תוכן העניינים

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ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

FROM SPLENDOR TO DISGRACE: ON THE DESTRUCTION OF EGYPTIAN JEWRY IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

By Noah Hacham

This study explores three passages from Palestinian Rabbinic literature that deal with the Alexandrian Jewish community during the Second Temple period and its destruction in the Jewish revolt in 115–117 C.E.. In the first passage, T. Sukka 4,6, R. Judah describes the splendors of the great synagogue in Alexandria that are significantly similar to rabbinical descriptions of the Temple in Jerusalem. By doing so, R. Judah bestows on this synagogue high status comparable to that of the Jerusalemite center, thus legitimizing the Diaspora as an alternative center of the Jewish people. The second passage, from Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, discusses the prohibition to return to Egypt. R. Simon b. Yohai explains that the destruction of Egyptian Jewry in 115–117 happened because they violated that prohibition. Thus, according to R. Simon, one is not permitted to leave the Land of Israel even under difficult conditions, and only those who stay will be rewarded with salvation. This view is opposed to that of R. Judah.

The Palestinian Talmud (Sukka 5:1 [55a-b]), which combines the two passages, obscures the dispute between the two Tannaim. It adds a third passage that describes the destruction of Alexandrian Jewry. The purpose of this description is not historiographic, but rather religious and didactic: to expose the essential cause of the events – the total hostility between the Jewish people and Rome.

THE EPITHETS בר פחתי AND בן פיחה , בר פחין AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN TALMUDIC SOURCES

By Aaron Amit

The term בר פחין occurs frequently in Palestinian rabbinic sources and has been explained in various ways. The regnant explanation is the one proposed by Saul Lieberman in a note in his *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*. Lieberman argued that the term should be understood as 'son of curses'. However, his opinion as to the precise etymology of the word is ambiguous; on the one hand he seems to indicate that the word is a feminine noun, פחא, whose determinate form would be פחתא; on the other hand, he also suggests that the word may be derived from the biblical פחתת (Leviticus 13:55) whose root is clearly פחת, with radical *tav*. While the former etymology provides no semantic connection with a known root, the latter would indicate that just like the Hebrew word for curse, קלל, derived from the root קלל meaning 'light', this Aramaic word is derived from the root פחת meaning 'less', in essence a call for the *lessening* of the value of the accursed. In a similar vein, Louis Ginzberg, in his commentary on the Palestinian Talmud, explained independently that בר פחין is indeed derived from the root פחת, and means a wicked and lowly man. However, these etymologies fail to explain the form בר פחין, which lacks a *tav*.

In this article, an alternate explanation is proposed. In the 19th century, Abraham Geiger

proposed that the term is derived from the Syriac root פחח, meaning 'weak', and explained בר פחין as a weakly, poor, pathetic person. Upon examination of the sources, however, it would seem that the primary meaning of the root פחח in Syriac is not 'weak', but 'soft', 'tender', or 'empty'. This is significant because one of the primary meanings of the root, 'empty', makes even more sense than 'weak' or 'pathetic' in the contexts in which the term בר פחין appears in rabbinic literature. Like the Aramaic term ריקא, the term פיחה (PT Betzah 4:3 [62c]) and its more common plural form פחין mean 'empty one(s)' or 'foolish one(s)'. The meaning 'empty' is indicated in a number of Syriac sources, including a hymn by the fourth century church father Ephrem. In his collection *Against Heresy* 4:19, we find the Syriac פחיחא ('empty ones') as a synonym for סכלא ('fools').

This derivation of בר פחין can help explain another source in PT Betzah (4:3 [62c]). There R. Hiyya calls his nephew Rav by the name of בן פיחה. The negative connotation of this epithet can be supported by the Syriac meaning of פחיחא: R. Hiya scolds his nephew calling him '[son of a] fool'. This interpretation is confirmed by another source which has been overlooked by scholars. In Midrash Tehillim 4 (Buber edition, p. 25), we find the term בן פיחה as a synonym of the Hebrew שוטה.

The parallel term in Babylonian sources, בר פחתי (BT Shabbat 29a; BT Berakhot 13b, 43a; BT Shabbat 3b and BT Nazir 59a), should also be understood as pejorative. However, the term בר פחתי is derived not from the root פחח, but from the root פחת (lessening, curse – see above), and can be translated 'son of curses'. The Geonim found the possibility that R. Hiyya called his nephew by this pejorative term problematic, and they therefore chose to explain the term on the basis of the Hebrew פחות (Esther 3:12, *inter alia*), meaning 'governors'. However, this explanation is purely apologetic.

Thus the masculine noun פח, meaning 'empty one, fool' is derived from the root פחח, meaning 'to be empty'. It has the determinate form פְּיְחָה/פִּיחָה (attested in PT Betzah 4:3 [62c]; Midrash Tehillim 4; and BT Arakhin 19a, where it takes the form פַּאחָא) and the plural form פַּחִין (attested in the form בר פחין in Palestinian sources). The semantically parallel, yet unrelated, masculine noun פחת, meaning curse, is derived from the root פחת, 'to lessen'. It has the determinate form פחתא/פחתה, and the Babylonian Aramaic plural form פחתי.

'*KI* HAS FOUR MEANINGS'

By Yochanan Breuer

This saying of the *Amora* Resh Laqish mentions four Aramaic words that represent four meanings of the Hebrew word *ki*: ʾ*i* (if), *dilma* (lest), ʾ*ela* (but), *dᵉha* (because). However, two very widespread meanings are missing from this saying: 'when' and 'that'. Scholars have tended to claim that these meanings are hinted at by one of the four words, e.g., the meaning 'when' is covered by ʾ*i* ('if'). These solutions are questionable. The best explanation seems to be that this saying focuses not on the meanings of the word, but on the ways it is translated into Aramaic, and that is why it mentions Aramaic equivalents. Assuming this, the missing meanings could not have been cited. The Aramaic word expressing the meaning 'when' is also *ki*, as in Hebrew, and the author did not find it necessary to mention Aramaic words that are identical with their Hebrew counterparts. As for the meaning 'that' in Aramaic, it is expressed by the proclitic particle *dᵉ*-. Such particles were not considered 'words', and the author intended to mention words only.

NEDARIM AND NAZIR IN *HALACHOT GEDOLOT*

By Mira Balberg

This paper deals with the question of the originality of the chapters Nedarim and Nazir in the book *Halachot Gedolot*. It has been proposed by Neil Danzig that these chapters are not original and are a later addition to the book. He bases this contention on the fact that they are missing in two manuscripts of the book and in *Halachot Pesuqot*, and on the widespread belief that during the Geonic period the talmudic tractates Nedarim and Nazir were not studied in the Geonic academies. Danzig also described these chapters as artificial and synthetic from a literary perspective. This paper suggests a different view of the evidence, arguing that these tractates hardly 'disappeared' during the Geonic era, and in any event the academies' curriculum is not relevant to the work and purposes of the author of *Halachot Gedolot*. The main part of this paper presents a literary, stylistic and structural analysis of these chapters in an attempt to see whether they are in fact artificially created or whether one can identify in them patterns of independent thought and construction. The literary analysis demonstrates that the creator of these chapters has invested a great deal of thought in selecting his sources and has independently adapted them according to his views, which were decidedly opposed to the use of oaths and vows. There is no reason whatsoever to consider these chapters a later addition.

SEFER ROSSINA – A SOUTHERN ITALIAN BIBLE COMMENTARY OF THE LATE ELEVENTH CENTURY

By Israel M. Ta-Shma

Sefer Rossina (ed. M. Weiss, Jerusalem 1976–1997 [in Hebrew]), a commentary on the Torah by an unidentified Rabbi Samuel, is known (from colophons of the surviving manuscripts) to have been copied in 1224. Bibliographers of the 19th and early 20th centuries placed its author in Russia, but Bernard D. Weinryb showed that it was written in Rossino or Rossano in southern Italy. It is the only known work of rabbinic literature which can be confidently assigned to southern Italy of the late 11th or early 12th century.

Contrary to the assertions of its editor, this commentary shows no signs of the influence of Rashi or later biblical commentators, except for two mentions of Rashi at its very end; its author apparently became aware of Rashi's work when he had almost finished writing his own commentary, and wrote a separate work (now lost) that may have been the first super-commentary on Rashi's commentary. Prominent among R. Samuel's sources are the *Aruch* of R. Nathan b. Yehiel and the controversial and enigmatic *Shiʿur Qomah.*

Like Rashi's commentary or R. Tobiah b. Eliezer's *Leqaḥ Tov,* R. Samuel's commentary combines interpretations of a philological 'peshat' nature and others of a midrashic character, but it does so in a unique fashion. The portion of the commentary devoted to each weekly *parashah* is divided into two completely separate sections, the first dedicated to philological interpretations and the second (up to ten times as long as the first) to an anthology of classical rabbinic sources having some connection, however tenuous, to the *parashah.* These sources are halachic and aggadic in roughly equal proportions, and are arranged in no particular order; all Aramaic passages are translated into elegant Hebrew. The author appears to have regarded

his work primarily as a kind of sourcebook for the weekly study of selected talmudic and midrashic passages rather than as a biblical commentary *per se*.

SALOMON MAIMON READS MOSES BEN-MAIMON: ON AMBIGUOUS NAMES

By Gideon Freudenthal and Sara Klein-Braslavy

This paper is a study of Salomon Maimon's (1753–1800) *Givᶜat Hammoreh*, his commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. We focus on Maimon's discussion of ambiguous names, which, according to Maimonides, are used in Scripture. The guiding question of our inquiry is whether Maimon's commentary is a genuine commentary on the *Guide* or merely a vehicle to sell his philosophy of Enlightenment to the Hebrew reader.

There are good reasons to doubt that Maimon's is a real commentary. In the main issues of metaphysics Maimon sided with a modernized version of the philosophy of the Mutakalimun and with Leibniz rather than with Maimonides. On the issue of language Maimon's convictions and inclinations were even directly opposed to those of Maimonides. Maimon stressed the possibility of a univocal language suitable to serve as the medium of a calculus of invention, an *ars inveniendi*. Maimonides, on the contrary, stressed the ambiguous meaning of 'names' in order to account for the figurative language he attributed to Scripture, thus paving the way for his philosophical interpretation of the Bible.

In a close reading of Maimon's commentary, we show that he explicated Maimonides' understanding of the different kinds of ambiguous 'names' on the basis of Maimonides' biblical source texts for such names and not according to Maimonides' *Milot ha-Higayyon*. Maimon's understanding clearly leans towards an epistemological, Kantian interpretation (in his own version of it). Thus, Maimon distinguishes between the objective and the subjective aspects of knowledge and correspondingly between 'names' and prepositions, between peculiar properties of some objects and universal properties of all objects. The latter are explained as rooted in the subjective categories of the understanding (expressed in prepositions) and projected onto the objects.

And yet, notwithstanding this agenda of Maimon's, we show that in the commentary on biblical words and phrases, which Maimonides, too, interpreted in the *Guide*, Maimon offers interesting and enlightening interpretations and even resolves some problems noted by previous commentators. Moreover, Maimon himself in the course of the work on his commentary changed his views on the nature and origin of ambiguous 'names'. Thus, both the success of his commentary in solving problems of interpreting Maimonides, and the influence of the work on his own thought show that he seriously engaged himself in the work on this commentary. In fact, it thus became a presentation of his philosophy and at the same time a genuine commentary on Maimonides' *Guide*. We conclude our study with a suggestion explaining how these two functions coincided: Maimon reflected on his own development in two forms – in the form of an autobiography (as is well known) and in the form of repeated commentaries on his own previous philosophical positions. In fact, all his books are commentaries of a sort. In writing commentaries Maimon developed his own position and documented its genesis, and in writing his autobiography he reflected on this same development.

THE SYROPALESTINIAN INSCRIPTION FROM 'ANAB EL-KEBIR

By Moshe Bar-Asher

Alongside Greek inscriptions, a partially damaged two-line Syropalestinian inscription was discovered in the excavations of the Church at 'Anab el-Kebir. We propose the following reading:

Šmwᶜ šy[lt] qš[y']   [Please] hear the petition of the priest
Hnynh qš[ysˀ] Gyrgwn Hanina [and the petition] of the priest Girgon

Several typical features of Syropalestinian are noteworthy: (1) all of the letters are connected in all of the words; (2) a non-final letter occurs at the end of the word ܠܚܡܘ; (3) the name *Ḥaninah* is spelled *Ḥanina* (apparently pronounced *Anina*) – the *ḥet*, which was not pronounced, is written with a *he*, and the unpronounced *he* functions as a *mater lectionis* for final *a*; (4) the *Peᶜal* imperative is *šmoᶜ* (and not *šmaᶜ*).