

DODANIM/RODANIM: THREE APPROACHES

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The Tanakh lists the offspring of the children of Noah in two places, in Genesis 10 and in I Chronicles 1. Japhet the son of Noah had seven sons. One of these was Javan, whose own four sons are named in Genesis 10:4 as *Elisha and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim*. In I Chronicles 1:7 the sons are listed as *Elisha and Tarshisha, Kittim and Rodanim*. In this article we will explore three different approaches to the question of why a son of Javan is called Dodanim in Genesis and Rodanim in Chronicles.

THE APPROACH OF MIDRASH RABBAH

In Genesis Rabbah 37:1, this discrepancy is noted and explained as teaching an important lesson:

Rabbi Simon says: "(They are called) Dodanim, since they are cousins [*bnei dodim*] of Israel, (and they are called) Rodanim, since they come and oppress [*rodim*] them." Rabbi Chanina says: "When Israel are elevated they say to them we are your cousins [*bnei dodim*], when they are low they come and oppress [*rodim*] them."

This midrash expresses the idea that the people of the nation called Dodanim/Rodanim act friendly to Israel when it suits their needs, but oppress Israel when the opportunity presents itself. This two-faced approach is exemplified by the two different names for this nation.

This midrash is repeated with slight variations in the later midrash compilations Midrash Lekach Tov,¹ Yalkut Shimoni,² and Midrash HaGadol.³ It is also quoted by Rashi in his commentary on I Chronicles 1:7 and by Hizkuni in his commentary on Genesis 10:4 as the reason for the different spellings of Dodanim/Rodanim.

Rabbi Elazar of Worms, in his commentary on Genesis 10:4, offers a slightly different interpretation that follows the general sense of the midrash. He explains: "At first they are *dodim* and judge [*danim*] truthfully (so they are called *dod-danim*), but at the end they oppress [*rodim*] and judge [*danim*] and strike their clans (so they are called *rod-danim*)." The

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Dodanim/Rodanim are here presented as two-faced, as in Midrash Rabbah, and here it seems this applies even in regard to just treatment of their own people.

According to this approach, it is not clear which of the two names is the original name of this son of Javan. Was his given name Dodanim, while the name Rodanim was written to teach the lesson of the midrash, or is the reverse true? Alternatively, this nation may have always been called both Dodanim and Rodanim, and the midrash gives an explanation for the double name.

THE APPROACH OF RADAK

The approach of Radak was mentioned in my previous article on Eliasaph ben Deuel/Reuel.⁴ In his commentary on I Chronicles 1:7, he writes that many *derashot* were made on the reason for the changing of letters in the names of people and places in different parts of the Tanakh, but the real explanation is different.

Since the *dalet* and *resh* are similar in appearance, and among the readers of the genealogies which were written in ancient times some read a *dalet* and some read a *resh*, some names were preserved for posterity in two forms with either a *dalet* or a *resh*.

Radak explains that Scripture preserved both traditions by recording these names one way in certain locations and the other way in others. He gives Dodanim/Rodanim as an example of this situation. Other examples include the name of the father of the leader of the tribe of Gad, who is called Deuel in Numbers 1:14, 7:42, 7:47 and 10:20, but is called Reuel in Numbers 2:14, and the city of Rivlah, mentioned many times in II Kings and Jeremiah,⁵ which is called Divlah in Ezekiel 6:14. Radak makes the same point in his commentary on Ezekiel 6:14.

Abraham Ibn-Ezra also gives Dodanim/Rodanim and Deuel/Reuel as examples of words with interchanged letters due to the similarity of the appearance of the letters *dalet* and *resh*.^{6,7} Interestingly, Rashi also notes Dodanim as an example of interchanged letters in his commentary on Job 15:24, although he quotes the interpretation of Genesis Rabbah in his commentary on I Chronicles.⁸ Radak further explains the issue of Dodanim/Rodanim in his commentary on Genesis 10:4. As opposed to Deuel/Reuel where both versions are found in the Torah, and Rivlah/Divlah,

where both versions are found in the Prophets, here the Torah uses the spelling Dodanim, whereas in Writings the spelling Rodanim is used. To Radak this indicates that the accurate spelling is the one recorded by Moses, which is Dodanim. Radak explains that Moses, through *ruach hakodesh*, uses the term Dodanim. Later, Ezra, when writing I Chronicles, uses the term Rodanim to inform his contemporaries that the nation that they currently refer to as Rodanim is the same nation that is called Dodanim in the Torah.

This approach is also taken by Malbim, who writes that by the time of I Chronicles the name of this nation was changed from Dodanim to Rodanim, and so it was written with its contemporary spelling.⁹

Based on this, we can say that according to Radak the original name of this nation was Dodanim. This correct spelling was used in the Torah. Over time, the "readers of the genealogies" confused the letters *dalet* and *resh*, so that the nation became known both as Dodanim and Rodanim. Ezra used the Rodanim spelling in I Chronicles to show that this nation is the same nation called Dodanim in the Torah.

THE APPROACH OF SHADAL

Shadal (Shmuel David Luzzatto) takes a different approach to Dodanim/Rodanim, and to the whole issue of *dalet/resh* interchanges in general. In his commentary on Genesis 10:4, he explains that the real name of this nation is neither Dodanim nor Rodanim, but in fact Dordanim, written with both a *dalet* and a *resh*. He similarly states that the real name of the father of Eliasaph in Numbers was neither Deuel or Reuel, but Dreuel. Shadal explains that it was difficult to pronounce these names with both a *dalet* and a *resh*. "In order to make it easier to pronounce [literally, *lehakel al halashon*, to make it easier on the tongue] they would say Dodanim or Rodanim."

The approach of Shadal is the explanation offered in the Da'at Mikra commentary published by Mossad HaRav Kook, in both the commentary on Genesis and on I Chronicles.

Based on this approach, we can say that even in the times of the Torah people would call the Dordanim either Dodanim or Rodanim for the sake of easy pronunciation, even though neither of these names is accurate. Shadal in fact identifies the Dordanim with the city of Dardania. This is one of the traditional identifications of the Dodanim/Rodanim, found in the Jerusalem Talmud,¹⁰ Genesis Rabbah 37:1, and in Targum Jonathan to I Chronicles 1:7.

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It is interesting to note that the approaches of Midrash Rabbah and Shadal meet when it comes to identifying the nationality of the Dodanim/Rodanim. Shadal writes that the real name of this nation is Dordanim, placed in Dardania. This is the same identification as in Midrash Rabbah 37:1. Shadal further explains that this Dardania is to be identified with Troy. In Greek legend Dardanus was the mythical founder of Dardania on the Hellesport and the royal house of Troy. The Trojans were sometimes called Dardani. Additionally, Dardanus was considered the ancestor of the Romans.¹¹ Tosafot explain that it is the Romans who, in the words of Midrash Rabbah "are cousins [*inei dodim*] of Israel," yet "they come and oppress them."¹² In a remarkable way we have here a confluence of the Midrash and Greek mythology, both identifying the Romans as descendants of Dardanus.

We have seen three different approaches to the problem of the two spellings of Dodanim/Rodanim. Midrash Rabbah gives a homiletic interpretation, Radak gives a graphological interpretation, and Shadal gives a phonological interpretation. Taken together, we see a wide spectrum of approaches, all grounded in rabbinic tradition.

NOTES

1. Midrash Lekach Tov, Genesis 10:4.
2. Yalkut Shimoni, Parshat Noah, Remez 61 and I Chronicles, Remez 1073.
3. Midrash HaGadol, Genesis 10:4.
4. "Eliasaph ben-Deuel/Reuel: A Rabbinic Interpretation," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* XXXIII:3 (131).
5. See for example II Kings 25:6 and 20 and Jeremiah 39:5 and 52:9 and 26.
6. Ibn Ezra, Kohelet 5:1.
7. See my article Eliasaph ben Deuel/Reuel for a full treatment of the approach of Rabbi Elazar of Worms and Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein to the idea of the interchanging of the letters *dalet* and *resh*.
8. Note also that Rashi does not list Deuel/Reuel, an inter-Torah letter exchange, as an example of an interchanged *dalet* and *resh*.
9. Commentary of Malbim on I Chronicles 1:7.
10. Megillah, 1:9.
11. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Dardanus"; *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, "Dardanus."
12. Tosafot HaShalem, Genesis 10:4.