ETYMOLOGY OF THE NICKNAME 'ISKARIÔT(H):'
the “One Who Saw a Sign” [(‘i)sqar(î)’ôt/yisqar(î)’ôt] or the “One Who Slandered/Betrayed a Sign” [(‘i)sqar(î)’ôt/yisqar(î)’ôt]?

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ABSTRACT. The article derives Judas’s nickname ‘Iskariôt(h)’ from the Hebrew/Aramaic verb sāqar/s’qar, and the noun ‘ôt’ôṭ (widely used in Biblical Hebrew and attested in the Talmud [=Aramaic ‘ôt’ôt’]), and interprets it as the “one who saw/gaze upon a sign” (cf., e.g., John 2:23, 4:48, 6:2,14,30 mentioning those who «saw signs» and came to be Jesus’s followers; the verbs theōrēō and orō used in these passages correlate with the verb sāqar/s’qar, “to look (at), gaze, see”, and the noun sēmeion (pl. sēmeïa) correlates with the term ‘ôt’ôṭ, “sign”). The ex hypothesi “positive” character of Judas’s nickname possibly explains the evangelists’ renunciation of its interpretation. As an alternative etymology of Judas’s nickname ‘Iskariôt(h), one can derive it from the Hebrew/Aramaic verb sāqar/s’qar (“to lie, deceive, slander”, sc. “to violate (a treaty, etc.)”, “to betray” [the latter meaning is attested in Samaritan Aramaic]) and the same noun ‘ôt’ôṭ: the “one who slandered/resp. betrayed a sign”, i.e. the one who brought false evidence against Jesus (cf.: Matt. 26:59 ff.; Mk. 14:55 ff.). In Jn. 6:70, Jesus himself defines Judas with the term diáboulos; this word can be interpreted as “slanderer”, “accuser”.

KEYWORDS: The Gospels; etymology of Judas’s nickname Iskariôt(h).

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Unlike some other Hebrew and Aramaic phrases and designations (including some of the apostles’ nicknames), rendered in Greek transliterations in the New Testament, the nickname of the betrayer Judas — Iskariôt(h) — has been left without any interpretation in all four Gospels. Possibly it was done by the evangelists deliberately, for the nickname Iskariôt(h) could arise before Judas’s betrayal — yet before “Satan entered into Judas” (Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:2,26–27; cf.: Matt. 27:3–5) — and therefore not necessary bear negative character. On the other hand, the figure of Judas must evoke none other than negative associations from the very beginning. (Probably we meet with the same approach in the case of the high priest Joseph named Caiaphas in the Gospels without any further interpretation of this designation. 1) Judging by Jn. 6:71, 13:2,26, Judas’s nickname was patrimonial: Τούδας

1 In connection with this nickname see, e.g.: Cotton et al. 2010, 481–487; Zissu– Goren 2011, 74–95; Rollston 2012, 233–243.

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Σῦμων Ἰσκαριώτης, “Judas, (son) of Simon Iskariot”. In any case, in the Gospels this nickname was applied to Judas before his betrayal, and thus its content could be neutral or even positive. The designation Iskariot(h) is attested in two forms: Ἰσκαριώθ and (ὁ) Ἰσκαριώτης (v.v. II.: Ἡσαῦ, Ἰσκαριώθ, Ἰσκαριώτης, resp. Peshitta: s’kar-youta’). As was noted by J. E. Taylor, “Judas was designated as a Hebrew or Aramaic name transliterated as Ἰσκαριώθ and rendered in Greek form as Ἰσκαριώτης”, but “the manuscripts show more of a tendency to standardize the epithet in Greek form rather than to retrieve or preserve the Hebrew or Aramaic form”.5 In the manuscripts of the earliest Gospel — According to Mark — only the spelling Ἰσκαριώθ is attested (3:19, 14:10; also: Lk. 6:16).

The present paper derives Judas’s nickname Iskarioth (‘Ἰσκαριώθ) from the Hebrew/Aramaic verb נַעַר, sàqar/s’qar, “to look (at)”, “to gaze”, “to see”,8 and the noun נִאֶר, נַעַר, “sign”, widely used in Biblical Hebrew and attested in the Talmud9 (=Aramaic ניאר, נַאֵר): נאם נַעַר, sàqar/s’qar נא ח, resp. ניאר(ניאר), (i)sqar(]>=) נא ח, i.e. the “one who saw/gaze upon a sign”10 11. This could be one of those signs (טומאות12), about which it was written or “not written” (cf.: Jn. 20:30) in the Gospels. A sign (especially, in heaven) was one of the most important confirmations of a prophet or a soteriological, Messianic figure mission verity for the Jews at that time (see, e.g.: Matt. 16:1, 24:24–26:30; Mk. 13:21–22; Lk. 11:16, 21:11,25; Acts 2:19; Rev. 12; cf., e.g.: Josephus Flavius, Jewish Antiquities, II, 259; ibid., 261 ff. and Acts 21:38).

John (e.g.: 2:23, 4:48, 6:2,14,30; cf. also: 6:26)13 mentions those who «saw signs» (εἶδοσέρεν τὰ σημεῖα; 6:2) and came to be Jesus’s followers. The verbs θεαρέομαι and ὀρῶ used in these passages correlate with the verb נאם, sàqar/s’qar, “to look (at, on), gaze, see, watch”, and the noun σημεῖον (πλ. σημεῖα) correlates with the word נא ח, נא ח, “sign”. One can assume that Judas was possibly the one who “saw” a special “sign”, “believed” in Jesus as Christ, and hereupon came to be his disciple and got the nickname “Iskarioth”, i.e. the “one who (proclaimed that he) saw a sign”. The hypothetical usage of just the verb נאם, sàqar/s’qar in this designa-

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2 In some manuscripts (K, Δ, Π, f1, and others) Jn. 6:71 reads Ἰσκαριωτήν instead of Ἰσκαριώτου.
3 The spelling with definite article (ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης) is attested in Matt. 10:4; Jn. 12:4, 14:22. The spelling ὁ Ἰσκαριώθ in Mk. 14:10, attested in some manuscripts (κ’), L, Θ, Ψ, 565, 892), should probably be considered as a secondary one.
4 The Bezae manuscript (D; V cent.).
5 Taylor 2010, 368.
6 Bibl.: נאם (attested in pi’el).
8 Yastrow 1926, 1021; Sokoloff 2002, 388.
9 Yastrow 1926, 36.
10 See also: Tantlevskij 2011, 163, n. 259.
11 In connection with the spelling Ἰσκαριωτής let us note that “Greek could transliterate Hebrew and Aramaic (soft) tav with a teth. Gennesareth (cf. Hebrew גennesר) in the Gospels is rendered with a final Greek ταυ rather than a theta for Hebrew tav: Γενναιοπότης (Matt 14:34; Mark 6:53; Luke 5:1), and by Eusebius in declinable form: πρὸς τὴν Γενναιοπότιν ὄμην (Onom. 58.11) and τὴν Γενναιοπότιν ὄμην (Onom. 120.28)”. (Taylor 2010, 381).
12 This term is often used in the meaning “miracles” in the New Testament.
13 Cf., e.g.: Lk. 19:37.
tion possibly implies the heavenly character of the sign; \textit{NB}: the noun רַעָּשׁ, sāqōr, “astronomer”\textsuperscript{14}, attested in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, is derived from this very verb. For instance, Judas’s vision of a sign could be like that described in the apocryphal Gospel of Judas\textsuperscript{15} (Iskariot); “‘Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star.’ Judas lifted up his eyes and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it. Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud…” As was noted above, the \textit{ex hypothesi} “positive” character of Judas’s nickname could explain the evangelists’ renunciation of its interpretation (and possibly that is why John carries it over Judas’s farther, Simon).

The addition of a prothetic \textit{aleph} (this phenomenon was not uncommon in Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew) to a stem can be explained by the inordinate length of the compound word; this gave rise to elision of the vowel farthest from the accent, thereby “creating a clash of syllables which necessitated its addition”.\textsuperscript{16} Let us also point out that in the Hebrew and Aramaic names and designations, composed from two words, a paragogic \textit{yod} could be used for their combination in the united term; in particular, this phenomenon took place in the names of some leaders of the fallen angels in the Qumran Aramaic fragments of the Book of Watchers (=1 Enoch 1–36), dated paleographically to the II–I centuries BCE (\textit{4QEn\textsuperscript{e}}, e.g.: יָדֵי יְהוָה, \textit{Sahari}’el, “Moon of God”; יָדֵי יְהוָה, \textit{Tūri}’el, “Mountain of God”; יָדְתֵי יְהוָה, \textit{Yomi}’el, “Day of God” (var.: \textit{Yammī}’el, “Sea of God”); יִנְוַי, \textit{Šemīḥazah}, “The Name saw” or the “One who saw The Name”; יָדֵי יְהוָה, \textit{Dānī}’el, “God has judged” or “Judge (from) God” (in \textit{Ezek}. 14:14, 20, 28:3, the spelling without a \textit{yod} is attested — יְדֵי יְהוָה); יָדִּישֵׁה יְהוָה, \textit{Yḥadi}’el, “God will guide”, and others. The spelling of one of the fallen angels name \textit{Ẓēq(i)’el}, “Lightning flash of God” or “Shooting star (from) God”, is attested both with a conjunctive \textit{yod} and without it — יָדֵי יְהוָה. In Greek transliterations of the fallen angels names a conjunctive \textit{yod} is rendered by a \textit{yota} (e.g.: ΥΔΡΩΣ — Τυρήν/Τυρηνός); in some cases a conjunctive \textit{yod}, missing in Hebrew-Aramaic names, is reproduced in Greek and Ethiopic renderings of these designations (e.g.: פָּרַמִּל = Ράμι’el, \textit{Rāmi}’el, “Thunder of God”; and others).\textsuperscript{18}

Let us also note that in the Washington Codex of the Four Gospels (V century), in Mk. 3:19, the spelling of Judas’s nickname without a \textit{yota} is attested: Ἰσκαρότης.

If the imperfect form of the verb\textsuperscript{19} יִסְכַּר was used in Judas’s nickname — יִסְכַּר, yisqar (cf., e.g., the Masoretic vocalizations of the Biblical Aramaic verbs in \textit{pe’al}, imperfect 3 m. sg.: יָסַר (\textit{Dan}. 7:25); יָסַר (\textit{Dan}. 5:7); יָסַר (\textit{Dan}. 4:24)), then the reconstruction of an initial prothetic \textit{aleph} is unnecessary at all, for the Hebrew/Aramaic -י, yis- can be rendered in Greek as ιο- (cf., e.g.: Ἰσκαρίον; yisqā’īl — Ἰσκαρίων). Thus, the designation Ἰσκαρίον can be precisely transliterated by the Greek letters as Ἰσκαρ(ι)οθ, \textit{i.e.} Iskart(i)oth.

\footnote{14} Sokoloff 2002, 387.
\footnote{15} On this composition see, e.g.: Kasser et al. 2008.
\footnote{16} Cf.: Taylor 2010, 377.
\footnote{17} According to \textit{Jub}. 4:20, Enoch was married to Daniel’s daughter. The Ugaritic epos contains a cycle of legends about Daniel.
\footnote{18} Cf. a comparison table of the fallen angels names in the Book of Watchers in: Dacy 2011, 31–37.
\footnote{19} Cf., e.g.: Jn. 6:2.
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Co-existence of Aramaic and the Hebrew vernacular in Judea at the beginning of the Christian era allows one to admit a “mixed” Aramean-Hebrew character of certain designations, phrases, passages, etc. (especially those of the religious content) at that period (cf., e.g.: Ps. 22:2 and Mk. 15:34, Matt. 27:46; a variation of κομψ/κομπα in different manuscripts in Mk. 5:41), including possibly the nickname “Iskariot(h)”.

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On the other hand, if the nickname Iskariot bore a negative content, then it could be derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic verb נָשַׁ֣ר, šāqr/sāqar ("to lie, deceive, slander", sc. “to violate (a treaty, etc.)”, “to betray” [the latter meaning is attested in Samaritan Aramaic20]) and the same noun רְוִי, ḥōr: Iskarioth is the “one who slandered/resp. betrayed a sign”, i.e. the one who could bring false evidence against Jesus (cf.: Matt. 26:59 ff.; Mk. 14:55 ff.). In Jn. 6:70, Jesus himself defines Judas with the term διάδικος; this word can be interpreted as “slanderer”, “accuser”.

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20 Tal 2000, 929.

21 See also: Tantlefskij 2011, Ibid.

22 Cf. the figure of “the Man of Lies” (‘iš ha-ḵāzāḇ) who seems to have slandered and betrayed the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness. (Cf., e.g.: Tantlefskij 2011, 129–131.)