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Eliezer of Damascus. I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Thomas Römer

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37:12: “This is great comfort for all who die professing the unity of His name [i.e., contra the trinitarian view of God]— and even for those who are not actually killed, since they constantly suffer insults and derision, and are beaten and struck because they do not believe in their idolatry, and die as a result.”

Eliezer’s commentaries were cited by his immediate successors in northern France in the late 12th and early 13th centuries; but they seem to have been forgotten soon after, as they are not mentioned in the subsequent exegetical tradition, perhaps reflecting the overall decline of the *peshat* school, which coincided with intensified persecutions of French Jewry at the time.

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Mordechai Z. Cohen

Eliezer of Damascus

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Judaism

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

In Gen 15:2 Abraham complains to YHWH that he will die childless and his heir will be – according to the MT – “the son of Mesheq, of my house, he is Damascus (Heb. *Dammešeq*), Eliezer.” This strange text has been rendered in LXX as “the son of Masek, my female slave, this Eliezer of Damascus.” Another possibility is to understand *mešeq* as a participle deriving from a root “to drink.” The meaning would then be “The son of libation [i.e., he one who takes care of the ancestor worship] is Eliezer.” The precision “He is (from) Damascus” is certainly a gloss.

Dammešeq is inspired by the word *mešeq* and by Gen 14, where Abraham wages war against mythical kings and passes through Damascus. The name Eliezer may also have been invented out of Gen 14:14, a verse which mentions 318 servants of Abraham. The numerical value of the name Eliezer is exactly 318. According to Seebass, the original text of Gen 15:2–3 would have been “Abram said, ‘My Lord Yhwh, what will you give me? For I will pass childless, and so somebody born in my house is to be my heir.’” Later redactors and glossators would have tried to identify this servant. In Gen 24, where Abraham’s servant is the main character (he is sent by Abraham to Mesopotamia in order to find a woman for Isaac), he bears no name. Later commentators have identified him with Eliezer.

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Thomas Römer

II. Judaism

■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval and Modern Judaism

A. Rabbinic Judaism

In the rabbinic literature, Eliezer of Damascus is the prototypical loyal servant, who embodied the ethical values he learned from his master, the patriarch Abraham. Eliezer was the servant whom the then childless Abraham complained to God would inherit Abraham’s estate (Gen 15:2). The rabbis identify him as well as the unnamed servant Abraham later sent to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24). Importantly, the rabbis say that, in carrying out this assignment, Eliezer acted against his own interests, since he himself had a daughter whom he hoped Isaac would marry (*BerR* 59:9). Eliezer thus modeled the highest level of loyalty and virtue, carrying out his master’s will even against his own personal interests. As a reward for finding a wife for Isaac, Eliezer is said to have been awarded the kingdom of Bashan, which he ruled under the name Og (*PRE* 16). Abraham’s 318 servants mentioned in Gen 14:14 are understood as Eliezer alone whose name is equivalent to 318 (*PesRK* 8:2).

The rabbis read the designation “Damascus” (*Dammasek*) as deriving from the Hebrew words *Doleh we-Mashkeh* (“drew and passed on”). Thus they hold that Eliezer drew from his master Abraham and passed his teachings on to others (*bYom* 28b). Rabbinic texts assert that Eliezer even looked like Abraham and that, because of his loyalty, the curse that applied to all other Canaanites was lifted from him (*BerR* 60:7). But some midrashic passages are not so positive. Eliezer is identified as one of the two servants who accompanied Abraham and Isaac to Mount Moriah and who were left waiting at the foot of the mountain because they were unable to