ON רֶכֶשׁ, RAKKASU, AND RAKSU

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In the course of my constant hunt for elements of linguistic interference between Assyrian and West Semitic, and in the context of my present research on war in the Assyrian empire, I stumbled across the Biblical term רכשׁ, on Imperial Aramaic rkš, and on the lexical item rkysh, allegedly attested in an Egyptian-Aramaic account. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, also following P. Grelot, consider this word as deriving from Akkadian with the meaning “harness, saddlery,” despite its unusual phonological and morphological facies. However, the most recent edition of this papyrus, by Porten and Yardeni, presents a completely different reading and interpretation, bearing absolutely no connection with equids and their apparel.

Thus, alas, not even a small shred of textual evidence connects my interest in רכשׁ—per se and in relation to the Neo-Assyrian term raksu and its congenersto Bezalel Porten’s ground-breaking philological and editorial work on the Aramaic papyri from Achaemenid Egypt. Nonetheless, I have chosen to continue in this small lexicographical and historical quest of mine; and I offer its results as a token of admiration and affection for the fêted colleague, with whom I have had the privilege of trading many ideas on Aramaic and Assyrian, in

2 Cf. for the moment Frederick Mario Fales, Guerre et paix en Assyrie: religion et impérialisme (Paris: Cerf, 2010).
3 AP no. 81:29.
4 DNWSI vol. 2, 1076.
5 DAE, 129.
6 TAD C3:28.
7 TAD C, 266–267. line 105: mhrwz(w)t 6 šl qmy’wt, “6 string(s) of beads.”
the course of an extended visit of his in 1993–94 at the University of Padua, where I taught at the time.

1. On BH רכש

The noun רכש (always vocalized as a segholate, רֶכֶשׁ) is attested in only four Biblical passages: in 1 Kings 5:8, Micah 1:13, Esther 8:10, and ibid., 14. The standard translations of this noun—which lacks in all cases the plural marker and is thus understood to have a collective meaning—range from the comprehensive “steeds” to a wider semantical gamut, geared to the individual passages, viz., “baggage horses,” “yokes/teams,” “relay horses.” The contexts of these passages (a–d in the following) may be briefly examined, to check for the specific interpretations of the term.

a) 1 Kings 5:8

וְהַשְּׂעֹרִים וְהַתֶּבֶן, לַסּוּסִים וְלָרֶכֶשׁ--יָבִאוּ, אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה-שָּׁם, אִישׁ כְּמִשְׁפָּטוֹ
Barley also and straw for the horses and for the רכש brought they unto the place where it should be, every man according to his charge

b) Micah 1:13

ךְ רְתֹם הַמֶּרְכָּבָה לָרֶכֶשׁ, יוֹשֶׁבֶת לָכִישׁ; רֵאשִׁית חַטָּאת הִיא לְבַת-צִיּוֹן, כִּי-בָנָהוֹ אֲשֶׁר פִּשְׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
Bind the chariots to the רכש, O inhabitant of Lachish; she was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion; for the transgressions of Israel are found in thee.

c) Esther 8:10

וַיִּכְתֹּב, בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ, וַיַּחְתֹּם, בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ; וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים בְּיַד הָרֶכֶשׁ בַּסּוּסִים רֹכְבֵי הָרֶכֶשׁ, הָאֲחַשְּרָנִים--בְּנֵי, הָרַמָּכִים
And they wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king’s ring, and sent letters by mounted messengers, riding on royal רכש, bred of the stud.

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8 BDB 940b.
9 HALOT, 1238b.