

BOOK REVIEW

MIDRASHIC FRAGMENTS FROM THE CAIRO GENIZA

by *SHMUEL SAFRAI*

צבי מאיר רבינוביץ, גנזי מדרש; לצורתם הקדומה של מדרשי חז"ל לפי כתבי-יד מן הגניזה; בית הספר למדעי היהדות של אוניברסיטת תל-אביב, תשל"ז; 323 ע'.

ZVI RABINOVITZ, *GINZE MIDRASH*; The Oldest Forms of Rabbinic Midrashim, According to Geniza Manuscripts, School of Jewish Studies, University of Tel Aviv; Tel Aviv, 1976, 323pp.

Among the many discoveries which we have gained in consequence of the opening up of the Cairo Genizah about eighty years ago, are some of the most outstanding in value. Fragments of the early talmudical literature of Erez Israel have been published in Hebrew within the last twenty years. About fifty years ago Louis Ginzburg published his "Ginzei Schechter" in which were collected genizah fragments from various fields of early Hebrew literature. The first volume, which appeared in 1928, was entirely devoted to midrashic fragments from the Genizah. Many items had been published previously and since then we have been treated, from time to time, by the publication of an additional fragment or fragments from this or the other source.

The present work comprises twenty-four chapters containing fragments from midrashic literature – tannaitic and amoraic midrashim discovered by Prof. Rabinovitz in various genizah collections mainly in the libraries of Cambridge, Oxford and London, but partly in photographs made by the Institute for Hebrew MSS at the National Library in Jerusalem from the Leningrad Library. One fragment (a midrash from the Book of Leviticus), Parashat Shemini, is not a genizah fragment, but comes from a collection of Yemenite MSS found in Hulon. Of the 24 fragments published by Rabinovitz, only three have previously been printed elsewhere in other periodicals by him.

The midrashic items, like most of the published genizah finds, are generally not entire books but one, two, or more pages from a book. Their great importance,

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however, is due to the fact not only that genizah fragments are several centuries earlier than our earliest MSS of the books in question, but also because they represent the earliest type of preservation of the tradition of the book. The genizah fragments, especially those of the midrashim, still preserve the early Palestinian writing. (the *Ketiv* generally) the forms of the sages' names, early forms of the language, phrases whose meaning became blurred in the course of time and Aramaic and Greek words which later were changed into Hebrew words or better known words. It is unnecessary to say that sentences were omitted or became garbled in the process of copying books throughout the centuries.

In an inscription found in a synagogue at Emeq Bet Sh'an near Tel Rehov, which was discovered in recent years, appears a palimpsest of 29 lines with various halakhic dicta dealing with oaths, tithes, and the borders of Erez Israel.¹ The spelling of Hebrew and Aramaic in the inscription matches that of the best and earliest MSS of Talmudic literature and of genizah fragments in general, especially that of the fragments included in the present volume.

The first six chapters consist of tannaitic midrashim, fragments from the Mekhilta of R. Ismael, from Sifra on Leviticus and one fragment from Deuteronomy. Except for a fragment of Sifra on Parashat Shemini known to us from another source, all other fragments were known to us, yet we had no early sources for them in the genizah fragments. Our MSS of the Mekhilta are medieval in date and were edited by H.S. Horovitz. A genizah fragment was found by the late Prof. Y. Kutscher in Oxford and it is probable that the fragments given at the beginning of the present book are identical with those published by Kutscher in his time. On page 13, in a description of the section on Israel's *Qiddush Hashem* (martyrdom) occur the words "As it is said: 'We have loved Thee even unto death.'" This verse does not appear in our Bible, but Prof. David Flusser is of the opinion that without assuming a homiletical exposition of this verse or some similar words we can make no sense of the reading in Revelation 12:11, where it is said of martyrs "and they did not love their souls even unto death." The author of the Apocalypse interprets this as meaning that they loved even unto death and not their own lives.

About twenty years ago we were given the privilege to print a photocopy of Sifra in the text of a MS in Rome; the photocopy was accompanied by an introduction by Prof. L. Finkelstein. This MS is ancient and essentially Babylonian, especially in its punctuation. In the present volume are presented a number of fragments which exhibit the Palestinian text, spelling and punctuation. Many fragments from the Antonin Collection in Leningrad are written with partial punctuation and accentuation marks.

Seven out of the 24 chapters consist of fragments of aggadic midrashim by the Amoraim on the Pentateuch and prophetic books. Some of them differ from the midrashim known to us in textual variations and spelling, but many fragments are

1. See the article by Ze'ev Safrai in this issue of *Immanuel*, pp. 48–57.

actually midrashim of which we had no knowledge from any other source. Chapter 7, which is a midrash on Numbers, *Parashyot* Pinhas and Mattot, is an early recension of this type of book. The Midrash of Tanhuma and many derashot (homiletical interpretations) are either not known from any other source or are only indirectly alluded to in other sources. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 are early texts of some chapters of the midrashim and dicta of the Sages and a great deal about Galilean Aramaic, which became corrupted by European copyists who were influenced by the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud. The same can also be said of chapters 12-14, which are fragments from chapters of the midrash Lamentations Rabba. In my opinion, many fragments tend to upset the assumption made by scholars as to the late date of certain midrashim, an example is the Midrash on Proverbs. Zunz and many after him regarded this as a late midrash compiled in Europe (in southern Italy) in the tenth or eleventh century. But the early midrashic fragments, especially those published in the present volume, go a long way towards proving that we have in Midrash Mishlei an early midrash emanating from Erez Israel.

Great interest has to be given to the six pages from the Genizah collection in Leningrad which are written on both sides of the page and contain about one third of Canticles Zuta. Here also, this reviewer does not agree with those who assign a late date to the midrash in question; we have here an important source of early Palestinian midrash containing important historical traditions from Second Temple times, particularly on the subject of relations between Israel and Rome.

The last chapter, chapter 24 is a fragment of Seder Eliahu Rabba. This important book, unique both in its style of writing as well as in its originality of doctrine and thought, is one of the very few MSS that exist. We have the first edition, printed in Venice in 1598 and a single MS in the Vatican dating from 1073, but the corruptions in the text of this book are many and serious. The publication of this fragment undoubtedly represents an important contribution towards clarifying the text of this book.

All readers and scholars in the field of midrashic literature will be grateful to the author of the present volume for his short introductions to the various fragments and for his effort to present the text in a suitable form with a detailed description.