

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

see the vision God made available to Abraham and his son (*BerR* 56:2). Still, the overall tendency is to see Eliezer in an extremely positive light. A post-Talmudic treatise thus holds that, because of his loyalty to Abraham, Eliezer was brought into paradise alive, a rare reward (*DEZ* 1).

Alan J. Avery-Peck

### B. Medieval and Modern Judaism

Abraham's servant, identified with Eliezer of Damascus, and the strategy he used to find Isaac's partner, received a good deal of attention from medieval and modern Jewish exegetes. One of the questions that arose was whether the sign that he used to identify the suitable candidate (*Gen* 24:12–14) was a form of divination, or rather a test of character. Maimonides considers Eliezer's action a prohibited form of divination (*MishT 'Avodat Kokhavim* 11.4). His critic, Rabad (Abraham ben David, of Posquières) takes Maimonides to task for this, insisting that this action is permissible and that Eliezer was a righteous man (*tsadiq*). Later exegetes, such as Isaac Abarbanel (15th cent.), Ephraim Solomon ben Aaron of Luntshits (*Keli yeqar*, 16th cent.), Malbim (19th cent.) and many others, insist that Eliezer had devised a character test, to determine whether Rebekah possessed the qualities of generosity and kindness (cf. Leibowitz: 223–29).

The rabbis in the midrash, noting the Torah's repetition of Abraham's servant's retelling (*Gen* 24:35–48) of the story just recounted (24:1–26), comment, "the conversation of the servants of patriarchs' households is more noteworthy (lit. beautiful) than the Scripture of their descendants" (*BerR* 60:11). They were marveling at the relative wordiness of this chapter in comparison to the legal sections of the Torah, where the superfluity of one letter can determine a fundamental legal principle. Many medieval and modern exegetes, including Rashi (11th cent.), Nahmanides (13th cent.), Malbim (19th cent.), and Naphtali Berlin (*Ha'ameq davar*; 19th cent.), commented on this passage, striving to demonstrate Eliezer's skill, artistry and cleverness in the way he retold the story. In order to convince Rebekah's family to allow her to marry Isaac, he deployed a series of tactics, including: emphasis on Abraham's wealth (v. 35), glossing over the differences in faith between Abraham and his family (vv. 3, 37), emphasis on the mandate given to the servant by Abraham to find a mate from "his father's house," something not mentioned by Abraham (vv. 4, 37, 7, 40), omission of the possibility that Isaac might come to Rebekah's home (vv. 39, 5); and the change in the order with regard to asking the girl's name and giving her the presents (v. 47). Rashi and Isaac Arama (15th cent.; *'Aqedat Yitshaq*) comment, the latter in more detail, that since the servant had claimed that the Abraham had sent him to his family, giving the presents away before knowing her identity would have undermined his mission. All of these adjustments made to his ac-

count reveal, according to these exegetes, the servant's remarkable wisdom, discretion, ingenuity and devotion to his master, Abraham (Leibowitz: 230–36).

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Barry Dov Wolfish

### Eliohoreph

According to the list of Solomon's high officers in 1 Kgs 4 (MT), Eliohoreph is (with Ahijah) one of the two scribes of Solomon, both being sons of Shisha (v.3). Although its spelling is uncertain, Eliohoreph's patronym most probably refers to the scribe of David, called Sheva in 2 Sam 20:25. Montgomery follows the LXX, which lacks "the priest" in v.2 (see also the singular of "son" in LXX v.3), and amends *'Ēlīhōrep* to *'al hahōrep*. He translates "Azariah ben Sadok Over-the-Year" (*hahōrep*, "the autumn" that is the beginning of the year). Accordingly, the "Over-the-Year" office, which could have been a priestly one, would be parallel to that of the Assyrian *limmu*, the year eponym whose name was used for the dating of official documents. However, there is no clear evidence of such an office in ancient Israel (see in particular 3 Kgdms 2:46h and 1 Chr 9:11, where Azariah is simply qualified as a priest), a fact that contrasts with its supposed first position in the list of 1 Kgs 4.

The meaning and origin of the name Eliohoreph are disputed. It may well have a Heb. origin and signify "El/God (of/gives) autumn/harvest time" (Fox: 105 understands "God is mature/in his prime," cf. Job 29:4). Based on another meaning of the root *h-r-p*, Zadok understand "(My) God is (my) sharpness, keenness." KBL gives also "El/God rewards" (Arab. *Ḥarafa*). The proposed foreign origins are more hypothetical. Some scholars retain the name as it appears in LXX<sup>B</sup>, *Ελιαφ* (though it is not necessarily the best reading; *Ελιαβ* in LXX<sup>L</sup> is *lectiofacilior*, cf. 3 Kgdms 4:6 and LXX<sup>L</sup> 2:46h), and suppose a semi-Egyptian origin of the name, which would mean "Apis is my god" (*'lyhp*; the penultimate *rēš* of Eliohoreph would have been added later in order to connect the heretic name with a root linked to shame and blasphemy; Mettinger). Mazar proposes instead a Canaanite origin of the name Eliohoreph based on the name *Ḥarpa/e*, a god worshipped in particular by the Kassites and the Hurrians. However, Tigay indicates that there is no evidence of this god from the first millennium BCE.

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