

DISCUSSION OF THREE TEXT EDITIONS
OF MISHNAIC GENIZA FRAGMENTS

by

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Geniza is an Aramaic word which originates from Persian and means something like treasure-house, storehouse or hiding-place. It is the place where the forbidden books are hidden, to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. The geniza is, however, also a hiding-place for all sorts of books, sacred and profane, which are written in the Holy Script and have become imperfect and useless due to age or wear. According to Jewish tradition such books may not be simply destroyed, used again, or thrown away with other rubbish. They must be blessed in God's name and buried like a human being with special ceremony. Before this, though, these manuscripts are collected in the geniza, until the room overflows. This custom is to blame for the small amount of old Hebrew manuscripts which have survived the centuries. Apart from the fortunate discovery of the manuscripts in Qumran, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible date from the ninth century A. D., which means they were written several centuries after the manuscripts of the Greek Bible, the Septuagint and the New Testament.

The geniza filled up with all the material which collected in the local archives, since letters, documents, bills etc. were all written in the Holy Script. In addition to this, all the written material which the family had no more use for was brought to the geniza. This means that the contents of the geniza provide a reliable representation of the whole written material of a community and a certain era.

As a rule the geniza was not particularly large, so that it filled up in a few centuries or less than a century, and the burial took place at the cemetery, where the material soon disintegrated completely.

By a fortunate coincidence, the story of the synagogue in Old Cairo, which is over a thousand years old, was different. This geniza was situated in a walled-in stairway, into which the manuscripts to be kept there were thrown from an opening above. There was so much space in this chamber that it was not emptied for a thousand years, until in the last century various pieces of writing from this geniza came to the traders. Travellers to Egypt then brought exotic souvenirs, as did the two English ladies, Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson. Prof. Schechter of Cambridge recognized some of the pages of Hebrew they brought back as pages from the lost Hebrew original of the apocryphal book Sira. In 1896 Schechter succeeded in bringing the

remaining fragments (about 250,000) from the Cairo geniza in chests to Cambridge. In time a whole series of lost works came to light, including the apocryphal Damascus manuscript, fragments of which were found fifty years later together with the famous scrolls in Qumran.

Naturally these discoveries have made the geniza in Cairo famous, so that when the word geniza is used alone, the geniza in Cairo is meant. The initial discovery of lost works have been followed by a whole series of historical sources, history books, lists, archive material, documents, contracts and the autographs of famous persons, which have made it necessary to rewrite early-medieval Jewish history, about which only very little material existed.

Of considerable importance is also the material which was already known to us, but of which particularly early manuscript fragments were found in the geniza. Some of these must be dated to five hundred years earlier than the previously known manuscripts. In this connection the whole Hala-khic material, the Mishnah and the Talmud, are of especial interest to us.

The Mishnah is the first systematic collection of all material dealing with the law in post-biblical Judaism. It can perhaps best be compared with the civil law, but it is more than this, since it also contains all the rules for religious life. It was fixed about 200 years A. D. by the patriarch Jehuda, but much of the material in the Mishnah dates from the time of Jesus, which makes the Mishnah, with other contemporary sources of early Judaism, the most important contemporary source contributing to our understanding of the New Testament.

The Mishnah is written in a Vulgar Hebrew, the so-called Mishnaic Hebrew, which was still spoken in Judaea in remote country districts at the time of Jesus. It differs from the Biblical Hebrew, the classical and literary language. It was the fate of Mishnaic Hebrew that the attempt was made through the centuries to "improve" the vulgar Hebrew, and bring it in line with the standard, Biblical Hebrew. Thus the characteristics of this language were increasingly lost and are only to be found in the oldest manuscripts, in particular the fragments from the geniza. Although it must be admitted that even in the geniza fragments the process of decay has already set in, and the oldest remaining Mishnah fragments were written at least 600 years after the first fixation of the Mishnah. On the banks of the Dead Sea, especially in Wadi Muraba'at and in Nachal Heber, a series of original documents from the Mishnah era have been discovered in the last two decades, for the first time, in genuine Mishnaic Hebrew.

These fragments from the Cairo geniza, however, do not only contain a more original language form of the Mishnah, they sometimes contain interpretations which no longer appear in the manuscripts: in some cases we have variations on the same theme, in others there are also deviating, partially contradictory opinions. It is also interesting that many additions

from later times, which are to be found in the manuscripts and prints are not contained in these geniza fragments. Thus the fragments, with the three old manuscripts containing the whole Mishnah text, provide the most important representations of the original Mishnah in text and language. It would therefore be of the utmost importance for the study of the Mishnah to have a complete collection of the whole geniza material on this subject. Unfortunately, 80 years after the discovery of the geniza, this work has still not been undertaken.

The geniza material is in no way uniform. There are Mishnah fragments from the tenth century (perhaps even from the ninth), which are of the greatest importance, and fragments from the seventeenth century and even later, which depend on the printed editions and have no scientific or practical significance. In addition to this, several recensions of the Mishnah are indicated, including at least two main recensions, one in Palestine and one in Babylonia. Most of the manuscripts are more or less mixtures, though some still have the evident characteristics of their recensions. Thus manuscript is not equal to manuscript and geniza fragment does not equal geniza fragment. The composition of fragments, the classification of age, place or origin and recension are very important for the text history of the Mishnah. The very nature of the geniza material means that most of the discarded texts consisted only of loose leaves. The conditions of preservation were not the best, either, so that the various manuscripts disintegrated even more. Some of the material was torn, or at least arrived in the geniza in a torn condition. When the material was sold pages from a single treatise, not to mention from a manuscript, were sent to four or five different libraries, sometimes separated by continents. For instance four pages of one treatise are to be found in New York, Oxford, Cambridge and Leningrad. Even within the libraries the material has not been sorted, successive pages are separated and bound in completely different volumes. At present there are no lists of the various finds from the geniza. The mix-up has not decreased in the past 80 years, much has already been lost due to inexpert treatment or war.

For this reason the intention of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to compose such a corpus of Mishnaic fragments, at least for internal use, is even more welcome.

The three books to be discussed represent a certain preparation for this project.

1) Abraham I. Katsh: *Ginze Mishna*. Mossad Harav Kook. Jerusalem, 1970

אברהם יצחקי קץ; גנוזי משנה

The editor has set himself the task of editing in fascimile all the Mishnaic geniza fragments of the Antonin Collection in Leningrad. The Antonin Collection in Leningrad is one of the smaller collections of geniza

fragments, but is of selected material. The collector himself, the Russian archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, who was Head of the Russian Mission in Jerusalem from 1865 until his death in 1894, is responsible for the quality of these fragments. In other fields of archaeology, too, the archimandrite Antonin was a pioneer in his field, as is still witnessed today by the fine collection on the Mount of Olives. At that time, as indeed now, Jerusalem was an excellent trading ground for Jewish antiquities, and the first items from the Cairo geniza were being bought and sold in Jerusalem long before Schechter arrived in Cairo. The archimandrite was a connoisseur with enough scientific appreciation to buy only the best of the available material. Thus the Antonin collection, which was transferred to Leningrad after the death of the archimandrite, is at present in the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library, equals in quality the collections in Cambridge, Oxford, London, Paris and New York, although these are quantitatively bigger.

The special value of the Mishnah fragment in the Antonin collection lies in the great age of most of the fragments and their generally excellent condition in comparison with other geniza fragments. Several fragments contain texts with Babylonian supralinear punctuation (cf. the next text edition to be discussed), the value of which had been recognized earlier, especially by Kahle, and which had already been published. A fragment with the very rare pre-Tiberian Palestine punctuation is also included (cf. the 3rd book discussed here, Aloni ABB. 22f. is missing in the Katsh edition). The most valuable fragment of the collection and one of the most valuable of all the Mishnah fragments is the Antonin fragment No. 262, which still appears in the Katsh index in the Jung jubilee volume as "unidentified part of Mishna", but which contains most of the last order from *Negaim* 2:1 to *Zabim* 5:9, continuous and complete with accents and partial Tiberian punctuation.

In addition to the fascimile material itself, which contains 159 pages, there are two prefaces, one in English and one in Hebrew. Both prefaces contain a similar description of the Antonin collection (for which reason it is not necessary to print one here), but are otherwise quite different.

The English preface (12 pages) describes first in detail the three other large collections of Hebrew manuscripts and fragments in Russia, the Guenzburg collection, the Friedliana collection and the two Firkowitch collections. Katsh has earned special praise for his research into these collections, to which it is so difficult to gain access. His best achievement, which should not be belittled, is his research into the Russian libraries and particularly the publication of these fragments, which we may hope will be followed by others. The Hebrew preface (also 12 pages) contains, in addition to the description of the Antonin collection, a detailed list of variations in the contents of Mishnah fragments, which makes apparent the importance of the fragments as textual evidence. However, here the first criticism must be

expressed, for the comparison of the geniza text with the printed text does not show whether only the geniza text reveals these variations, or whether other manuscripts also contain a text comparable to the geniza fragments. Examination of some sections revealed that in fact, often the same text can be found in the manuscripts and in the geniza fragments. At the end of the preface there is a list of all the pages shown, with specified contents. The contents are also given on the relevant page (in two versions).

Unfortunately there is no mention at this point of the library number of the section under discussion, which means that the user is not automatically in a position to find a particular section in the microfilm (there are microfilms of the whole Antonin collection in the Jewish National University Library and at the Rabbinical Seminary in New York), should the reproduction be unsatisfactory, for example. When looking through the whole work one cannot help feeling that the facsimile collection is incomplete.

Unfortunately too, there is no description of the fragments. We are not told whether the fragments are of parchment (pergamum) or paper, whether the pages are written on both sides or only one, there is no mention of size. The photographs are all more or less the same size, which is hardly likely to be the case in reality. It looks as if the editor sees the whole geniza as an ocean of pages which all have more or less the same quality, and out of which it is his purpose to produce a single geniza manuscript. This at least seems to be his intention in this edition, limited to the Antonin collection. This intention could best be realized with tractate Avot, which is one of the most popular Mishnah tracts, and of which there are the most manuscripts. This is also true for the geniza and for the Antonin collection. In his index the Antonin collection, which the editor published in the Leo Jung Jubilee Volume, New York, 1962, he counted (on p. 129) 8 fragments to tractate Avot (without the Arabic ones). In his edition appear fragments from four or five manuscripts (it is difficult to tell from the photograph alone, which manuscripts they are; Antonin No. 853, in Aloni Fig. 22f. reproduced with early Palestinian punctuation, also indicated in the Katsh index in the Jung Jubilee Volume. is evidently missing in this edition), but the whole tractate is reproduced more or less continuously, at least according to the list of contents. This fact does not, however, stand up to closer examination. Thus facsimile 52 on page 105 ends, according to Katsh's index, with 2:10, and facsimile 53 on page 107 continues the tractate with 2:11, without a gap. However, facsimile 53 obviously belongs to a different manuscript to facsimile 52, and the text is not continuous, in fact facsimile 53 starts with 2:9 (Avot 2:13 in the old Mishnah manuscripts). This manuscript facsimile 53 was certainly written by the same copyist as fragment (a) in tractate Arakin published by me (Berlin-New York 1971, p. 139). This manuscript was written on both sides of the page, as all geniza fragments are. Katsh only shows us one side of the page.

What happened to the back? Was it empty? Or did he not read it, because he possessed another manuscript for the continuous text? This is probably the answer; since the connection to the next page, facsimile 54, is perfect according to the legend. Facsimile 53 ends with 3:1, facsimile 54, obviously another new manuscript, begins with 3:2. In fact, however, facsimile 53 ends with 3:5, and facsimile 54 continues with 3:1. At least one further page is missing for sure. Facsimile 5 has no reverse, it is a piece with Babylonian punctuation which also appears in the next work to be discussed. Yeivin p. 162: p. 163 there shows the reverse side which is missing in Katsh.

Fragments are not always easy to read, usually because they have suffered greatly from the effects of time. Publishers who print such fragments must choose an especially good type of print, in order to achieve optional legibility. In general the screen process chosen here is satisfactory, although sometimes nothing can be recognized in the printed version, when the microfilm is quite legible.

I have compared some portions of the text with the microfilm made available to me by Leningrad. Even if this problem was technically insoluble, the text should have been printed on the facing page. Instead of this we find, with a scientific appearance a complicated variant apparatus which not only quotes the manuscript inaccurately, but also presents an arbitrary selection of manuscripts. Lacking are, for example, the important Mishnah fragments which would have been particularly important. Instead of this the Mishnah text of the Talmud is quoted according to completely unsatisfactory prints (about which we are, moreover, not informed at all).

Information about fragments is in itself not necessarily very worthwhile, especially when there is no evaluation, and we are not even told which fragments have already been published and how they were assessed. There is also no mention of the various kinds of punctuation exhibited by some fragments.

But enough criticism. In a new edition a number of improvements would be desirable, the most important having been mentioned here. The publishers must be praised for producing a book which is within the price-range of students, a matter which is no longer a matter of course even in Israel. If one compares the quality of the pictorial reproductions with similar text reproductions from the much more expensive Makor publishers, who produced the other two books to be discussed, then the Rav Kook Institute compares most favourably. In spite of its failings this book is indispensable for everyone who wishes to study the text of the Mishnah.

2) A collection of Mishnaic Geniza Fragments with Babylonian Vocalisation. ed. I. Yeivan. Makor, Jerusalem 1974,

אוסף קטעי הגניזה של המשנה ניקוד בבלי בעריכת י. ייבין

The aim of this book is to collect all the Mishnaic geniza fragments with Babylonian supralinear punctuation and to publish them in facsimile. Although Biblical and Targumic texts are often to be found with this punctuation, which was common in Babylonia and later in Yemen, the texts are very rare in Mishnaic Hebrew. Paul Kahle was the one who, in his "Masoretes of the East", 1913, researched this punctuation thoroughly. However, in this book he also investigated Biblical texts and Targumim. He was the first person to begin collecting the whole Mishnaic material systematically. His students Anton Richters, C. B. Friedmann and Efraim Porat have also investigated in dissertations and laborious research work, the Mishnaic material. Kahle himself published the first collection of five manuscripts with supralinear punctuation, in HUCA 10 (1935) pp. 185-222 and HUCA 12/13 (1937-38) pp. 275-325. The latter is more a group, consisting of a series of various manuscripts. The manuscript fragments A-D are larger, A and B being older than C and D. MS A contains the orders (sedarim) Nashim to Toharot, 28 pages in all; MS B contains the first three orders Zeraim to Nashim, 19 pages; MS C only the order Zeraim, 7 pages, and MS D the orders Zeraim, Nashim and Kodashim, 16 pages. In the two essays in HUCA Kahle published the manuscripts A and C.

Fortunately the new edition from Yeivin remains true to the first attempt by Kahle to investigate this material and adds little. To manuscript A, 2 pages have been added from the Jewish National University Library in Jerusalem and from the Dropsie College in Philadelphia (the latter library was overlooked by Kahle, a catalogue from Philadelphia appeared in 1924). To MS B have been added 2 fragments from the New Series from Cambridge, and to MS D 4 pages from London, British Museum, from Cambridge, T. S. Collection and the Rabbinical Seminary, New York. To the 3 various manuscript fragments of group E two further fragments have been found. Apart from this two more additional pages of Mishnaic texts with supralinear punctuation are published here, one very old fragment to Avot from Cambridge and a fragment to Eduyot from the Yemen (the only page which does not come from the geniza). There is also a vocabulary index to the Mishnah with supralinear punctuation which is published here.

Since other non-Biblical texts written in Mishnaic Hebrew are extremely rare, the pieces discovered up to now have been published here as an appendix. These include a portion of the Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra, a Sifra fragment and a longer portion from an Aggadic Midrash.

Thus the whole of the material written in Mishnaic Hebrew with Babylonian supralinear punctuation, which is known at present and not including texts in which only isolated words are vocalic is now available to the scientific world in facsimile form. Apart from the fragments published here there are in fact only three other manuscripts with the eastern punctuation, all of which appeared earlier in facsimile form.

- 1). Vatican MS 66, Sifra, published by L. Finkelstein, New York, 1956; this manuscript contains the oldest form of Babylonian punctuation, and is perhaps the oldest manuscript we have on Rabbinical literature (9th century?).
- 2). MS Sassoon 263, Sefer Halakot Pesugot, published by the Makor company, Jerusalem 1971, only partially vocalized.
- 3). MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Heb. 1402, Sefer Halakot Gedolot, also published 1971 by the Makor company, partially vocalized.

Vatican MS 66, Sifra and the fragments published by Kahle and Yeivin are thus the most important material existing of the Mishnah in Babylonian. The text of the fragments, apart from the punctuation, is however mostly Palestinian. The book begins with a Hebrew introduction by I. Yeivin (19 folio pages), which describes the three complete manuscripts, and continues with brief history of the investigation of the Babylonian punctuation. There is no explanation of the system itself, only a reference to other literature on this subject. Then follows a brief description of the material published here.

After this comes a summary of the stages of punctuation, a list of vowel signs and a division into vocalization groups. Subsequently the accentuation symbols which appear now and then are mentioned. There follows a section about the Arabic glosses in the margin of some fragments and a short explanation of differences in the order of the tractates in relation to the prints and manuscripts.

Following the introduction we find a list of all published fragments with information about the place of origin and sections of Mishnah. The fragments are classified according to manuscript, their orders and tractates. At the end of each manuscript there is a brief evaluation of the manuscript, with information of the kind of punctuation and a list of previous publications of the individual fragments. This list and description also appear in English. Both indices in the book are also printed in English and Hebrew: a page index of all the published Mishnaic fragments, according to the order of the Mishnah prints, and a list of the libraries in which the fragments are stored.

In conclusion the technical form of the book should be mentioned. The book is more than 5 times as expensive as the previously mentioned book. Both are the same in volume. The Makor book is hand-bound in half-leather and the price corresponds to the price of the book from the Rav Kook Institute. The printing technique, which is most important in a facsimile edition, is, however, not better in any way. If one compares the fragments which appear in both books then the less expensive book usually proves to be more legible. Unforgivable in such an expensive edition are a few pages, such as p. 48 or p. 64, in which more or less everything is illegible. Both examples come from a relatively large continuous fragment from Oxford, the microfilm of which I happen to possess. In this microfilm the whole fragment is completely legible. Unfortunately the scientific world has to rely on the editions. The old, laborious microfilm reading has not

yet been replaced by these. In this volume, too, there is no information about the size of the fragments. The fragments have apparently often been reproduced in a much smaller format, which makes them more difficult to read. Here, too, a printed copy would have been desirable. It is annoying when the same fragment appears in different sizes on subsequent pages, cf. p. 44 and p. 45 and many other examples.

3). Geniza Fragments of Rabbinical Literature; Mishna, Talmud and Midrash; with Palestinian Vocalisation, ed. N. Aloni, Makor, Jerusalem 1973.

קטעי גניזה של משנה, תלמוד ומדרש מנוקדים בניקוד ארצי ישראלי

The aim of the book is to collect all non-Biblical and non-poetic material with Palestinian punctuation and to publish it in facsimile. The Palestinian punctuation system is probably the oldest of the three which are usually in Hebrew. It was replaced soon after its creation by the Tiberian system, which afterwards also replaced the Babylonian system and is the usual one today. However, for centuries the Babylonian and Tiberian systems existed in competition with one another, so that we still have relatively many more texts with Babylonian punctuation (cf. the second book discussed). In contrast to the Babylonian and Tiberian systems, the Palestinian system only vocalized a few isolated words. There is no fragment containing a completely Palestinian vocalized text. As a rule only a few words on each page are vocalized, and these are usually incompletely vocalized. In order to decode this system and the pronunciation in earlier times (probably in the 7th or 8th century) every punctated letter is important.

In the jubilee volume for Hanoch Albeck, Jerusalem 1963, N. Aloni published on p. 30 to 40 the two, at that time, known Mishnaic manuscripts with this early form of punctuation and simultaneously a list of all other known fragments of Rabbinical literature with Palestinian punctuation.

This article must immediately be recommended as an introduction to the book under discussion here, since the editor assumes that his educated reader is familiar with the methods of Palestinian vocalization.

Although the editor could only present a handful of fragments with this rare punctuation in 1963, ten years later he is able to submit a publication with approximately 60 fragments, 12 Mishnah, 10 Jeruschalmi, 7 Babli, 27 Midrash, 3 Halakha and 1 philology fragment, 219 pages in all.

In contrast to the other books discussed here, the Hebrew introduction to this book takes up considerable space (90 pages) and is a significant part of the whole work. Since only a few words are vocalized, most of the material is very old, most of it was written before the 11th century, and since, in addition, most of it is palimpsest, the facsimile pages do not provide a satisfactory idea of the punctuation, or even make it recognizable in most cases. For this reason it is even more praiseworthy that the editor collected and discussed in his foreword page for page, all the separate vocalized and ac-

cented words. Thus in order to understand the earlier Palestinian punctuation the introduction is almost more important than the facsimiles. In the introduction we also find a precise description of each fragment with exact information about size and content. After the foreword come a series of indices, of which the first and most important contains an alphabetical list of several hundred words, which were found in the various fragments with Palestinian punctuation. This list is the yield of the book and will be most important for the comprehension and investigation of the early punctuation. There follows an index of all the facsimile pages with details, library and place, then a summary of the various kinds of Rabbinical literature which are dealt with in this book, a list of libraries and one of abbreviations.

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