

## Καταπέτασμα: LEXICOGRAPHICAL AND ETYMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE BIBLICAL “VEIL”

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In 2000, R. E. Gane argued convincingly that if the expression ἰσώτερον τοῦ καταπέτασματος (Heb 6:19) is based on the LXX, where “inner veil” is the only possible meaning (Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2, 12, 15), it should also be “inner veil” in Heb 6:19.<sup>2</sup> Gane’s observation that the term καταπέτασμα is qualified by the term ἰσώτερον is important, because it recognizes a trend of the LXX translators with respect to the term καταπέτασμα. That is, while the Greek translators are often inconsistent in what Hebrew term they translate as καταπέτασμα (it can itself refer to any of three curtains in the tabernacle), the presence of contextual qualifiers, such as ἰσώτερον, seemed to have afforded the LXX translators such liberties.<sup>3</sup> This trend, it seems, was readily recognized by NT authors in the six texts in which the term καταπέτασμα appears. The term καταπέτασμα appears in the Synoptics (Matt 27:51a; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) as καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ. It also appears in Hebrews as τὸ ἰσώτερον τοῦ καταπέτασματος (“within the veil,” Heb 6:19), τὸ δεῦτερον καταπέτασμα (“the second veil,” Heb 9:3), and τοῦ καταπέτασματος τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (“the veil that is his flesh,” Heb 10:20). The purpose of this short article is twofold. First, it will explore the etymology of this rare but important word as it relates to its function in the temple, particularly vis-à-vis the variety of other curtain terms in the LXX and Second Temple Judaism. Second, it will attempt to

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<sup>2</sup>“Re-opening Katapetasma (‘Veil’) in Hebrews 6:19,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 5-8. He wrote in response to a previous article by George Rice, who argues that the term καταπέτασμα is a metaphorical expression for the entirety of the heavenly sanctuary (“Hebrews 6:19: An Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning *Katapetasma*,” *AUSS* 25 [1987]: 65-71).

<sup>3</sup>It does not, as Fearghas Ó Fearghail suggests, “obliterate any distinction that may have existed in the Hebrew text” (“Sir 50,5-21: Yom Kippur or the Daily Whole-Offering?” *Bib* 59 [1978]: 309).

further demonstrate the importance of Gane's observation of the definitiveness of the contextual qualifiers in defining which "curtain" is in view by showing that καταπέτασμα is an *exclusively cultic* term.<sup>4</sup>

Etymological considerations of a biblical term often translated "veil" (καταπέτασμα) have been largely overlooked in the modern discussion of the term.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer and others widely assumed that καταπέτασμα was an Alexandrian Greek word, created by the LXX translators as a Judeo-Christian "specialty."<sup>6</sup> That is, it was thought to have come about by Jewish-Christian interests in tabernacle and temple furniture rather than drawing upon a use outside of these traditions. It was thought to be derived by that tradition from the more common παραπέτασμα, a word well attested up through the first century A.D.<sup>7</sup> Herodotus (*Hist.* 9.82.4) speaks of gold and silver and gaily-colored tapestry (παραπετάσμασι ποικίλοισι κατεσκευασμένην) as possessions of Mardonius. And Menander (c. 344–392 B.C.) speaks of "a curtain of foreign weave" (παραπέτασμα βαρβαρικὸν ὕφαντόν; *Dysk.* 923).<sup>8</sup> Παραπέτασμα is found in the biblical tradition only in Amos 2:8, where it refers to a curtain made out of garments (ἱμάτια).

<sup>4</sup>For a more comprehensive discussion of the role of the contextual qualifiers in determining the identity of the veil in the LXX and Synoptic contexts, cf. Daniel M. Gurtner, "Behind the Καταπέτασμα: An Examination of the Irregular Septuagint Translational Tendencies of 'Veil,'" (under review).

<sup>5</sup>The most comprehensive discussions of this word have given little attention to etymological details. C. Schneider discusses its meaning, based almost exclusively on its apparent cultic function rather than etymological factors ("Καταπέτασμα," *TDNT*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 3:629). Cf. Rice, 65–71.

<sup>6</sup>Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. L. R. M. Strachman (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 101.

<sup>7</sup>"That which is spread before a thing, hanging, curtain" (H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., rev. supp. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]). Cf. Aeschylus, *Fr.* 212.39; Pseudo (?) Philolaus, *Fr.* 19.3; Herodotus *Hist.* 9.82.4; Aristophanes, *Fr.* 45.1; 611.1; *Ran.* 938; Plato, *Prot.* 316e.5; *Pol.* 279d.3; Antiphanes, *Fr.* 63.2; 327.2; Demosthenes, *1 Steph.* 19.1; Aeneas, *Pol.* 32.9.1; Menander, *Dysk.* 923, 930; *Fr. Long.* 336.9; 405–406.9; 1094.2; *Fr.* 6.4; 175.2; 336.9; 936.2; Alexis, *Fr.* 41.2; 340.2; Chrysippus, *Fr. Log.* 178.7; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 11.56.8.2; Philo, *QG* 5.69.5.

<sup>8</sup>Pausanias, *Descr.* 5.12.4, has a similar description for the curtain of the Olympian temple, though he calls it a παραπέτασμα. Moses Hadas notes that apart from the Samos inscription, discussed below, καταπέτασμα "does not occur in secular literature . . . until Heliodorus and sixth-century papyri" (*Aristeas to Philostrates* [*Letter of Aristeas*] [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951], 15).

An inscription from Samos, a Greek island in the northeast Aegean Sea, 346-345 B.C., has overturned this view.<sup>9</sup> The inscription catalogues the furniture of the temple of the goddess Hera (whose Roman name was Juno). Her temple is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world,<sup>10</sup> and she is known as queen of the gods and bride as well as sister of Zeus. The discovery of her (second) temple in the late nineteenth century not only revealed one of the most primitive of Greek temples, but also provides both the earliest attested use of *καταπέτασμα* by at least a century and the only occurrence of the word from antiquity outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>11</sup> The earliest occurrence in that tradition is either the LXX translations, dating no earlier than the middle of the third century B.C., or perhaps the *Letter of Aristeas* (86) itself. Within Hera's temple was found a stone inscription with a lengthy list of artifacts and cultic instruments, including a *καταπέτασμα τῆς τραπέζης*, of which no further comment is made. Its contextual definition provides little illumination for the meaning of the word in general, except that it may have been a term exclusive to cultic furnishings.<sup>12</sup> The discovery of this inscription has vindicated Adolf Deissmann's earlier conclusions, especially because it predates any Greek literature from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Remarkably, however, outside of this inscription, without exception, every occurrence of the term is in reference to the hangings and veils in the Jewish temple, even well beyond the completion of the first century A.D. The reference in Hera's temple, as well as its conspicuous absence in secular literature, strongly suggests its proper place in distinctively cultic terminology.

While it is *possible* that one day *καταπέτασμα* may be discovered on an inscription within a throne room context, as do Semitic cognates to

<sup>9</sup>Cf. photograph from D. Ohly, "Die Göttin und Ihre Basis," *Mitteilungen des deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 68 (1953): Tafel IX.

<sup>10</sup>Though it does not appear on the usual lists, and perhaps may have been confused with the temple of Artemis in Ephesus (Antipater, *Greek Anthology*, 9.58; cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.92; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, 8.14.5; Strabo, *Geography*, 14.1.22; Acts 19:23-29, 34-35).

<sup>11</sup>Deissmann, 101; so J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan following, Deissmann (*Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997], 331). Cf. Otto Hoffman, *Die Griechischen Dialekte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1891-1898), 3:72.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Clermont-Ganneau has argued that the preferred term *καταπέτασμα* is used exclusively in Josephus and Maccabees to refer to the hanging of the Jewish temple curtain (*Le Dieu Satrape et Les Phéniciens dans le Péloponèse* [Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878], 56-60).

פרכת ("curtain"),<sup>13</sup> this is probably unlikely. For within such a context, Greek has other words from which an author can choose. For example, in Arrian's *Anabasis* (6.29.5), we find a description of the revered King Cyrus's sarcophagus covered with a material of "Babylonian" tapestry.<sup>14</sup> The cloth is not called a καταπέτασμα, but ἐπιβλημα. There seem to be simply too many other Greek words that can be used for "curtain" for καταπέτασμα to be required in such contexts. If such an inscription were found it would probably reflect both a strong ANE influence and familiarity with Greek cultic language of mostly Jewish origin. Though these are arguments from silence, the term has, to date, been only found in such cultic contexts.<sup>15</sup>

Etymological analyses of this word are incomplete and based on much later evidence, such as H. G. Liddell and R. Scott's account citing Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 10.28 and *P.Oxy.* 3150.37, both dating from the fifth to sixth century A.D.<sup>16</sup> Only a limited amount of credence can be afforded root analysis, for it can easily distort the meaning of a word, which must ultimately be determined by usage. Yet, here it may be illuminating to examine the etymological construction of καταπέτασμα since lack of raw data may provide only a limited understanding of its

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Jacob Milgrom and Roy Gane, "פרכת," *TWAT*, 6:755-756. T. Klauser looks to the Persian practice of maintaining a separation between its king and his subjects ("Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes," *JAC* 3 [1960], 141f.). A. Büchler suggests the idea comes from the Roman court practice, according to which the judge himself sits behind a veil, advising ("Die Erlösung Eliša b. Abujahs aus dem Höllenfeuer," *MGWJ* 76 [1932], 412-456). פרכת may derive from the Sumerian *bāra* or the Akkadian *parakku* or the verb *parāku*, which can mean simply "to spread open," but it most commonly means to "lay something across" something else, perhaps in a prohibitive manner (*TWAT* 6:755; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 AB* [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 234). For a summary of the debate regarding the etymology of this word, cf. *NIDOTTE*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:688. Cf. also Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 359; Wolfgang von Soden, ed., *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972), 2:828-829.

<sup>14</sup>τῶν Βαβυλωνίων; cf. Josephus's καταπέτασμα as Βαβυλώνος πικιλτὸς (*B.J.* 5.4.4 §212).

<sup>15</sup>In addition to occurrences of καταπέτασμα in canonical LXX texts, all others are likewise in exclusively cultic contexts: *Sir* 50.4; 1 *Macc* 1.22; 4.51; *Let. Aris.* 86; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.5.4 §212; 5.5.5 §219; 5.5.7 §232; 6.8.3 §389; 6.8.3 §390; 7.5.7 §162; *A.J.* 8.3.3 §75; 8.3.7 §90; 12.5.3 §250; Philo, *Gig.* 53; *Mut.* 192; *Mos.* 2.80, 86, 87 [2x], 95, 101; *Spec.* 1.171, 231, 274, 296. A possible exception is *Jos. Azen.* 10.2, though cf. G. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis*, *Early Judaism and Its Literature*, 10 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 70 n. 18.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Liddell and Scott's supplement, 171.

meaning. Πέτασμα (—ατος, τὸ) is designated by Liddell and Scott as related to the verbal form πετάννυμι and means “anything spread out,” whether the feelers of an animal (Aristotle, *Hist. An.* 541B.6) or a carpet (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 909). The only occurrence in biblical literature is a variant reading of Num 23:22. Alfred Rahlfs’s edition, which reads θεὸς ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ὡς δόξα μονοκέρωτος αὐτῷ, can perhaps be translated: “It was God who brought them out of Egypt; as the horns of a wild ox he is for them.” However, in the variant reading, Aquila reads πετάσμα for δόξα, perhaps explicitly suggesting the “protection” element of the wild ox (or unicorn), which is variously translated as “horns” (NAS), “strength” (ASV; Geneva Bible [1599]; KJV; NIV), “glory” (Brenton’s LXX), and “towering might” (NAB), all likely seeing the ambiguity of the Hebrew חַרְוִיחַ. This variant is only found in Codex VII in the margin of manuscript 2<sup>da</sup> of Origen’s *Hexapla*. The word πετάσμα itself is relatively rare in Greek literature, with only three uses antedating the LXX<sup>17</sup> and a small handful postdating the LXX through the fifth century A.D.<sup>18</sup> Its verbal form, πετάννυμι, is better attested and can simply mean “to spread out,” “spread abroad, disperse,” or even refer to “the opening of doors.”<sup>19</sup> With the preposition κατα (“down,” etc.), it can then possibly mean “something which is spread downwards”<sup>20</sup> vis-à-vis παραπέτασμα, “that which is spread before” a thing.<sup>21</sup>

Deissmann’s argument against Thayer,<sup>22</sup> that the proximity of καταπέτασμα to παραπέτασμα in Hera’s temple inscription refutes an Alexandrian origin for the former term and thus demands that they be

<sup>17</sup>Aeschylus, *Ag.* 909; Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 541b.6; and possibly *Sib. Or.* 8.305.

<sup>18</sup>Aelius Herodianus, *Part.* 111.17; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 2.1.38.35; Didymus, *Fr. Prov.* 39.1641.37; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carm. Dog.* 415.7; 440.14; 490.13.

<sup>19</sup>Liddell and Scott say a closer verbal form may be καταπετάννυμι, meaning to “spread out” or “spread over.” Its attestation, however, is extremely scarce, with the only two occurrences prior to the ninth century A.D. coming either in the first or second century A.D. (Plutarch, *Rom.* 5.5; Harpocration, *Lex. Atticos* 248.7).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Andre Pelletier, “Le ‘Voile’ du Temple de Jérusalem est-il devenu la ‘Portière’ du Temple d’Olympie,” *Syria* 32 (1955): 295; Immanuel Bekker, *Heliodori Aethiopicorum libri decem* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1855); Héliodore, *Les Éthiopiennes*, ed. R. M. Rattenbury and T. W. Lumb, trans. J. Maillon (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1938), 10:28.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Liddell and Scott.

<sup>22</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 335. That is the opinion of H. A. A. Kennedy, who argues it always refers to the “inner veil” (*Sources of New Testament Greek: The Influence of the Septuagint on the Vocabulary of the New Testament* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895], 113).

distinct terms, is convincing.<sup>23</sup> In Deissmann's opinion, καταπέτασμα was a technical term "connected with the apparatus of worship," and he defines it literally as "that which is spread out downwards, that which hangs down."<sup>24</sup> Others simply designate it as a veil of the temple or tabernacle.<sup>25</sup>

The etymology of καταπέτασμα perhaps tells us more about how it hung (downward)<sup>26</sup> and where (cultic setting) than its particular function. Indeed, the term does not seem to occur in noncultic contexts until at least the eighth century A.D. By itself, the word seems to have no special meaning, though one should note its presence solely in cultic contexts before assuming it is synonymous with παραπέτασμα, which was typically not used in cultic contexts, except in Hera's inscription.<sup>27</sup> Naturally, however, its significance becomes enhanced by the use of grammatical qualifiers in both the LXX and NT and how the

<sup>23</sup>Deissmann, 101 n. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 101; Schneider, 628.

<sup>25</sup>J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996), 1:241.

<sup>26</sup>Contra Hadas, 14, following R. Tramontano (*La Lettera di Aristeia a Filocrate* [Naples: Ufficio succursale dell civiltà cattolica in Napoli, 1931]), who, in turn, follows Clermont-Ganneau, who argues the preposition suggests how veils were drawn (*Le Dieu Satrape et Les Phéniciens dans le Péloponèse*, 56-60). Pausanias, *Descr.* 5.12.4, speaks of the curtain "with Assyrian weaving and Phoenician purple," which Antiochus presented to the temple of Zeus at Olympia, and he remarks on its peculiarity in being let down to the ground by cords instead of drawn upwards to the roof. It has been plausibly conjectured that this was the very curtain that Antiochus plundered from Jerusalem in 170 (Cf. 1 Macc 1.22). B. Celada insists that a παραπέτασμα unfolds, while a καταπέτασμα hangs downward ("El velo del Templo," *CB* 15 [1958]: 110).

<sup>27</sup>On line 26 of the inscription, we read παραπέτασματα δυο βαρβαρικά ποικίλα ("two ornate foreign curtains"). Παραπέτασμα occurs about as often as καταπέτασμα, with an exhaustive TLG search revealing 32 references occurring through the end of the first century A.D. It is often used in reference to furnishing in a common home (Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.82.4; Menander, *Dysk.* 923, 930), a decoration (Aristophanes, *Ran.* 938), or an act of deception, concealing the truth (Demosthenes, *1 Steph.* 19.1; Philo, *QG* 4.69.5) or covering an attribute (Plutarch, *Tranq. an.* 471A:10), a skin (Plutarch, *Rect. rat. aud.* 41D:5), a curtain concealing a queen (Plutarch, *Art.* 5:3; here it is explicitly said to be pulled up, so that the queen was in view. This is perhaps revealing of the direction in which a παραπέτασμα worked) or the "awning" (not the sail) on a ship (Plutarch, *Pomp.* 24.3.7). Cf. also Aeschylus, *Tet.* 26 *Fr.* 212.39; Philolaus, *Fr.* 19.3; Aristophanes, *Fr.* 45.1; 611.1.; 45.1; Plato, *Prot.* 316E.5; *Pol.* 279D.3; Antiphanes, *Fr.* 63.2; 327.2; Aeneas, *Pol.* 32.9.1; Menander, *Fr.* 336.9; 405-406.9; 1094.2; *Fr.* 6.14; 175.2; 336.9; 936.2; Alexis, *Fr.* 41.2; 340.2; Chrysippus, *Fr. Log.* 178.7; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. His.* 11.56.8.2; Plutarch, *Rom.* 29.8.3. Each of these occurrences indicate that, apart from the inscription at Hera's temple, παραπέτασμα occurs exclusively in *noncultic* contexts.

καταπέτασμα is used in cultic life. It seems, then, that though a relatively rare word, καταπέτασμα is to be associated in some way with cultic life in antiquity. It has become for the Greek OT tradition a technical term for the hangings and veils of the tabernacle and temples.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>See D. H. Madvig, "τὸ καταπέτασμα," *NIDNTT*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 3:794. In only one occurrence (Num 4:5) is there mention of the καταπέτασμα being used as a "table-cover" as in Hera's inscription, though that is referring to the same מִרְכָּח ("veil") being used for such a purpose.