimer, 3, 212–213 [= F]). The identical phrase is used in an inquiry addressed to Rav Hai Gaon (Simcha Emanuel, ed., Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa and Writings of Early Provencal Sages [in Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Ofeq Institute, 1995], 164; below = G) who, in his response, returns verbatim to the prohibition in Halakhot Gedolot, shortens the reference to הגרות חיטות דנה,” the suryaqe of the ileum”. Cf. Raviah (Bnei Brak: Sifriati, 1976), 145–146, par. 1121; and ibid. 4, 170.

14 There is no term for small veins or capillaries (probably meant here) in Talmudic Aramaic. Warid is used only in Syriac (see Brockelmann/Sokoloff, 360 and meanings there; CAL), but not in other Aramaic dialects. For larger blood vessels TB can use circumlocutions, such as simpona (see DJBA, 806); for smaller, סארא (ibid., 1124). In this passage the Gaon manufactures the terminology required for his new halakhic distinction.
possessed no technical term for these capillaries. R. Sherira Gaon referred to them as ḥuṭim, “threads,”15 by analogy of similar structure. The author of Halakhot Gedolot preferred a descriptive tact: the “narrow suryqaе of blood which are in it,” taking advantage of the traditional term suryqaе for undefined bodies (whose presence may cause halakhic prohibition). In the passage by R. Hai Gaon16 the first mention of these small blood vessels used the long phrase as in Halakhot Gedolot; the second reference could then be abbreviated: ב濕ריך דקירה, “suryqaе of the ileum.”

Once again, literary and lexical development go hand in hand. Each era adds new linguistic usages, and lexical development never ends. As clearly enunciated by E.Y. Kutcher, Talmudic Hebrew is best analyzed as two successive stages, Tannaitic Hebrew and Amoraic Hebrew,17 with substantial differences between them. Similarly, in the specific context we are treating here, we note that the language of the Ge’onim develops a further stage of usage, directly based upon the Talmudic, and growing out of it.

Progression within the Talmud

DJBа, which suggests for the etymological derivation a Syriac term defined as the “glare of the sun or fire,” opens the entry with (1) b. Pesaḥ. 74b (= D), translated there “red veins of blood” (as indicated above, “red” is a secondary addition to the Talmud text); the second reference (2) is to Halakhot Gedolot (= F),18 translated “thin veins of blood.” The third (3) b. Meš. 83b (= A), “... red veins ...”, translation applying also to (4) b. Ḥul. 93b (= C); (5) (= G),19 translated “veins of the ileum”. (1–2) contain the word “blood;” (1, 3–4) “red.” (1) has both, “red” and “blood”; (5) has neither word. The progression leads from the more specified to the less specified: “blood” → “red” → “suryqaе” unmodified. The second sub-entry (“streak”) collects the occurrences where “vein” is impossible or improbable: (6) the rooster’s crown (= E); (7) b. Ḥul. 47b “suryqaе ḥiwre”—“white steaks,” farthest possible from red blood.

16 See n. 13.
18 See n. 13.
19 See n. 13.
In order to address the etymological question we undertook first to establish the primary meaning within the Talmudic corpus. Secondary and tertiary usages, which stem, *inter alia*, from the development of additional applications within the Talmud itself, and are then further adapted to meet the needs of writers from the geonic era, are less useful in arriving at a satisfactory etymology.

As we have seen, the first sub-entry in *DJBA* is devoted to the meaning “vein.” It is composed of three Talmudic references and two geonic. In our opinion, only in the geonic passages occur phrases referring to “veins” (better, perhaps, “capillaries”), or, finally, actually denote “vein.” The Talmudic passages themselves touch upon remnants, traces, and the like, and generate a progression along the lines we have suggested: B, C, D, A, E.

It is R. Ashi who can claim to have first used the term *suryaqe*. He, and the Stam after him, needed a word for tiny, insubstantial entities, the traces or remnants of some material or substance whose presence can barely be detected by the naked eye. A language’s lexicon of nouns is initially constituted by words that refer to substantial, material things; words for abstractions, conceptions, and even specks and the ethereal are constructed through semantic borrowing, or are borrowed from other dialects that have already reached this level of development.

**Etymology**

One final point is in order before ascertaining the etymology of *suryaqe*. The letter ש that begins “suryaqe” may in some (all?) occurrences be taken as śin (ש), based on the reading with *samekh* in Talmudic textual witnesses and Geonic quotations. Of the 46 instances of this word in manuscripts and first print editions of the Talmud, sixteen, including several Genizah fragments and pedigreed manuscripts, attest to *samekh*.20

20 For example, in Ezriel Hildesheimer, ed., *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdanim, 1987), 147 n. 49. Cf. Rashi to b. Sanh. 105b and b. ‘Abod. Zar. 4b (with further attestations in the manuscripts of Rashi’s Talmudic commentaries). For Talmudic occurrences with *samekh* see appendix.

As to etymology, DJBA compares the rare Syriac word šuriqa, which is defined there “glare of the sun or fire.” In Payne Smith’s dictionary, it is rendered “flashing beams of sun or fire light.” Both are based on Bar Bahlul’s Syriac-Arabic dictionary, which preserves the only documentation of this word:

\[ \text{šuriqa} \]

[“The burning (wahaj) of heat, the sun, or fire”]

The exact meaning of the word wahaj is pertinent. If wahaj in this quotation does not indicate “flashing” or “light,” but “burning,” indeed more fitting to “heat,” the above adaptations of Bar Bahlul are brought into question.

The Syriac šuriqa can be associated with our occurrences only through the implicit association of the glare and flashes with the color “red.” There are of course rich associations of the root s/šrq in Hebrew and other Semitic languages with red, although I have not seen it suggested in connection with Syriac šuriqa. However, any association with a shining red hue is precisely where the suggestion fails! Redness is a quality that can describe suryaqe, just as whiteness can, as in the case of suryaqe ḥiwre! Thus, color is not an essential attribute of suryaqe.


23 J. Payne Smith, A Compendious Syriac Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 568; R. Payne Smith, Thesaurus syriacus (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–1901), 4338, under root קרש = whistle. Brockelmann/Sokoloff LexSyr does not register this word at all, but in the entry קרש = whistle (p. 1611) we find a fifth meaning: “to shine”, based on one occurrence which is marked as doubtful. The nouns associated there with this root do not include the word under discussion.


25 Zech 1:8; See HALOT, pp. 1361–1362, even “the rising, blood-red sun”. For š/s in the root קרש in Tannaitic Hebrew see: Kara, Yemenite Manuscripts, 79 n. 154. It should be noted that the shining sun is referred to in Sir 5:7 as מַשְּׁרֵק (Ze’ev Ben-Hayyim, Sefer Ben Sira [Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1973], 62; M.H. Segal, Sefer Ben Sira ha-Shalem [Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958], 344. Also note mašriq instead of mazhir in the margin to 43:11).
In Jastrow’s dictionary, the word in question is compared to the Syriac “sarūqa” with reference to Payne Smith’s Thesaurus, which in turn translates this term as “particula nebulae,” small bits of cloud; Payne Smith Dictionary: “a particle of mist.” In Sokoloff’s edition of Brockelmann’s dictionary, it is translated as “wisp of cloud.” Saruqa means simply the “particle,” as the word “cloud” is also used in context. This meaning fits well with our interpretation of suryaqe as “small traces” of shapeless, indistinct matter of any color. This is the primary meaning in the Talmudic instances of the word: something tiny, like the remains of a dissolved bronchial tube in lung fluid, barely visible traces of blood in a liquid, and red spots on human fat.

The Syriac word saruqa can be illustrated in context from Acta martyrum et sanctorum Syriacae: “A saruqa of a small cloud was seen.” The cloud is small, and its saruqa is even smaller.

Developing a word for a “[small] piece” of nebulous stuff is often done through linguistic analogy. From where can such a meaning be borrowed? Reasonably, from the realm of threads and fabrics, where we can find something similar to a small, fluffy cloud, and to the threads mentioned by Sherira and Maimonides.

The root ק״רס refers to the combing or carding of fiber, a basic operation in the manufacture of textiles. As a major element of the linen-making process, combing is mentioned in Isaiah 19:9 (NJPS): “The flax-workers, too, shall be dismayed, both carders (šeriqot) and weavers chagrined.” In an area where carding is done, small, light, all but worthless bits of fabric—if you wish, saruqa/suryaqe—can be found. Their name is readily lent to ethereal traces which interest the halakhist, and the pedantic glossator rejoiced as he further applied them to the Talmud’s bold, colorful narratives.

Let us return to “the saruqa of a small cloud,” translated above as “a wisp of cloud.” One meaning of wisp is “a thin, narrow, filmy, or slight piece, fragment (of something),” as in “wisp after wisp growing, trembling, fleeting, and fading in the blue” and “a thin wisp of smoke on the horizon.”

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26 p. 1542.
27 p. 2750.
28 P. 390.
29 LexSyr, Sokoloff ed., 1044.
31 See LexSyr, Sokoloff ed., 1050; Payne Smith, Compendious Syriac Dictionary, 392. Jastrow’s entry for the word we are dealing with does indeed refer to ק"רס II (= p. 1029 in his dictionary).
32 OED, 2437.
We may thus reasonably hypothesize that the meaning of the Talmudic “suryaqe” as a small trace of something is based on the small wads of fiber that are separated from the fabric during the carding process, as described in m. B. Qam. 10:10: “Wads of fiber that the launderer pulls out belong to him, and that the carder (קוּרָסַּה/קרוסה) pulls out belong to the householder.” Even these fluffy remnants are of some use.

Number

The lexeme under study appears in the following three immediate contexts:

The first two are clearly plurals, modified by plural adjectives. The third, with no adjective (in the original, shorter reading), is plural in most witnesses. However, in two geniza fragments we find: שורייקא דרמא שורייקא דרמא, almost certainly singular: a trace.

Morphology

A plene orthography with alef in this word appears sporadically in the Yemenite manuscripts, and once on Cod. Hamburg 165, e.g.: שוריימק סומיך שורייאק סומיך.

The above reflect two possible realizations: 1. šuryaqe; 2. šuraiqe.

In the Yemenite reading tradition the following phonological realizations of the morphological possibilities have been recorded: šuryqa/e, šuraiqa/e.
The form šuryaqe has few exact morphological parallels. Furthermore, it presents the yod as a consonant, yielding an anomalous quatro-literal pattern. In contrast, šuraiqe (with its /u-ai/ structure) can be analyzed as a diminutive form, as in the Syriac ‘ūlayma for “young lad” and BT ’uzzēla (gazelle) for a small goat.

Arabic suryāq

Rashi commented on the word under discussion as follows: שָׁרוֹיָאָה נָקִים שֵׁיַיְק "Suryaqe; taches [= spots] in French. Like threads, and in Arabic a thread is called suryāq" (b. ‘Abod. Zar. 4b; Pesaro print). In the only surviving manuscript for this gloss the entire comment consists of only three words: שָׁרוֹיָאָה בָּלֵין. The most reasonable explanation is that the short text is the original form of this gloss, to which Rashi added at a later time. The addition was subsequently transferred to some exemplars, while others maintained the original language, without the addition. The original text simply presents the translation of the difficult word into Old French, exactly as appears in Rashi’s commentary to the parallel passages (b. Ber. 7b and b. Ḥul. 47b). The addition presents the definition “threads,” as against the original “spots.” The ostensible reason for the addition is that Rashi received new information, including an explanation of the word in Arabic. This situation is similar to Rashi, b. Beṣah 33b s.v. יָקִים בָּוְאָשָׁה, where

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38 See ibid., 266–268.
40 See n. 42.
41 Parma 3155 (De-Rossi 1292).
42 This is the correct form of the Old French gloss; see Arsène Darmesteter and D.S. Blondheim, Les Gloses Françaises dans les commentaires Talmudiques de Raschi (Paris: Libraire Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1929), 134, no. 974.
43 In defense of this pattern, see Shamma Friedman, “Rashi’s Talmudic Commentaries and the Nature of Their Revisions and Recensions” (Hebrew), in Zvi Arie Steinfeld, ed., Rashi Studies (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1993), 173.
44 Regarding Arabic in Rashi’s commentaries, see Avraham Grossman, “The Impact of Rabbi Samuel of Spain and Reuel of Byzantium on Rashi’s School” [in Hebrew], Turbiq 82 (2014): 453–455; idem, “The Treatment of Lexicon and Grammar in Rashi’s Commentaries: Rashi’s Ties with the Islamic Lands” [in Hebrew], Lĕšonénu 73 (2011): 432–433; idem, “Rashi’s
an addition (which can be seen as a later recension) quotes R. Samuel the Pious, the Sefaradi, including an Arabic gloss. The similarity of Rashi’s laʿaz to the Talmudic word suryâqe which he is explaining, is tantalizing! The meaning “threads” corresponds to the suggestion that the image behind the Talmudic word is related to combing fibers; the consonants of the Arabic correspond to srq, suggested above as the root of the Talmudic word.

The root srq with the meaning “card,” “comb,” which we have been discussing in connection with suryâqe, has indeed been documented in Judeo-Arabic. It is possible that this word was also in use by speakers of other Arabic dialects. Conversely, its not being mentioned in the general Arabic dictionaries may suggest its uniqueness to Judeo-Arabic, in essence a loan-word from Aramaic or Hebrew.

Even if Rashi’s informant communicated his interpretation in writing, the reconstruction of the Arabic word’s pronunciation is hazardous, in that we are relying on a single attestation. Were we able to conclude that the Arabic word was pronounced suryāq, and were it true that the Arabic word was simply a borrowing of the Talmudic suryâqe, we would have further confirmation of the corresponding Yemenite recitation tradition. More significant is the spelling with samekh, corresponding to the orthography prominent in oriental textual witnesses of the Bavli.

Most significant is the explanation “threads” (identical with Sherira Gaon’s and Maimonides’s explanation) which Rashi received from an Arabic-speaking sage, using a noun from the root srq, and belonging to the realm of fibers, lending much weight to the above suggestion regarding the Talmudic Aramaic word, which may have been absorbed in Judeo-Arabic directly from the Aramaic.

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46 Joshua Blau, A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 294; see Mordechai Akiva Friedman, A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic in the India Book Letters from the Geniza and in Other Texts (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2016), 200–201.
48 An Arabic noun سِرَق saraq indicating a unit (piece, oblong piece, sheet, bolt?) of silk recorded in both general Arabic and Judeo-Arabic (Edward William Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon [London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893], 1352; M.A. Friedman, A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic, 601) is of questionable etymology, would not be connected to carding, and seems to refer to units much larger than “threads.”
Conclusion

Exemplary dictionaries, such as Michael Sokoloff’s *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, present to the careful reader both what is known and what is not known. Such entries often allow one studying the language to step in, taking advantage of the outstanding groundwork that has been laid out for him or her, and carry the investigation a step further. The word “šuryaqa” is one such entry.

This type of challenge is not infrequent in the field of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic lexicography. One is moved to emulate the work of early scholars who devoted in-depth studies to particular lexemes beset with vexing complications. These studies may by necessity expand the canvas of inquiry, but in the final product serve the ends of lexicography as well.

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49 And thus perhaps rile a reviewer; see Yochanan Breuer, review of *Studies in the Language and Terminology of Talmudic Literature* by Shamma Friedman [in Hebrew], *Lĕšonenu* 78 (2016): 216.
Appendix

A  b. B. Meš. 83b

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C  b. Ḥul. 93b

D  b. Pesah. 74b (see above, p. 390)

E  b. Sanh. 105b, b. Ber. 7b, b. ‘Abod. Zar. 4b
Bibliography


