

Mishnah and LXX as Mystery **An Example of Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Byzantine Period**

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Pesiqta Rabbati 5 (ed. Friedmann, p. 14b)

Rabbi Yehudah berabbi Shalom said: Moses requested that the Mishnah (i.e. the Oral Torah) be in writing. But the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that the nations would translate the Torah and would be reading it in Greek and would be saying, We are Israel! The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, Behold, Moses! In the future the nations will be saying, We are Israel; we are the sons of God. And Israel will be saying, We are the sons of God. And until now the scales are balanced.¹ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the nations, What is this that you are saying? That you are my sons? I do not know. But he who possesses my Mystery (מסתירין, *mistirin*), he is my son. They said to him, And what is your Mystery? He replied to them, It is the Mishnah.

Tanhuma, Va-Yera 5

For the Mishnah is the Mystery of the Holy One, blessed be He. And the Holy One, blessed be He, transmits his Mystery only to the righteous, as it says: ‘The Secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him (Ps. 25:14)’.

I Cor. 2:6-7

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God’s hidden wisdom, in a Mystery, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

Mark 4:11-12

To you has been given the Mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, I everything comes in parables; in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.

¹ מְעוּיָן = ‘balanced’. Other texts have מְצוּיָן = ‘found’

Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus super Psalmos* 2.2-3
(translated by Professor Adam Kamesar)

It had already been established by Moses previously that in every synagogue there should be seventy teachers. For this man Moses, although he had committed to writing the words of the [Old] Testament, nevertheless he communicated separately, from hidden sources, certain more secret mysteries [*mysteria*] of the law to seventy elders, who would remain as teachers after him. The Lord mentions these teachings in the Gospels, when he says, ‘The scribes and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. For this reason, do and observe everything that they tell you. But do not behave as they do (Matt. 23:2)’. Therefore [i.e., this proves that] their teachings have remained in later generations, namely, the teachings received from the very writer of the law and preserved in this office of seventy elders. Accordingly, the seventy elders, when translating these books, had acquired the higher knowledge of these hidden teachings in conformity with the Mosaic tradition, and were able to translate words and expressions which in Hebrew are ambiguous and indicate different realities with an unambiguous and non-metaphorical use of words, so as to indicate the [true] nature of the things signified. They were able to ‘control’ the polysemous aspect of the [Hebrew] words by their knowledge of the [oral] tradition. And thus it comes about that those who translated later [i.e., the *recentiores*], who [also] translated according to diverse methods, have given many a misleading translation to the Gentiles. For being ignorant of that secret tradition which originated from Moses, they rendered with uncertainty, relying only on their own notions, that which had been expressed in a polysemous fashion in Hebrew.