

In constructing the Aron, the Torah tells us that the four rings should be placed on the four "*Pa'a'motav*."
What are these and where are they?

Rashi Shemot 25:12

France, 11th c.

"*Pa'a'motav*." Understand this as the Targum renders it: 'On its corners'. It was on the upper corners near to the cover that the rings were placed – two on one side of the ark and two on the other along the width of the ark, and the staves were put into them (the rings).

רש"י שמות כה:יב

ר' שלמה יצחקי

פעמותיו - כתרגומו זויתיה; ובזויות העליונות סמוך לכפרת היו נתונות, שתיים מכאן ושתיים מכאן לרחבו של ארון, והבדים נתונים בהם...

Rashi's understanding (following Targum) makes sense in this context.
But are there other situations where this word is used to mean "corners"?

Ibn Ezra Shemot 25:12

Spain, 11th c.

"*Pa'a'motav*." I searched all of Scripture and did not find the word *pa'am* means "corner". It is always used to mean "foot". As we see: *Even the feet of the poor, and the steps (pa'amei) of the needy* (Is. 26:6); *And shall make His footsteps (pe'amav) a way* (Ps. 85:14); *How beautiful are thy steps (pa'amayich)* (Song of Songs 7:2). There are many other instances. I was therefore forced to explain that the ark had feet, for it would be disrespectful for the ark to sit on the ground. Furthermore, what reason is there for Scripture to place a connective *vav* before the word *u'shetei* (and two) when dealing with the two rings of gold (v. 12)? If the reference was to the rings already mentioned, then Scripture should have read, *shetei taba'ot* (two rings), as that is the proper syntax if the Torah wants to indicate that it is dealing with the four gold rings previously noted.

אבן עזרא שמות כה:יב

ר' אברהם בן מאיר אבן עזרא

פעמותיו - חפשתי בכל המקרא ולא מצאתי פעם שהוא זוית, רק מלשון רגל, רגלי עני פעמי דלים (ישעי' כו) וישם לדרך פעמיו (תה' פה יד) מה יפו פעמיק (שיר השירים זב) ורבים ככה. על כן הוצרכתי לפרש כי רגלים היו לארון, כי דרך בזיון הוא שישב הארון בארץ, ועוד מה טעם לומר, ושתי טבעות זהב בתוספת הו"ו, ואלו היו הראשונות היה כתוב שתי טבעות להודיע שהם ארבע טבעות זהב שהזכיר כמשפט הלשון...

Using other sources from Tanach, the Ibn Ezra understands that the Torah is telling us the Aron had feet.

Ramban Shemot 25:12

Spain, 12th c.

"Four Pa'a'motav." ... Thus did Rashi explain, and he explained it well. But I do not know why Rashi wrote that "on the upper corners near to the cover" the rings were placed. For in that case, the weight [of the ark and the tables of law hanging down from the staves] would be much heavier. Moreover, the respectful way is that the ark be lifted up, resting high upon the shoulders of the priests [when carrying it]... But in my opinion pa'am does not mean "foot" but is a term meaning "step."... The word pa'amothav here is Scripture's reference to the steps of the priests that carry the ark, thus hinting at two things: that the rings be in the corners right at the bottom, near the seat of the ark, and that the whole length of the ark should interpose between the two rings. For, assuming that the length of the ark was placed in an east-west position, then there were two rings on its north side, one at the eastern head and one at the western, and likewise two rings on the south side of the ark [similarly placed], and the steps of the priests moved between the rings with their faces towards one another...

רמב"ן שמות כה:יב

ר' משה בן נחמן

ארבע פעמותיו – ... כך פרש רש"י; ויפה פרש. אבל לא ידעתי למה אמר שבזויות העליונות סמוך לכפרת היו הטבעות, שהכבד היה יתר מאד, ועוד כי דרך הכבוד הוא שיהיה הארון נשא וגבוה למעלה על כתפות הכהנים... אבל לפי דעתי אין פעם רגל, אבל הוא שם הפסיעה... ואמר הכתוב בכאן "פעמותיו" לפסיעות הכהנים הנושאים אותו, רמז שני דברים, שיהיו הטבעות בזויות למטה ממש סמוכים למושב הארון, ושיהיה כל ארכו של ארון מפסיק בין שתי הטבעות, כי הארון ארכו למזרח, והטבעות שנים בצפון אחד בראש המזרחי ואחד במערבי, ושנים בדרום, ופעמי הכהנים הולכים בין טבעת לטבעת, ולפניהם...

The Ramban takes issue with the Ibn Ezra and explains how they were set up.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How do you translate/understand something if there's no precedent for a word used in chumash?
2. For further study, if you look up the Ramban, how would you respond to the questions of the Ramban on the Ibn Ezra?

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