

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE: 1 COR 15:52

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Commentators have not expressed much interest in Paul’s expression, ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ (“in the blink of an eye”). Some mention a parallel in Test Ab 4:5.¹ Rarer, however, is a reference to Paul Billerbeck’s citation of rabbinic analogies.² David Daube and Allen Kerkeslager have both examined the expression at some length.³ Carl Siegfried apparently was the first to draw attention to the rabbinical expression that corresponds closely to that of Paul: הָרַף עֵין (“the blink of an eye”).⁴ Daube refers to several texts with the expression, and Kerkeslager lists more occurrences of הָרַף עֵין in rabbinic texts—making good use of the Bar Ilan Responsa database—but is more interested in attempting to establish that 1 Cor 15:51–52a was derived from an earlier Greek liturgical tradition that was itself based on a Hebrew

1. See, e.g., Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 4:373n1863; Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 367; and Zeller, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 520n396. Zuntz (*Text of the Epistles*, 39), Kerkeslager (“Evidence,” 69) and Allison (*Testament*, 138) believe that an occurrence of the Greek phrase in the *Hygromanteia of Solomon* is “independent” of Paul. But that thesis is almost certainly incorrect. See the discussion below in footnote 3.

2. See Str-B 2:156 on Luke 4:5 ἐν στίγμῃ χρόνου. BAGD (s.v. ῥιπή) cites Str-B 2:156), and Conzelmann (*First Corinthians*, 297n41) cites BAGD.

3. Daube, *Sudden in the Scriptures*, 76–79 (cited by Schrage, Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 4:373n1863). See also Kerkeslager, “Evidence,” who does not refer to Daube’s investigation.

4. See Siegfried, *Analecta rabbinica*, 1–18 (9), whose citation is *genus dicendi Talmudicum Berach 2b* (“a Talmudic manner of speaking—presumably intending *b. Ber.* 2b”). Siegfried’s contribution is noted by Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. הָרַף.

source. He argues that the Hebrew phrase has two basic usages: (1) to express the “brevity or immediacy of an action”; or (2) to express the “supernatural speed of an action by God or an angel, especially in traversing a great distance.”⁵ Raymond F. Collins suggests that the “phrase is drawn from popular parlance.”⁶ Siegfried, Daube, and Kerkeslager have all demonstrated that the phrase is a rabbinic form of speech. Against Kerkeslager, I will argue that the phrase has one primary reference—namely, an “instantaneous moment” signified by the blink of an eye—and that it is simply used in a variety of contexts, some of which describe the speed of divine action, in its approximately 900 appearances in the database. The concept of the blink of an eye as a reference to a moment in time apparently emerged in the speech of Greek, Hebrew, and (perhaps) Aramaic speaking Jews in the years before the Common Era or in Paul’s time. The phrase הֵרָף עֵין is (curiously) absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Mishna, and the Tosefta. Equivalent phrases appear in later Samaritan Aramaic and Mandaic.⁷ Various signemes for “blinking one’s eyes” occur in Hellenistic Jewish texts before Paul that refer to something in addition to a physical gesture.⁸ Those uses are not demonstrably significant precursors of Paul’s phrase in 15:52.

5. Kerkeslager, “Evidence,” 70–71. For the first usage—as the equivalent of רגע “moment”—he refers to *y. Ber.* 1.1; *Exod Rab* 45; *Lam Rab* 2; *Midr Sam* 3 (Buber, ed.); “brevity of immediacy of an action” in *Pesiq Rab* (Supplement 1) 2’ (*Ish Shalom*, ed.); *b. Ber.* 2b; *b. Shab.* 34b; *Mek Shab* 1 to *Exod* 31:14; *Cant Rab* (Vilna, ed.) 5; *Pesiq Rab Kah* 24 (Mandelbaum, ed.); *Midr Rab Qoh* 11’. For divine action, he refers to *Mek Pisha* 14 to *Exod* 12:37, 41–42; *Gen Rab* 59; 77; *Exod Rab* 45; *Cant Rab* 3 (Vilna, ed.); *Midr Cant Zut* 8 (Buber, ed.); *Midr Tanchuma* 9 (Warsaw, ed.); *Midr Pss* to *Ps* 90; *Otsar Midrashim* 1, 253, 474 (Eisenstein, ed.). He actually quotes none of these texts. For the references, see “Online Responsa Project.”

6. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 580.

7. One can check this statement with the following: (1) Abegg et al., *Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance*; (2) Accordance software for the Dead Sea Scrolls and Targumim (see “Dead Sea Scrolls Resources” and “Targums”); (3) the Bar Ilan Torah database (responsa.co.il); and (4) the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (cal.huc.edu).

8. I will make use of this term from semantics. It is “defined as a meaningful unit on the abstraction level of *langue* systems,” for which see Heger, “Text Coherence,” 44. *Langue* is the level of an entire language. The level of *langue* includes

The structure of the argument below is straightforward:

- (1) Paul's phrase can only mean "a moment in time" in the context, and it is patently obvious that there were Jews in the church in Corinth.
- (2) ῥιπή is not used frequently in Classical Greek.
- (3) There are no extant Classical or Hellenistic uses of Paul's phrase to signify a moment in time. Reasons why this is not a fatal argument from silence will be outlined below.
- (4) Blinking one's eyes in Classical and Hellenistic Greek could have a variety of meanings.
- (5) Of three possible independent use of Paul's phrase, only Test Ab 4:5 is valid. Greek Jewish texts such as 1 Cor 15:52 and Test Ab 4:5 indicate that in the first century and shortly thereafter the phrase could signify a brief moment in time.
- (6) Later rabbinic texts in Hebrew warrant the view that the phrase is of Jewish coinage.
- (7) Later texts in Aramaic (both Samaritan and Mandaic) also are evidence of signemes in which the blink of an eye mean brief moments in time.

Two conclusions are possible. First, one might conclude that the signeme was developed independently by the authors of four texts or groups of texts without a common source: 1 Cor 15:52; Test Ab 4:5, rabbinic texts, and Samaritan/Mandaic Aramaic texts. Or, and far more probably, one can and should conclude that the signeme developed in the Greek and Hebrew (and perhaps Aramaic) Jewish community at least during Paul's time if not before.

multiple languages. Cuarón (*Connotation and Meaning*) writes, "For example, the synonyms *soixante-dix/septante* refer, on the language plane, are two signemes that correspond to one noeme '70' and one class of denotata" (139). A noeme (a unit of meaning that exists in more than one language) is a "concept defined intensionally," and a "*class of denotata*" is a "class defined extensionally that belongs to a noeme" (151). For example, the various signemes for "blink of an eyebrow" have a number of meanings in different languages (and even in the same language), but some refer to the *class* of instantaneous moments in time. A signeme can be defined also as "a sign viewed from both its material aspect and its content"; for this concept, see Cook, *Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark*, 91, 351.

*Premise One: The Meaning of the Signeme and
Jewish Christians in Corinth*

At the outset, one should establish several non-controversial points. There is no significant alternative interpretation of Paul's phrase, ἐν ῥίπῃ ὀφθαλμοῦ, other than a reference to a brief moment of time. Uses of similar expressions in the Hebrew Bible and LXX can signify derision, arrogance, or even a wanton gaze. But none of those possibilities are remotely relevant for 1 Cor 15:52 which in context can mean nothing other than a brief moment of time. This is also warranted by the immediately preceding phrase ἐν ἀτόμῳ. Several examples in Aristotle illustrate the significance of that phrase. He writes, οὐχ οἷόν τε εἰς ἀτόμους χρόνους διαιρεῖσθαι τὸν χρόνον ("It is not possible to divide time into indivisible units of time").⁹ Compare this text in Aristotle: φανερόν οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὸ ἐφθαρμένον καὶ τὸ γεγονὸς ἐν ἀτόμῳ τὸ μὲν ἐφθάρται τὸ δὲ γέγονεν ("It is also evident, therefore, that that in which that which has ceased to be has ceased to be and that in which that has come to be has come to be are indivisible [or "in an indivisible moment/time"]").¹⁰ The burden is on any interpreter who wishes to claim that Paul's phrase, ἐν ῥίπῃ ὀφθαλμοῦ, had any significance other than a brief moment in time. The other point to be established at the outset is that it is a demonstrable fact that there were Jews in the community in Corinth in addition to former pagans, even if pagan Christians (1 Cor 12:2; 8:10; 10:27) outnumbered Jewish Christians (1 Cor 7:18; 10:32; 12:13). And the Crispus of 1 Cor 1:14 may be identical with the synagogue ruler of Acts 18:8.¹¹ In addition, the large number of references to the LXX in the letter indicate that Jewish and gentile Christians in Paul's community were familiar with the Scriptures of the synagogue. One can assume that such gentiles (God-fearers) understood Jewish expressions.

9. Aristotle, *Phys.* 8.8 (263b.27–28).

10. Aristotle, *Phys.* 5.5 (236a.5–7) (translation of Barnes, ed., *Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1:398); cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, 112 ("It is also evident, then, that the time in which what has passed away has passed away or in which what has come to be has come to be is indivisible").

11. For these arguments, see Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:31–32 ("7.18 would be hardly meaningful if there were not Jewish Christians such as Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos, and the Cephas party was hardly recruited from Gentile Christians").

Premise Two: ῥιπή and ῥοπή in Classical and Hellenistic Greek

Paul's word for the "blink" (ῥιπή) of an eye is fairly rare in Classical Greek and only occurs about sixty-seven times before the use in First Corinthians, none of which signify the blink of an eye.¹² Some scribes were more comfortable with ῥοπή which could mean the "turn of a scale," "downward momentum," and in an important sense, it could refer to a "decisive moment."¹³ Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* includes "motion" and "any slight movement" as optional senses of ῥοπή.¹⁴ For example, in 3 Macc 5:49, the Judeans thought that a charge of elephants "was the very last moment of their lives" (ὑστάτην βίου ῥοπήν αὐτοῖς ἐκείνην δόξαντες εἶναι).¹⁵ ῥοπή does occur with ὀφθαλμοῦ in patristic texts.¹⁶

12. Using the TLL (*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* [stephanus.tlg.uci.edu]) one can verify this statistic. "Rapid movement, rush" (Montanari, ed., *Brill Dictionary*, s.v. ῥιπή). Cf. Euripides (*Iph. Taur.* 885) has ποδῶν ῥιπαῖ ("rush of feet").

13. P46, D*, F, G, 0243, 6, 1739. Zuntz's (*Text of the Epistles*, 37–39) citation (based on Tischendorf's *Novum Testamentum Graece* [8th ed.]) of Gregory of Nyssa as a witness for this reading—which he noted he could not check—should be corrected by the superior edition of *In sanctum pascha* (GNO 9/1:252), which replaces the inferior reading of PG 46:660: ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ τελεσθήσεται ἡ ἀνάστασις (ῥιπή δὲ ὀφθαλμοῦ ἐπίμυσις βλεφάρων ἐστὶ) ("the resurrection will be completed in the blink of an eye [the blink of an eye is the closing of the eyelids]"). Cf. LSJ 1575.

14. Lampe, ed., *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1218 (section 3a).

15. Cf. a similar use in Wis 18:12 πρὸς μίαν ῥοπήν ἡ ἐντιμότερα γένεσις αὐτῶν διέφθαρτο ("in one instant their most valued offspring was destroyed").

16. There are approximately 200 uses of ῥοπή prior to the New Testament (but not paired with ὀφθαλμοῦ). Gregory of Nyssa, *Comm. not.* (see GNO 3/1:24) uses ῥοπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ: οὔτε τελευτᾷ ποτε ἐν τῶν τριῶν τούτων προσώπων καὶ ὡσεὶ ῥοπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ ("neither of these three persons [i.e., the trinity] dies even for as much as an eye[lid]'s motion"). Cf. the TLG for other patristic instances of ῥοπή ὀφθαλμοῦ.

*Premise Three: No Extant Classical or Hellenistic Uses
of Paul's Signeme (with Any Meaning)*

There are good warrants for believing that Paul's signeme is of Jewish coinage, since it appears in no extant non-Jewish Greek texts prior to Paul.¹⁷ Although this is an argument from silence, and although the phrase could have appeared in texts that have perished, it is clear that there were many ways in Classical and Hellenistic Greek of expressing an instantaneous moment in time. Options included *στιγμὴ χρόνου* ("a point/moment of time");¹⁸ *ἐν ἀκαρεῖ χρόνῳ* ("in a hair's breadth of time");¹⁹ and *ἐν ἀτόμῳ* ("in an indivisible moment of time").²⁰ In addition, there were many signemes for adverbs such as "suddenly" or "instantly."²¹ Thus, a considerable number of synonymous expressions were in common use, and that makes the non-appearance of *ρίπη ὀφθαλμοῦ* before Paul all the more remarkable. One wonders why that phrase is missing in the texts if it belonged to a normal Greek vocabulary. It is still an argument from silence, but it is an argument from silence that is not fatal, because of the massive data on the TLG and the existence of so many expressions for a "moment" or "suddenly." Nevertheless, one cannot absolutely rule out the possibility that *ρίπη ὀφθαλμοῦ* existed prior to Paul in (pagan) Classical or Hellenistic Greek usage.

17. The TLG and the papyri.info databases have no occurrences of the signeme in pagan texts. Apparently, no Classical Latin text used the concept of blinking eyes to refer to time. I thank Robert Kaster for this point (personal communication on June 3, 2023). Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.10.14 (cf. *Res.* 42.1) has *in oculi momentaneo motu* ("in an instantaneous movement of the eye"), a translation that differs from the Itala's and the Vulgate's *in ictu oculi*. MS 77 (G 012) has *ictu vel nudu oculi* ("a blink or nod of the eye"). See Houghton et al., *Principal Pauline Epistles*, 293.

18. Pseudo-Plutarch, *Lib. ed.* 13b.

19. Aristophanes, *Plut.* 244; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 3.33.3; 3.40.6.

20. Aristotle, *Phys.* 5.5 (236a.5–7).

21. Cf. Woodhouse, *English–Greek Dictionary*, s.v. "instantly"; "suddenly"; "quickly"; and "moment." Güthling, *Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *Augenblick* and *augenblicklich* (46); *Moment* and *momentan* (338); and *plötzlich* (376).

Premise Four: Blinking One's Eyes in Classical and Hellenistic Greek

Although it only occurs approximately twenty-five times before the New Testament period, *σκαρδαμύσσω* refers to the physical act of blinking one's eyes, but there is no reference to time.²² The verb *ἐπιλλίζω* could be used in contexts where winking was a sign; for example, a beggar taunts Odysseus, οὐκ αἶεις ὅτι δὴ μοι ἐπιλλίζουσιν ἅπαντες (“Do you not perceive that all are winking at me?”)—that is, the suitors are signaling to the beggar that he should drive the unrecognized Odysseus from his home.²³

A verbal form of “wink with one's eyes” (*διανεύοντες ὀφθαλμοῖς*) appears in several LXX texts where the signeme refers to derision but not an instant in time.²⁴ The use in Sir 27:22, *διανεύων ὀφθαλμῷ τεκταίνει κακά* (“one who winks an eye devises evil things” [New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)])—which does not exist in the Hebrew MSS—also indicates derision. In Isa 3:16, the construction, *ἐν νεύμασιν ὀφθαλμῶν* (“with winks of their eyes”), apparently refers to arrogance or the women's wanton nature: *τάδε λέγει κύριος Ἄνθ' ὧν ὑψώθησαν αἱ θυγατέρες Σιών καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν ὑψηλῷ τραχήλῳ καὶ ἐν νεύμασιν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ τῇ πορείᾳ τῶν ποδῶν ἅμα σύρουσαι τοὺς χιτῶνας καὶ τοῖς ποσὶν ἅμα παίζουσαι* (“This is what the Lord says: Because the daughters of Sion were lifted up and walked with an uplifted neck and with a wink of the eyes, all the while sweeping their tunics in the gait of their feet, all the while being playful with their feet” [NETS]).²⁵ The signeme does not mean a moment in time,

22. See, e.g., Pseudo-Aristotle, *Physiogn.* 808a.1 (τὰ μὲν γὰρ ταχέως σκαρδαμύττοντα τῶν ὀμμάτων . . . (“for rapid instances of blinking of the eyes . . .”); Hippocrates, *Int.* 43.

23. Homer, *Od.* 18.11. Cf. LSJ 644 for other examples; see Apollonius, *Lexicon Homericum*, s.v. *ἐπιλλίζουσι* (*ἐπιλλίζειν* ἐστὶν τὸ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπικατακλᾶν, where *ἐπιλλίζειν* means closing the eyes).

24. Ps 34:19 LXX (35:19 MT [יִקְרְצוּ עֵין]; Tg. Teh. 35:19 [רַמְזִין בְּעִינְהוֹן]; Peshitta ܬܪܡܝܢ ܒܥܝܢܐܝܢܐ). Cf. Prov 10:10 LXX ὁ ἐννεύων ὀφθαλμοῖς (MT קָרָץ עֵין; Tg. Mish. ܕܪܡܝܢ ܒܥܝܢܐܝܢܐ; Peshitta ܕܪܡܝܢ ܒܥܝܢܐܝܢܐ); Prov 6:13 LXX ὁ . . . ἐννεύει ὀφθαλμῷ (MT קָרָץ ܒܥܝܢܐܝܢܐ; Tg. Mish. ܕܪܡܝܢ ܒܥܝܢܐܝܢܐ; Peshitta ܕܪܡܝܢ ܒܥܝܢܐܝܢܐ [all referring to malicious gestures signaled by winking eyes]).

25. Kraus and Karrer, eds., *Septuaginta Deutsch*, 1234, who have *klimpernden Augen* (“blinking coquettishly”). Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Isaiah 3:16 has this equivalent: *אִזְלוּ מְרִימֵן צוּאָר וּמִסְרַבְקֵן עֵינֵין* (“they went lifting their neck[s] and winking their eyes”). Cf. A. Sperber, *Bible in Aramaic*, 7.

however. A use in Joseph and Aseneth does not refer to time either, but to a beckoning gesture: καὶ ἐξέτεινε τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἐκάλεσε τὴν Ἀσενεθ τῷ νεύματι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ (“And Joseph stretched out his hands and called Aseneth by a wink of his eyes”).²⁶ In Aristeas’s letter, the word apparently refers to a moment, in a description of the various hidden orifices at the base of the altar through which sacrificial blood flows: ὡς ῥοπῇ καὶ νεύματι πάντα καθαρίζεσθαι τὰ συναγόμενα παμπληθῆ τῶν θυμάτων αἵματα (“so that in a moment and a wink [or “nod”] all the blood that accumulates from the sheer number of victims can be washed away”).²⁷ If νεῦμα in that sentence signifies a motion of the eyes and not a nod of the head, then it is close to Paul’s usage because it also refers to a nearly instantaneous moment. One may—if that supposition is correct—assume that some Jews in Alexandria were familiar with the notion of blinking one’s eyes as a means of referring to a moment of time although the use in Aristeas is not a precise parallel with Paul’s expression.²⁸

*Premise Five: Three Later Uses of ῥιπή ὀφθαλμοῦ
Possibly Independent of Paul*

After Paul, Christian authors adopted ῥιπή ὀφθαλμοῦ. In a fairly contemporaneous apocalyptic text from the first or second century CE, the archangel Michael ascends to heaven in the blink of an eye (καὶ ἀνῆλθεν εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ).²⁹ Dale C. Allison argues that the “external evidence” warrants the conclusion that some version of the Testament of Abraham “was in circulation by the third century,” although he believes that the long recension is “early Byzantine.”³⁰ However, its “ancestor” may have had “a much earlier date.” Francis Schmidt ascribes a much earlier

26. Jos Asen 19:10 (Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 233).

27. Ep Arist 90 (SC 89:147–49); I owe this reference to Zuntz, *Text of the Epistles*, 38).

28. SC 89:72–77 discusses the Alexandrian context of the letter. For an example of the word used for the nod of a head, cf. Montanari, ed., *Brill Dictionary*, s.v. ῥιπή. Longus, *Daph. et Chloe* 3.15.4 (Πρότερον . . . ἐκ νευμάτων καὶ γέλωτος συνεβάλλετο, “previously she had understood this from nods and smiles” [translation by Montanari]). The same meaning occurs in Xenophon, *Anab.* 5.8.20.

29. Test Ab 4:5. Cf. Schmidt, *Le Testament grec d’Abraham*, 106.

30. Allison, *Testament*, 138.

date to the long recension.³¹ Whether the phrase in Test Abr 4:5 is Jewish or instead is the addition of a scribe is a matter of some difficulty.³² Since Schmidt includes no MSS (or versions) in the apparatus of his edition that do not have the expression and given the later rabbinic evidence one may justifiably assume that it is authentic.

A far more questionable text, however, is a passage in a late medieval composition, entitled the *Hygromanteia of Solomon*. Günther Zuntz mentioned the signeme's presence in Joseph Heeg's edition of Codex Monacensis Graecus 70 and argued, "The character of the writing precludes the assumption that the expression comes from 1 Cor. xv 52."³³ He goes even further in his description of the Hermetic author's usage: "It is an independent testimony demonstrating that it belongs to popular Greek."³⁴ Zuntz failed to notice that the signeme simply derived from the usage of Byzantine (Christian) Greek—and that one easily sees evidence of such Greek elsewhere in the MS and in other MSS of the *Hygromanteia*. In a description of the "Sun's plant" that the treatise names "helioscope" (τὸ βότανον τοῦ Ἡλίου καλεῖται ἡλιοσκόπος), the author includes this recipe:

31. Allison, *Testament*, 38, 40, who believes that the long recension and short recension developed in parallel from a common (Jewish) archetype (see 12–27). See also the conclusion of Schmidt, "Two Recensions," 80: "the T Abr was very likely written in the second half of the first century A.D.; it is possible that he original was composed in a Semitic language; in this case it would then have been translated into Greek, forming the short recension. MS E and the Slavonic version are currently the best witnesses of this state of the tradition. It was further reworked in a Jewish community of lower Egypt in the second, or indeed at the beginning of the third century, forming the long recension"; he also writes that there are "about ten words attested only since the Christian period in the MSS edited by James, the tradition represented by E contains only four" (67); Turner, "Testament of Abraham: A Study," 49–54; "Testament of Abraham: Problems."

32. Kerkeslager ("Evidence," 69) mentions these options: "Jewish author, a recensional editor of uncertain identity, or a Byzantine Christian editor." Allison (*Testament*, 138) considers the possibility of Paul's influence but discounts it due to the rabbinic evidence.

33. Zuntz, *Text of the Epistles*, 39 (with reference to Heeg, ed., *Catalogus*, 163 [line 36 (252 verso in the MS)]). Cf. The translations of the MSS of the treatise by Marathakis, *Magical Treatise*, who unfortunately only presents translations and does not edit the MSS.

34. Zuntz, *Text of the Epistles*, 39.

Put its flowers and fruit within the skin of an eagle and carry them upon you. If there is treasure somewhere it will be revealed at once in the blink of an eye

καὶ τὰ ἄνθη καὶ τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ βάλε εἰς δέρμα ἀετοῦ καὶ βάσταζε μετὰ σοῦ. καὶ ἔνθα ἔνι θησαυρός, παραυτίκα ἀνεωχθήσεται, ὡς ἐν ῥίπῃ ὀφθαλμοῦ.³⁵

Ioannis Marathakis dates the text to the thirteenth or fourteenth century.³⁶ The MS (as do the other MSS of the *Hygromanteia*) includes clear indicators of Christian (i.e., Byzantine) Greek. Sunday is the “Lord’s day”: τῇ κυριακῇ ἄγγελοι καὶ δαίμονες (“the angels and demons [belonging to] the Lord’s day/Sunday”).³⁷ It is not impossible that a Jewish author would use such contemporary language for Sunday, but it seems more likely that it is simply the language of Byzantium. The angel and demon of the first hour of Wednesday (superscript: τῆς τετάρτης ἄγγελοι καὶ δαίμονες [Wednesday’s angels and demons]) are Ὀυριήλ (“Ouriel”) and Λουτζιφέρ (“Loutzipher”): ὥρα α’ Ἄγγελος Ὀυριήλ δαίμων Λουτζιφέρ (“the first hour: the angel Ouriel and the demon Loutzipher”).³⁸ “Lucifer” is certainly an example of Christian language—that is, “Lucifer” is not an element of Jewish demonology. Many other MSS of the *Hygromanteia* include mentions of Christ or other

35. Heeg, ed., *Catalogus*, 163 (lines 34–36) (translation from Marathakis, *Magical Treatise*, 249).

36. The names of the days are ecclesiastical (i.e., after Constantine). Cf. Marathakis, *Magical Treatise*, 37–38. The “chief demon of Wednesday” is Lucifer, transliterated as *Loutzipher* or *Loutzēpher*, which he argues is an “Italian pronunciation”; in addition, a “Greek of the early middle ages would not have used” *Loutzipher* for “Satan” (75). Instead, they would have used ἑωσφόρος. Lampe, ed. (*Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 590 [section 2c]) does give examples of ἑωσφόρος used for the “devil.” Athanasius and others used Λουκίφερ as a proper name for various individuals in the church (see, e.g., *Tomus ad Antiochenos* [PG 26:808]). See the TLG where there are approximately 108 usages of that transliteration up until the eighteenth century. Robert Kaster (personal communication on June 12, 2023) writes that Marathakis’s argument for an Italian pronunciation “seems mistaken”; the “Italian” cluster /tsi/ is derived from Latin *-ti-*, not *-ci-* (i.e., /ki/) (e.g., *natio-* [Latin] to *nazio-* [Italian; as in *nazionale*]; cf. *Cicero* ([kikero], Latin) to *Cicerone* ([tʃitʃerone], Italian).

37. Heeg, ed., *Catalogus*, 149 (line 34) (243 verso).

38. Heeg, ed., *Catalogus*, 151 (lines 34–35) (244 verso).

Christian imagery.³⁹ The language of the Hermetic/magical treatise is simply that of a good Byzantine Greek writer who uses the Christian name for Sunday and a late Christian transcription for the dawn star. The author clearly did not have to derive ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ straight from Paul. It was present in Byzantine Greek, as even the briefest glance at the TLG shows (180 occurrences, including one from a nineteenth-century hagiographer).

A nearly equally challenging example is from the old scholia to Pindar. The scholiast describes the thirteenth colon of the first Olympian Ode as a “proceleusmatic dimeter catalectic [two feet of four short syllables each, in which the last is cut off—or left neutral]” (τὸ γ’ προκελευσματικὸν δίμετρον καταληκτικόν). He comments, after quoting various illustrative phrases from the ode, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις τὸ, θεὸς ἐπίτροπος ἔων, διὰ τὴν καὶ ὑπὲρ ῥιπὴν ὀφθαλμοῦ ὀξυκινήσιαν τοῦ θείου (“Finally, ‘God is a guardian’ [*Ol.* 1.106], because of the quick motion of the divinity that is greater than the blink of an eye”).⁴⁰ Eleanor Dickey has an important thesis about these scholia: “There is a large body of old metrical scholia, compiled probably in the fifth century AD and based on a metrical analysis of the Odes written in the second century AD.”⁴¹ Robert Fowler comments on the scholiast’s remark about the speed of god the guardian:

I do not recall offhand a passage in which the speediness of gods is compared to the blink of an eye in older pagan literature. Their speed is compared rather to that of thought, e.g. *Iliad* 15.80–83 . . . , *Hom. Hymn. Apollo* 186–188, 448. The speediness of thought has already been cited by our scholiast at line eleven, so the thought is close to hand—if he then reaches instead for the “blink of an eye,” from a passage in which the context is hardly the same, then I would say yes, the

39. Marathakis (*Magical Treatise*, 18) remarks that the scribe of Bononiensis Univers. 3632 may have been a “Christianized Jew.” Cf. a phrase from the Lord’s Prayer in several MSS (53–54); Pontius Pilate as demon (73); virgin wax for a church (89); and mentions of Christ (118, 124, 126, 179, 200, 203, 213, 284, etc.).

40. See Drachmann, ed., *Scholia Vetera*, 14. I thank Jerker Blomqvist for his comments on this text (personal communication, June 12, 2023).

41. Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 38, who notes that modern scholars do not accept the scholiast’s analysis of Pindar’s meter. See also Lefkowitz, “Pindar Scholia.”

odds are very high that this is a Christian writer who has St. Paul in mind.⁴²

Consequently, this is probably not a pagan (non-Christian) usage of ῥίπην ὁφθαλμοῦ. The only significant candidate, consequently, for a usage of the signeme that is independent of Paul is Test Ab 4:5. This supports that conclusion that the phrase was current in the Jewish community in the first and second century of the imperial era.

Premise Six: The Blink of an Eye as an Instant of Time in Rabbinic Judaism

It is undeniable that, at some point, signemes equivalent to Paul's developed in Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking Judaism. Since Paul assumed his audience in Corinth could easily understand him, it is fair to assume that his expression was current before him in the Jewish community unless he invented it (a possibility I will return to in the conclusion). It is strange that equivalent signemes are absent in intertestamental literature, the extant Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Mishna.⁴³ One of the earliest *manuscripts* to actually include the Hebrew הרף עין is a ninth- or tenth-century MS of the Eighteen Benedictions (the *'amidah*) from the Taylor Schechter collection (T-S K27.33b). In that MS, the text of the second Benediction is as follows:⁴⁴

42. Personal communication on June 13, 2023. Drachmann, ed., *Scholia Vetera*, 14 (lines 10–11) has δὲ τὸ τοῦ σοῦς ὁξυαλνῆτον (“because it is faster than thought”).

43. Kerkeslager, “Evidence,” 70, who briefly refers to a verbal construction (הרופפת בעיניה) in *t. Hul.* 2.12. The full text (Zuckerman, *Tosephta*, 502) is ר"א ברבי יוסי אומר משמו הרופפת בעיניה רעי בשעת שחיטה כשרה (“Rabbi Eliezer said, in the name of Rabbi Yose, ‘If it blinks its eyes [at the time of slaughter] or if excrement is found at the hour of slaughter, it is ritually valid’”). Cf. Jastrow, comp., *Dictionary*, s.v. רפף (cf. *b. Hul.* 38b ולא כשכש אלא זנבו רפף) (“and a bird, even if it fluttered only its wing or wagged only its tail, that is a convulsion [and sign of life]”; translation from “Chullin 38b”). There is a variant reading listed in the *Arukh Completum* for אלא גפו, namely, אלא עינו (“only its eye”). Cf. ben Jehiel, *Plenus Aruch*, 294 (s.v. רפרף). These uses do not refer to instantaneous moments.

44. In the current collection of digital images of T-S K27.33b in the library, the bifolium is image seven, four recto (see “Liturgy”). Kerkeslager (“Evidence,” 73–77) astutely refers to this text.



Figure 1. T-S K27.33b, bifolium P4

(Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)

You are powerful, humbling the proud; strong, and judging the violent; alive forever, raising the dead; making wind blow and dew fall; sustaining the living, reviving the dead. Like the blink of an eye, make our salvation sprout. Blessed are you Lord, reviving the dead.⁴⁵

אתא גבור משפיל גאים חזק ומדין עריצים חי עולמים מקים מתים משיב הרוח ומוריד הטל מכלכל חיים מחיה המתים כהרף עין ישועה לנו תצמיח ברוך אתא "מחיה המתים"

Uri Ehrlich and Ruth Langer argue that the phrase *כהרף עין ישועה לנו תצמיח* ("like the blink of an eye, make our salvation sprout") was added to the benediction, based on the other Genizah evidence.⁴⁶ In context, the words comprise part of a petition for speedy divine salvation and follow a description of God's ability to resurrect the dead. Assuming Ehrlich and Langer have made their case that the phrase is a later addition, Kerkeslager's argument that a text such as the *'amidah* could have been the ultimate source of 1 Cor 15:51–52a is rendered moot.⁴⁷ In addition, the *'amidah* does not in-

45. Transcription and translation (slightly modified) are from Instone-Brewer, "Eighteen Benedictions," 29. See the more complete investigations in Ehrlich and Langer, "Earliest Texts," 73–74 (a table summarizing the *birkat ha minim* in 86 MSS from the Geniza); cf. also Langer, *Cursing the Christians?* 187.

46. Ehrlich and Langer, "Earliest Texts," 74n40. Cf. Ehrlich, "Complete Weekday Amidah," 19n13.

47. Kerkeslager, "Evidence," 73–77.

clude any emphasis on transformation, which is the key image in those verses.

The first examples of the signeme on the Bar Ilan Responsa database are from the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael. That midrash's claim to be a Tannaitic composition has recently been called into question, however. H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger conclude, "The date of the final redaction (apart from interpolations, textual corruptions, etc.) is hereby left entirely in limbo . . . It is probably no longer possible to speak consistently of a Tannaitic midrash." However, they ultimately date the "final redaction" to "the second half of the third century."⁴⁸ In Mekhilta, the Hebrew equivalent of Paul's signeme appears several times. The midrash asserts that the distance from Rameses to Succoth is 160 miles and then states, "In the blink of an eye did the children of Israel travel from Rameses to Succoth" (כהרף עין) (נסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס לסכות).⁴⁹ The context indicates that God gave them the ability to do that instantaneously. After mentioning the 430 years of Exod 12:41, the interpretation linking the events to the fifteenth of Nisan is as follows: "This tells that as soon as the designated time came, God [Existence] did not delay them for the blinking of an eye" (מגיד שמכיון שהגיע הקץ) (לא עכבן המקום כהרף עין).⁵⁰ That text does not refer to a supernatural action but merely to a length of time. The phrase occurs in a debate about the profanation of the Sabbath in which Rabbi Yehuda ben Betheira says,⁵¹

48. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 254–55.

49. Mek. Pisha 1.14 (Lauterbach, trans. and ed., *Mekhilta*, 1:74). I have slightly modified his translation. No rabbinical authority is mentioned in the context.

50. Mek. Pisha 1.14 (Lauterbach, trans. and ed., *Mekhilta*, 1:77). I have slightly modified his translation (i.e., he has "moment"). Again, no rabbinical authority is mentioned in the context. Cf. Mek. Pisha 1.14 (Lauterbach, trans. and ed., *Mekhilta*, 1:80): "And as soon as the designated time came, God [Existence] did not delay them even for the blinking of an eye" (וכשהגיע הקץ לא עיכבן המקום אפילו כהרף עין). Rabbi Eliezer is responsible for that interpretation. The reference to Eliezer is problematic, not only because of his obscure identity but also because of the problem of pseudepigraphic attribution. See Wacholder, "Date," 127. On the vexed problem of the attribution of sayings to rabbinic teachers, cf. Wacholder and Neusner, "Why We Cannot Assume the Historical Reliability of Attributions" (e.g., problems such as the same saying attributed to two different rabbis).

51. Yehudah was a second-generation Palestinian Tanna who "worked in Palestine, later in Nisib" (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 75); Strack and Stemberger note Neusner's view that "two rabbis of this name must be assumed:

Suppose the Gentiles surrounded Israelite cities and the Israelites in self-defense had to profane the Sabbath. The Israelites should not in such a case say: Since we had to profane part of the Sabbath, we might as well continue to profane the rest of the day. For it says: “Everyone that profanes it shall surely be put to death,” meaning: Everyone that profanes it even for the blinking of an eye shall be put to death.⁵²

והרי הגוים שהקיפו את ערי ישראל וחללו את השבת שלא יהו
ישראל אומרים הואיל וחללנו מקצתה נחלל את כולא תלמוד לואמר
מחלליה מות יומת אפילו כהרף עין

Again, this is not a supernatural action but simply a usage that refers to an instant of time.

Although the Palestinian Talmud probably was finally redacted in the first half of the fifth century, it contains much earlier material.⁵³ In a discussion concerning the nature of dusk in that Talmud, Rabbi Jose states, “Dusk is the blink of an eye and the sages could not determine it” (רבי יוסי).⁵⁴ In a discussion of the divisions of time, “the Sages say that the moment is the blink of an eyelash” (ורבנן אמרין הרגע כהרף עין).⁵⁵ In another argument on the nature of dusk, Rabbi Yose said to Rabbi Aha: “Is it not reasonable that the end of the half a *mil* of rebbi Nehemiah is the blink of an eye (of Rabbi Yose)?” (אמר

one c. 20/30–90, the other c. 100–160, both in Nisibis”). See Neusner, *History*, 1:43–49, 121–24. Strack and Stemberger (*Introduction*, 69) date the second generation to ca. 90–130 CE.

52. Mek. Shabbata 9.1 (Lauterbach, trans. and ed., *Mekhilta*, 2:496). I have slightly modified his translation.

53. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 171.

54. *y. Ber.* 1.1 (Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 54–55). I have slightly modified his translation. Guggenheimer (55n39) identifies R. Yose as R. Yose bar Halaphta. He was a third generation Tannaitic teacher (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 76–77, 326). Cf. the identical tradition in *b. Ber.* 2b (דאמר רבי יוסי בין השמשות כהרף עין). The same position is attributed to R. Jose in *b. Shab.* 34b.

55. *y. Ber.* 1.1 (Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 73). The sages (רבנן, “our rabbis”) are presumably Tannaitic. Cf. Lam Rab 2:19 (Buber, ed., *Midrasch*, p. 120) (Answering the query “How long is a *rega* [רגע]?” the sages say, “like the blink of an eyelash” (ורבנן אמרי כהרף עין)).

Rebbi Aha (רבי יוסי לרבי אחא לא מסתברא סוף חצי מיל דרבי נחמיה כהרף עין).⁵⁶ Rebbi Aha says, “Rebbi Hizqiah does not say so⁵⁷ but every single blink of an eye in the half a *mil* of Rebbi Nehemiah is in doubt” (רבי חזקיה לא אמר כן אלא).⁵⁸ A further difficulty in the same passage concerns a seminal emission being assigned to different times (i.e., late afternoon or evening): Rebbi Hiya bar Josef says to Rebbi Yose, “Here is your problem since you say that every single blink of an eye in the half a *mil* of Rebbi Nehemiah is in doubt” (אמר ליה קשתה על דעתך).⁵⁹ These examples, which are purportedly Tannaitic, indicate that the signeme refers to an instantaneous moment.

The expression is used in narratives about Jacob, the magicians of Exodus, and David. A late midrash, finally redacted in “the second half of the eighth century,” mentions Jacob and the angel: And so the angel led the flock of Jacob over in the blink of an eyelash (כך העביר המלאך צאנו של יעקב).⁶⁰ The Midrash to the Psalms interprets Jacob’s journey in Gen

56. *y. Ber.* 1.1 (Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 56). I have slightly modified his translation.

57. Namely, “that the end of the half a *mil* [2000 cubits] of Rebbi Nehemiah is the blink of an eye of Rebbi Yose” (*y. Ber.* 1.1 [Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 56]; I have slightly modified his translation). R. Nehemiah was a third generation Tannaitic teacher and a student of R. Aqibah of Yabneh. Cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 77 and Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 6.

58. *y. Ber.* 1.1 (Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 56). I have slightly modified his translation. Aḥa of Lydda was a rabbi of the fourth Amoraic generation (57n40). Hizqiah was an “Amora of the fourth generation” in Galilee (57n42).

59. *y. Ber.* 1.1 (Guggenheimer, trans. and ed., *Jerusalem Talmud*, 56–57). I have slightly modified his translation. Guggenheimer (57n44) identifies Ḥiya bar Josef as a Babylonian rabbi from the “start of the Amoraic period.” He also (57n45) identifies R. Jose as Jose bar Ḥalaphta.

60. Song Rab 3:6 (ספר מדרש רבה על שיר השירים) [Levenson and Fridman (1876), 143]. Cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 315, who also remark that it “contains much older material.” Cf. the text in Gen Rab 77:2 (Theodor and Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba*, 2:911): עיבר המלאך את שלאבינו כהרף עין (“the angel made what was his go across in the blink of an eye”). See also Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 35 (Börner-Klein, ed. and trans., *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, 438–39): ומשם נשא רגליו

28:10 as follows: “In the blink of an eye he came to Haran” (ובהריפת עין בא) (לחרן).⁶¹ Presumably that instantaneous journey involved divine aid. A twelfth-century midrash includes a tradition that seeks to explain the sorcerers’ abilities in Exod 7:11: “Rabbi Hiyya said that [it was done] with their secret arts [*belateiher*], the work of sorcerers, something that is done with a curse. With their secret arts [*belahateiher*]⁶²—that is, the works of [using] demons who flash and crush in the blink of an eye” (א”ר חייא בלטיהון מעשה) (כשפים דבר הנעשה בלט: בלהטיהם אלו מעשי שדים שהן לזהטין ובזוקין בהריפת עין).⁶² Here, the “blink of an eye” refers to the speed of demonic activity. In a description of God’s ability to immediately transport Abishai to David’s aid (2 Sam 21:16–17), a text in Genesis Rabbah has the following:

The Rabbis said: Even had he been at the end of the world the Holy One, blessed be He, would have made him leap (or “fly”) and would have brought him in the twinkling of an eye, so that that righteous man should not be in distress.⁶³

רבנן אמרי אפלו היה בסוף העולם הטיסו הקדוש ברוך הוא והביאו
בהרף עין שלא יהיה אותו צדיק עומד ומצטער

In this context, the signeme expresses the extraordinary speed of God’s transport of Abishai.

כהרף עין בא לחרן (“and from there he lifted up his feet and as in the blink of an eye he came to Haran”).

61. Midr Teh 91:7 (Buber, ed., *Midrasch Tehillim*, 400). Strack and Stemberger (*Introduction*, 322) write, “A definite date of composition cannot be given.”

62. Midr Sekhel Tov Exod 7:7 (Buber, ed., *Sechel Tob*, 39). Cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 357. Hiyya is probably the fifth generation Tanna, born in Babylonia but emigrated to Tiberias (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 82). He is identified as Hiyya bar Abba in *b. Sanh.* 67b where he expresses a similar view. See also Steinsaltz’s explanation for the distinction between the two categories—which are used in the opposite sense here—one meaning the arts of the sorcerers themselves and the other the action of using demonic assistance) (“Sanhedrin 67b”).

63. Gen Rab 59:11 (Theodor and Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba*, 2:639) (translation of Freedman, trans. *Midrash Rabbah*, 2:523). Strack and Stemberger (*Introduction*, 279) date the midrash to the first half of the fifth century (based on the authorities quoted).

The phrase occurs in several discussions of repentance. The Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, interpreting the “be still” (הרפו) of Ps 46:11 as a combination of כהרף עין, argues,

R. Tanḥuma citing R. Ḥanina, and R. Aibu citing Resh Lakish said: Vow repentance for as little time as it takes to wink an eye, and you will be aware that I am the Lord [of mercy]. For as R. Levi said: Were Israel to vow repentance for but one day they would be redeemed forthwith.⁶⁴

ר' תנחומה בשם ר' חנינה ר' איבו בשם ריש לקיש עשה תשובה כהרף עין ודעו כי אני יי: א"ר לוי אילו היו ישר' עושין תשובה יום אחד היו נגאלין

Daube comments, “According to one view the verse means ‘Desist from evildoing and do penitence but for the twinkling of an eye, and redemption will come.’”⁶⁵ Clearly, the reference of כהרף עין is not the instantaneous moment of divine action here but the speed of the action of the children of Israel. The speed of divine action and human repentance occur in a midrash on the first two words of Jer 18:7: “What is the meaning of, ‘At one instant I may speak’? For I can decree [says God] that in the blink of an eye a person may die but will at once repent thereof should that person become penitent” (מה רגע אדבר כהרף עין אני גוזר על האדם שימות והוא עושה תשובה ואני מתנחם) (עליו).⁶⁶

The image appears in a shipwreck account in another late midrash: “R. Eleazar b. Shamua was strolling along the shore of the great Sea. He espied a ship foundering in the sea. In the wink of an eye the boat sank with all that

64. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 24 (Buber, ed., *Pesikta*, 163b; Mandelbaum, ed., *Pesikta*, 2:369) (translation of Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta*, 507; see their comment on הרפו). The text is cited in Str-B 1:168. Strack and Stemberger (*Introduction*, 295) date the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana to the fifth century. Resh Lakish was a second-generation Amora (third century CE). Cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 86; Tanchuma was a fifth-generation Amora (96); Aibo was a fourth-generation Amora (94); Levi was a third generation Amora (89); and Ḥanina was presumably the first-generation Amora (83). These rabbis were all from Palestine.

65. Daube, *Sudden in the Scriptures*, 77.

66. Exod Rab 45:1 (Jadler, ed., *Sefer Midrash Rabbah*, 91); the translation is from Lehrman, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, 516. Strack and Stemberger (*Introduction*, 309), noting that the first reference to the text is in the thirteenth century, conclude, “A more precise dating must await further study.”

ר' אלעזר בן שמוע הוה מטייל על כ"ף ימא רבה: חמא אילפא דמיטרפא) (was in her" ⁶⁷ A midrashic text devoted to the creation remarks, "The moon always disappears from the sky in the blink of an eye, even when it is fully surrounded with [light] rays in the east and west" אין הלבנה חסרה מן השמים אלא כהרף עין אפילו יש בה כמלא החוש) (סובבת במזרח ובמערב).⁶⁸

A text in the *Zohar Midrash ha-Ne'elam* illustrates the continued vitality of the signeme in the middle ages. The following text occurs immediately after a quotation of Song 2:17:

Rabbi Shim'on son of Pazzi said, "This constitutes a warning to a human being while he is still in this world—that it is like the blink of an eye" . . . Rabbi Shim'on said, "A person's soul warns him, saying, 'Before the day breathes—and it will seem to you as the blink of an eye while you are still in this world; and the shadows flee—as is written: For our days upon earth are a shadow (Job 8:9)' . . ."⁶⁹

א"ר שמעון בן פזי זו אזהרה לאדם בעודו בעולם הזה שהוא כהרף עין ... אמר רבי שמעון נשמתו של אדם מתרה בו ואומרת עד שיפוח היום ודימה בעיניך כהרף עין בעודך בעולם הזה ונסו הצללים הה"ך כי צל ימינו עלי ארץ

67. Qoh Rab 11:1 (text and translation [slightly modified] from D. Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica*, 105). D. Sperber notes that Eleazar's floruit was "ca. 135–170 in Palestine."

68. *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* 7 (Börner-Klein, ed. and trans., *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, 66–67); this is a dynamic translation, which, if literally translated, reads, "The moon does not disappear from the firmament except in an instant . . ." Higger ("Pirke," 104) has a variant reading: הרקיע אלא כהריפת עין. Higger based his edition on a collation by C. M. Horowitz of three MSS from the Bibliotheca Casanatense in Rome (for details see Börner-Klein, ed. and trans., *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, xiii). Strack and Stemberger (*Introduction*, 329) believe that the "work originated in the eighth or ninth century."

69. *Midrash ha-Ne'elam, Parashat Va-Yera*, 10:99b (this translation is a slightly modified version of Wolski and Hecker, trans. *Zohar*, 324). Wolski and Hecker write, "The *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*—'the Concealed Midrash,' or perhaps better, 'the Midrash of the Concealed'—is recognized by all Zohar scholars as the earliest layer of the Zoharic literary corpus" (xi). Rabbi Shimeon was a third-generation Amora in Palestine (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 90). For Daniel Matt's edition of the original text, see "Aramaic Texts."

Nathan Wolski argues that the “fleeing shadows” refer to “the end of one’s life on earth.”⁷⁰ In this Zohairic text, the signeme simply refers to a moment of time. There are around forty-two instances of the expression (הֲרַף (עֵין) in the usual rabbinic literature (Talmuds, midrashim, etc.) and in the Zohar, and more than 850 in later Hebrew literature including the responsa. However, this selection illustrates the central reference of the phrase: an instantaneous moment in time.

Premise Seven: Blinking an Eye as an Instant in Time in Aramaic Texts

As one might expect, the concept makes its appearance in Aramaic texts.⁷¹ It occurs in Samaritan Aramaic to refer to a moment in time. The phrase עֵין אֲרָפוֹת in that dialect means “blinking an eye.”⁷² It appears several times in the treatise entitled the *Tibât Mârqe*.⁷³ In the following passage, the children of Israel complain to Moses and Aaron:

For this would be a great shame on the part of the king of Egypt, if he were to let six hundred thousand go with the like of you because of the speech you spoke. If he had a sword in his hand, he would slay us in the blink of an eye.⁷⁴

דהדה גנוה רבה למלך מצר' ישלח שת מון דאלף עם כותכון על ממללה
דמלתון לו שקח בידה חרב קטלנו הך ארפו עין

Here the signeme refers to Pharaoh’s ability to quickly destroy the Israelites. Another passage mentions Pharaoh:

70. Wolski and Hecker, trans. *Zohar*, 324n28.

71. See the targumim quoted above in the notes of Premise Four (where the signeme does not mean an instant of time).

72. Cf. Tal, ed., *Dictionary*, 633 (s.v. אֲרָפוֹת עֵין [a sub-lemma of עֵין]; an expression which Tal defines as הֲרַף עֵין [“in a flash”]. The CAL (Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon at <https://cal.huc.edu>) defines אֲרָפוֹ as “instant, moment” and אֲרָפוֹת עֵין as “the blink of an eye (a moment of time).”

73. Tal, ed., *Tibât Mârqe*.

74. *Tibât Mârqe* 1.32 (45b) (Tal, ed., *Tibât Mârqe*, 74–75). I have slightly modified his translation. (Tal has “in a flash” with “wink of an eye” in his note to line 12.)

He said: “Quickly bring to me the sages and all the magicians.” They ran in great haste, in a wink of an eye, their hearts full of fear, and told them: “Come in haste to the king . . .”⁷⁵

אמר זרזו לי בחכימיה וכל מכשפיה רחטו בזרזו רבה ולבביון מלין
דחלה הד ארפות עין ואמרו לון זרזו אתו לות מלכה

Again, the phrase refers simply to quick motion and not any sort of divine action. Another equivalent expression in Samaritan Aramaic is חטף עין or its variation עטף עין, which Abraham Tal defines as “in a flash” or הרף עין.⁷⁶ It appears in the *Tibât Mârqe* in this phrase: “See I make you as God to Pharaoh [Exod 7:1]—by my will, destroy all the Egyptians in a wink of an eye” (חזי יהבתך אלהים לפרעה בבעותי אבד כל מצראי כעטף עינה).⁷⁷ Tal attributes the first book, from which these texts derive, to Marqe himself (second half of the fourth century).⁷⁸

In Mandaic, there is also a signeme equivalent to Paul’s: *merpās aynā* and *merpās zāpā d-aynā*.⁷⁹ E. S. Drower and R. Macuch note that the expression occurs frequently in Mandaic.⁸⁰ An example from the *Book of John* quotes the great creator who assures Shem, *kaḏ merpās zāpēh d-aynā hākā ānā aṭī* (“Like the twinkling of an eye, I have come here”).⁸¹ Literally, *merpās zāpēh d-aynā* means the “fluttering of the eyelash of an eye.”⁸² The Splendid Hibel (“a Lightworld being”) uses the same phrase with Yurba: “Did you know, Yurba, that I came here in the twinkling of an eye” (*lā-merpās zāpā d-aynā*).⁸³ The book may have been composed around the

75. *Tibât Mârqe* 1.42 (Tal, ed., *Tibât Mârqe*, 84–85).

76. Tal, ed., *Dictionary*, 633 (s.v. [חטף עין] עין). The CAL defines the noun חטף as “snatching” (main lemma) and lemma §3 (s.v. עטף עין) “the wink of an eye, immediately.”

77. *Tibât Mârqe* 1.34 (Tal, ed., *Tibât Mârqe*, 76–79).

78. Tal, ed., *Tibât Mârqe*, 1–9.

79. Cf. Drower and Macuch, eds., *Mandaic Dictionary*, 270 (s.v. *mirpas* [with many examples]). The verb from which it derives, *rps* (Drower and Macuch, eds., *Mandaic Dictionary*, 437 [s.v. RPS]) means “move convulsively, flap, flop.” See also the CAL s.v. *rps*.

80. Drower and Macuch, eds., *Mandaic Dictionary*, 270 (s.v. *mirpas*).

81. Cf. Häberl and McGrath, *Mandaean Book of John*, 92–93 (17:29).

82. Cf. Drower and Macuch, eds., *Mandaic Dictionary*, 160 (s.v. *zapa*).

83. *Mandaean Book of John* 52:68 (Häberl and McGrath, *Mandaean Book of John*, 234–35). On Hibel, cf. Buckley, *Mandaeans*, 8–9, 13. On Yurba, cf. Häberl

time of the rise of Islam.⁸⁴ Some elements of Mandaicism may go back to the first century, however.⁸⁵

Conclusions

It is apparent that Paul could assume the Corinthians were familiar with ῥίπῃ ὀφθαλμοῦ as a signeme that referred to an instantaneous moment of time. It is also clear that although there were signemes for the blinking of an eye in pagan Greek, including phrases in which the words referred to something in addition to the physical action (such as the gesture of Homer's suitors), none of those phrases referred to a moment in time. It is only in the language of Hellenistic Judaism—itsself indebted to the language of the Hebrew Bible—that uses emerge in which blinking one's eyes could signify derision, wantonness, and perhaps a moment in time. If νεῦμα in the Letter of Aristeas means the "blink of an eye" with reference to an instantaneous moment, as seems likely, then some in the Jewish community of Alexandria were familiar with the notion. If the occurrence of the words in the Testament of Abraham is independent of Paul, then it is clear that he did not create the signeme. It is not possible to demonstrate that any other extant uses of the Greek phrase are independent of Paul (and later Christian usage). The rabbinic evidence warrants the surmise that הָרַף עֵין ("wink of an eye") existed in a Jewish tradition independent of Paul's usage (and probably that of the Testament of Abraham). The signeme could be used in many contexts, and the speed of divine action was clearly one such context. The expression simply was a means of referring to instantaneous moment—as one may easily see on the Bar Ilan database. Although the Aramaic evidence from Samaritan and Mandaic texts is a bit further afield, it is also a tradition that is independent of Paul although the date of the texts is much later than the first century.

Two hypotheses are possible to explain the evidence. Hypothesis one: Paul, the author of Test Ab 4:5, the rabbis, and the authors of the Samaritan

and McGrath, *Mandaean Book of John*, 9. The name Yurba derives from "Yāw the great," and the sun "is identified with Yurba or Adunay, the god of the Jews" (409).

84. Häberl and McGrath, *Mandaean Book of John*, 4–5. I thank Charles Häberl for the transcriptions of the Mandaean Book of John.

85. Cf. Buckley, *Great Stem of Souls*, 275–315.

and Mandaic texts invented the signeme independently to refer to a moment in time with no common source. Hypothesis two: the use of the signeme in Paul, the author of Test Ab 4:5, the rabbis, and the authors of the Samaritan and Mandaic texts have a common ancestor in the Jewish community of Paul's time or the centuries preceding Paul – despite the fact that the rabbis and the Aramaic texts date to the centuries after Paul. In addition, even if Mekhilta is not a Tannaitic midrash and received its final redaction in the third century, it includes rabbis who were fairly close to Paul's time (late first or second century). These individuals are all Jews.

In my view, Occam's razor militates against the probability of the first hypothesis which itself borders on irrationality. In human experience generally, when the same phenomenon emerges independently in multiple places, we seek a common ancestor of the various instantiations of the phenomenon. Several examples will illustrate this point. If one assumes that Matthew and Luke are independent of one another in the sense that the authors were unaware of each other, then the evidence clearly suggests they had a common source or sources, and it would be highly improbable and irrational to assume otherwise.⁸⁶ Similarly, Newton and Leibniz developed the calculus independently of each other, but they had a primary common source, and it was the concept of the infinitesimal—vigorously opposed by the Jesuits—that was developed by the Italian mathematicians Bonaventura Cavalieri and Evangelista Torricelli who were students of Galileo.⁸⁷ It would be fundamentally irrational to assume that the calculus appeared *de novo* independently in the work of two mathematicians without any common source. One could multiply such examples at will. Only the second hypothesis fits the facts with a high level of probability. The absence in (pagan) Classical and Hellenistic Greek of the concept of the blink of an eye to signify a moment in time is additional evidence that warrants the conclusion that it emerged in the Greek and Hebrew (and perhaps Aramaic) speaking Jewish community. The second hypothesis best accounts for the evidence. ῥιπή ὀφθαλμοῦ was a powerful expression for the instantaneous bodily transformation Paul foresaw for Christ's followers.

86. Cf. For the Synoptic problem and various solutions, see the essays in Porter and Dyer, eds., *Synoptic Problem*.

87. Cf. Alexander, *Infinitesimal*, 11–12, 117, and passim. Archimedes used the concept. See the references in the index of the book (338). On Galileo's acceptance of (and use of in calculations) "indivisibles," see the index (343, esp. 291).

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