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## A New Fragment of *Megillat Ta'anit*\*

The inauguration of the website for the Project of Hebrew Manuscripts and Fragments in Austrian Libraries marks an important step for the field of Jewish Studies. Now, a significant portion of the Hebrew fragments in Austrian libraries have been found, identified, listed and published, thereby making them freely accessible to all scholars and interested parties. It is of noteworthy significance that the Austrian project is the first of its kind to implement this practice regarding the publication of Hebrew fragments.

Even before the establishment of this important project, already during the nineteen eighties, a relationship of cooperation was established between Dr. Peter Landesmann and Prof. Yaakov Sussmann of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who, for nearly forty years, has been heading the project “Thesaurus of Talmudic Manuscripts”, formerly known as the “Mishnah Project”. The cooperation between the “Mishnah Project” and the “Project of Hebrew Manuscripts and Fragments in Austrian Libraries” has intensified over the last few years,<sup>1</sup> and it is the fruits of this cooperation that I will present in this paper. However, I wish to preface with a few words describing the Thesaurus of Talmudic Manuscripts.

The Thesaurus includes descriptions of all known manuscripts and fragments of Mishnah, Tosefta, Jerusalem Talmud, Babylonian Talmud and Rif,<sup>2</sup> found throughout the entire world. This project has been active for nearly forty years, and has examined all libraries, archives and collections known to contain a Hebrew manuscript. It is the first project of its kind in the area of Jewish Studies to collect all manuscripts belonging to the same field of

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\* This paper was delivered in the conference of Hebrew Manuscripts and Fragments in Austrian Libraries, which took place during the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Studies, Vienna, 26 July 2007. It is published here with some updates and adaptations. – A detailed research paper on the important fragment discussed here will be published in Hebrew by myself in a forthcoming volume of *Tarbiz*.

<sup>1</sup> I want to express my thanks to the staff of the Austrian project and especially to Prof. Josef Oesch and to Mrs. Almut Laufer, for their productive cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Rif = the code of Talmudic Law compiled by R. Isaac Alfasi.

study. In total, there are listed in the Thesaurus approximately eight thousand seven hundred and fifty Talmudic manuscripts and fragments.

The Thesaurus will soon be published under the auspices of the Friedberg Genizah Project.

The majority of items are Cairo Genizah fragments. Added to these are the codices, and a continuously growing list of fragments from European libraries. In contrast to the Cairo Genizah fragments and the codices – regarding which there is little expectation of further discoveries – there is no doubt that the area of European fragments contains many further discoveries, primarily due to projects such as the Project of Hebrew Manuscripts and Fragments in Austrian Libraries.

Following is a brief summary of the findings in the Thesaurus regarding the fragments and manuscripts found in Austrian libraries.

According to the catalogues of Schwarz, Loewinger and Roth, up to the beginning of the nineteen seventies there were known to be approximately eighty-five Talmudic manuscripts – mostly fragments – in Austria, the overwhelming majority of which were binding fragments. During the end of the nineteen sixties, and primarily during the seventies, Prof. Yaakov Sussmann conducted wide investigations of Austrian libraries, during which seventy-five additional Talmudic fragments were found. To these were added, in recent years, around fifty more fragments, most of which were discovered through the thorough investigations of the Austrian project. More findings are likely to follow.

All in all, the Thesaurus contains two hundred and thirteen items, from thirty-five libraries throughout Austria. A significant majority – nearly forty percent – of the fragments are found in the Austrian National Library in Vienna (amongst them five Cairo Genizah fragments belonging to the Rainer collection). In nineteen other libraries there are between two and twelve Talmudic fragments in each library, and in fifteen additional libraries there is one Talmudic fragment alone.

There is only one comprehensive Talmudic manuscript in all of Austria. This manuscript is a very important manuscript of the Tosefta, found in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. However, this manuscript was acquired by the National Library in Vienna only during the nineteenth century. The National Library also contains a partial manuscript of the Rif.

All other items listed for Austria are fragments containing, for the most part, one or two leaves of text. Most of these fragments are found in bindings or have been removed from them.

These fragments include representatives of all Talmudic texts covered by the Thesaurus. However, not all of these texts are represented equally. Nearly all of the fragments – one hundred and eighty seven of them – are fragments of the Babylonian Talmud. Of the other texts there are but a few fragments. As Prof. Sussmann has already shown,<sup>3</sup> this phenomenon is characteristic of the distribution of Talmudic manuscripts throughout Europe<sup>4</sup>, and is an indication of the indisputable dominance of the Babylonian Talmud in Jewish medieval Europe. Copies of other Talmudic texts were extremely rare, and the proportions – which have not changed even now, after the discovery of many new fragments during the last thirty years – speak for themselves.

Nevertheless, rarely copied texts were occasionally copied. Thus, in the framework of extensive investigations conducted recently by the Austrian Project, a leaf of an unusual and unique Talmudic text has been discovered, namely: *Megillat Ta'anit* – the Scroll of Fasting. This paper will focus on describing this rare and important discovery.

This fragment was found in the Library of the Benedictine Monastery in St. Paul in the Lavant Valley, in the binding of Cod. 39c/4 – a copy of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. This manuscript was written in 1424, and, as I have been informed by Dr. Christine Glaßner, was very likely bound sometime after that in Vienna. In the binding of this codex were found two complete leaves, one of the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Shqalim and the other of *Megillat Ta'anit*, as well as a large number of strips.<sup>5</sup>

I have identified a number of these strips as remnants of a manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma. The pages of Shqalim, *Megillat Ta'anit* and the strips containing the Babylonian Talmud Yoma all seem to have been written by the same hand and belonged to the same original manuscript. Dr. M. Glatzer, who examined the fragments at my request, dates this manuscript as being earlier than 1300.

Examination of the text of the leaf of Shqalim, revealed that it represents a late and revised version of this text. The Babylonian Talmud does not include the tractate of Shqalim, and therefore in some manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud, as well as in the first complete printed volumes of the

<sup>3</sup> Y. SUSSMANN, Talmudic remnants in the "European Genizah", in: *The Italian Genizah*. Ed. A. DAVID–J. TABORY. Jerusalem 1998, 53–60, esp. 56 (hebr.).

<sup>4</sup> With the exception of Italy where a large number of fragments of Mishnah and Rif are found – see SUSSMANN [ibid.], 57, and the reference there in note 32. Yet also in Italy the dominance of the Babylonian Talmud is clear.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Prof. J. Oesch for the dedicated efforts involved in arranging for the unbinding of these fragments.

Babylonian Talmud, this revised version of the Jerusalem Talmud's tractate of Shqalim is added.

Since the text of Tractate Shqalim in this manuscript is the revised version of Shqalim, and the original manuscript included also Babylonian Talmud, it is reasonable to conclude that these fragments are remnants of an original manuscript of Seder Moed, that contained, besides the Babylonian Talmud, some additional texts relevant to this Order – such as Tractate Shqalim, and such as *Megillat Ta'anit*. The original manuscript was, therefore, seemingly one of Babylonian Talmud, as indeed is usual for Austrian fragments.

Examination of the text on the leaf of *Megillat Ta'anit* reveals that this finding is of great importance to the research of this *Megilla*, in terms of its textual, linguistic and historical aspects.

*Megillat Ta'anit* differs from all other early Talmudic texts by almost all parameters of comparison – its nature, its size, its language, its time of compilation and its method of distribution. This composition is made up of a list of about thirty-five dates during which it is forbidden to fast due to joyous events that took place on them. The *Megilla* lists these dates and, alongside the vast majority of them, notes, with extreme brevity, the event that caused the day to be pronounced celebratory.

Although this *Megilla* is primarily a legal, halachic text, it is one of the most “historic” of Talmudic texts, and indeed, many historians have attempted to decipher the events mentioned by the *Megilla*. In spite of many disagreements, it is widely agreed that most of the dates commemorate events that took place before the destruction of the Second Temple, and there is no doubt that this text is the earliest Rabbinic work that has been handed down to our times.

The language of the *Megilla* is Aramaic, and in this too the *Megilla* is an exception to other early Talmudic texts.

Finally, this *Megilla* is the only Talmudic text regarding which we have explicit information of it being written and not handed down in oral form. It is indeed described as being “written and deposited” (כתובה ומגוחת).

The difficulty in identifying the events mentioned by the *Megilla* is not an experience exclusive to contemporary historians alone, but was already felt by the Rabbis of the Mishnaic period. They too felt the need for explanatory notes to the events of the *Megilla*. So, already in the Mishnaic period, an additional text was composed, a text whose sole purpose was to explain the earlier, Aramaic, *Megillat Ta'anit*. This text, whose language is Hebrew, reveals a strong affinity to Tannaitic texts, and indeed significant sections of

it are quoted in the Babylonian Talmud using the common terminology for quoting oral Tannaitic sources.

This Tannaitic commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit* has been termed by Graetz: the "*scholion*", and it is by this term that it is known today.

For nearly a century, scholars researching the text of the *scholion* to *Megillat Ta'anit* have been unsuccessful at understanding the significance of the various different versions of this text appearing in different manuscripts. The most significant progress has been made only recently by Dr. V. Noam, who published a new edition of *Megillat Ta'anit*,<sup>6</sup> based on her research conducted during the nineteen nineties. Noam showed, through indisputable evidence that the manuscripts represent in reality, not one, but two different compositions of *scholion* to the *Megilla*. Each of these two compositions is represented by one manuscript, one being the Parma manuscript (Parma, Palatina, De Rossi 117) and the other the Oxford manuscript (Oxford Bodleian, Michael 388). In addition, we have one Cairo Genizah fragment,<sup>7</sup> representing the *scholion* of the Oxford manuscript. However, this fragment is very small and contains only a few words and its usefulness is severely limited. All other manuscripts represent a hybrid text, which intertwined the texts of the two commentaries, added additional texts, mainly from the Babylonian Talmud, and revised the full work. This hybrid text is, for the most part, responsible for the difficulty in identifying the different compositions.

Indeed, it is only now, after the publication of Noam's conclusions, and particularly after the publication of her edition of *Megillat Ta'anit*, that it is possible to conduct proper research of this text, based on an appropriately critical text, and not a reconstructed and confused text.

I will refer henceforth to these two distinct *Scholias* by the terms used by Noam in her edition, namely: the Oxford manuscript will be referred to as manuscript "O" and the Parma manuscript will be referred to as manuscript "P". Correspondingly, the *scholion* represented by the Oxford manuscript will be referred to as *scholion* "O", and the *scholion* represented by the Parma manuscript will be referred to as *scholion* "P".

It is important to emphasize that these new realizations also present us with a serious difficulty. Until now, we believed that we were in possession of a substantial amount of manuscripts of *Megillat Ta'anit*, enough to enable textual research and the establishment of a good critical text. However, now that it is apparent that there are two separate compositions of the *scholion*

<sup>6</sup> V. NOAM, *Megillat Ta'anit*. Jerusalem 2003.

<sup>7</sup> There is an additional Genizah fragment, thought by Noam to represent the *scholion* of the Parma manuscript. However, I have recently found an additional fragment from the same manuscript making it clear that this fragment represents the hybrid version.

to *Megillat Ta'anit*, and most of the manuscripts represent a later, revised, hybrid version, we came to realize that we actually possess only one manuscript for each original text. Furthermore, the Oxford manuscript, representing *scholion* "O", appears to be a faulty version of its composition.

Examination of the newly discovered Austrian fragment (henceforth: fragment A) indicates clearly that it represents the text of *scholion* "O". This fragment includes a large portion – over forty percent<sup>8</sup> – of the entire text of *scholion* "O", which enables its proper research.

The study of its text discloses that fragment A is less corrupt than manuscript O. For example, the unclear phrase in manuscript O in the *scholion* to the twenty second of *Shvat* – "מוציאין יום טוב" – which has correctly been suggested by Prof. M. Kister<sup>9</sup> to be a corruption of the phrase "מוצאי יום טוב" – the night following the festival – is found in fragment A to be indeed "מוצאי יו' טו'".

Or the word "קופטאות"<sup>10</sup> found in manuscript O in the *scholion* to the seventeenth of *Elul*, is a corruption of the word "קסטריאות", as appears in the hybrid version, or "קסטריות", as appears in fragment A, and other such examples.

However, the importance of this new fragment is not only in its relatively small amount of textual corruptions. There are also many and various variant readings between the version of manuscript O and the version of fragment A. We find alternative versions, some of content, some of style, as well as texts that appear in only one of the two. So, for example, in the *scholion* to the fifteenth of *Av*, we find in manuscript O a section, thirty-eight words long, that does not appear in fragment A. And, of greater importance, in the *scholion* to the twenty-third of *Cheshvan* fragment A contains two alternative explanations, whereas manuscript O retains only a vague remnant of one of these alternatives.

With regard to differences in content, a prime example is the commentary to the twenty-fifth of *Kislev*, the festival of *Hanukka*. According to the well-known Talmudic tradition, found in the Babylonian Talmud, the miracle commemorated by the eight days of *Hanukka*, is the miracle of the cruse of oil. This tradition explains that during the restoration of the Temple by the Maccabees, only one small cruse of oil – enough to last just one day – was

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with the end of the *scholion* to the tenth of *Tamuz* (as in manuscript O, or the fourth of *Tamuz* as in manuscript P), and ending in the middle of the *scholion* to the twenty-second of *Shvat*.

<sup>9</sup> M. KISTER, "The Scholia on *Megillat Ta'anit*" (Hebrew). *Tarbiz* 74 (2005) 457.

<sup>10</sup> So it appears in manuscript O, and not as in Noam's edition.

found with the seal of the High Priest still intact, yet this cruse of oil lasted miraculously for eight days. This miracle of the cruse of oil is found in the Babylonian Talmud as part of its *scholion* to *Megillat Ta'anit*, and is found also, in a different version, in the *scholion* of manuscript O. Manuscript P also mentions the finding of pure oil, but without speaking of a miracle.

In contrast, in fragment A – in place of the miracle of the cruse of oil, brought in manuscript O – an entirely different story is told. We hear of seven iron skewers, that were coated with tin and lit in place of the menorah. The story of the skewers, rather than the miracle of the cruse of oil, also appears in the work of Rabbi Yitzchak ben Moshe of Vienna, the Or Zarua, who quotes a section of *scholion* O to *Megillat Ta'anit* for *Hanukka*. It appears, therefore, that the version of *scholion* O in his possession was similar to that of fragment A. Noam, who was aware of the version of the skewers from the Or Zarua, claimed that it is this story that is original in *scholion* O. In any case, two completely separate stories were transmitted in different versions of *scholion* O – the Oxford manuscript being one and fragment A and the Or Zarua being the other. In addition, the text preceding the story of the skewers also includes significant variant readings between manuscript O and fragment A. In this text the version of fragment A, previously unknown, is of particular importance as the text of manuscript O is particularly difficult and confused. Further importance of the version of this text in fragment A lies in a certain type of affinity between it and *scholion* P – a phenomenon which is repeated in a few contexts.

In addition to differences in the text of the *scholion* between fragment A and manuscript O, there are also differences with regard to the version of the Aramaic *Megilla* itself. For example, the seventeenth of *Elul*, is the day on which “נפקו רומאי מן ירוש” – the Romans departed from Jerusalem – so it appears in the *Megilla* in manuscript P. In manuscript O, in place of the word “רומאי”, we find the word “רומאי”. It is clear that this is yet another error of manuscript O and should most likely read “רומאי” or “רהומאי” = Romans, similar to the tradition of manuscript P. We find, therefore, that the *Megilla* itself speaks of the date on which the Romans departed from Jerusalem. However, in sharp contrast to the *Megilla*, *scholion* O explains that the events commemorated by this date are ones that took place during “the reign of the Greeks” (“בימי מלכות יון”). It is perhaps possible to explain this contradiction by referring to the famous indifference of the Rabbis to history, characteristic of them even when commenting on as historic a text as *Megillat Ta'anit*. Nevertheless, this contradiction is very sharp and it seems difficult to accept the lack of distinction, even among the Rabbis, between the Romans, who ruled during their own time, and the Greeks. And sure enough, on frag-

ment A in place of “רומא” – Romans – we find written in the *Megilla* itself: “דימוסנאי”! The accepted meaning of “דימוסנאי” – or “דימוסנאי”<sup>11</sup> (in Greek: *δημοσιῶναι*) is „tax collectors“, which, given the nature of the *scholion*, is not incompatible with the explanation presented by *scholion* O. In any case, there are no longer “Romans” in the text of the *Megilla* and a contradiction is no longer to be found here. It is, therefore, possible that the version of the *Megilla* as found on fragment A reflects the version of the *Megilla* that stood originally before the editor of *scholion* O. If so, this might suggest that before the editor of *scholion* O stood a different version of the *Megilla* than that which stood before the editor of *scholion* P, and it is this difference in the version of the *Megilla* that led to some of the differences between the two scholia.

In most of the examples that I have presented until now the superiority of the version of fragment A is apparent. However, there are also differences regarding which it is difficult to make a clear judgment. The quantity and variety of differences of this sort seem to indicate that *scholion* O was transmitted in two distinct versions, two branches or perhaps even two traditions.

It is further apparent that the version of fragment A is the version of *scholion* O that had been absorbed into the revised hybrid text of the *scholion* to *Megillat Ta’anit*. Until now, it was believed that the deviations of the hybrid text from the version of *scholion* O – that are not a representation of *scholion* P – were, for the most part, the product of the creator of the hybrid text. Now, however, it seems clear that more than a few of the hybrid versions differing from manuscript O are versions belonging to the textual tradition of fragment A.

Quotations of the version represented by fragment A are also to be found amongst some medieval Jewish scholars. In a liturgical poem written by Rabbi Menachem ben Machir – an Ashkenazi Rabbi of the second half of the eleventh century – there are a number of phrases that suggest that he had a version of the *scholion* like that of fragment A. A stronger affiliation to the

<sup>11</sup> As appears in the *Megilla* for the twenty-fifth of *Sivan* in manuscript P (in manuscript O there is a corrupt form: “דמתנאי”. Fragment A does not include this section of the *Megilla*). However, both *scholia* (P and O) for the twenty-fifth of *Sivan* present a story that is seemingly unconnected to the “דימוסנאי” in the *Megilla*. Additionally, the appearance of the term “דימוסנאי” for the seventeenth of *Elul* in fragment A raises another difficulty in that it results in a basically identical event as that celebrated on the twenty-fifth of *Sivan* (according to manuscripts O and P). These difficulties might indicate that the manuscript from which fragment A was taken presented a different version of the *Megilla* for the twenty-fifth of *Sivan* which did not, in any case, mention “דימוסנאי”.



version of fragment A is found in two quotes from *Megillat Ta'anit* in a work referred to as “יהוסי תנאים ואמוראים” – a biography of Rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud – written by Rabbi Yehuda ben Kalonymos, an Ashkenazi Rabbi of the twelfth century. From other places in this work it is clear that the author was in possession of two different versions of *Megillat Ta'anit* and it is possible that these were two versions of *scholion* O. If this is so, then R. Yehuda ben Kalonymos, besides his familiarity with the version of fragment A, was also familiar with the version of manuscript O.

The latest appearance of the version of fragment A is to be found in the work of Eshtori HaParchi, the “Kaftor va Ferach”, written in the land of Israel in the second decade of the fourteenth century.

In the time period between these two citations, the version of fragment A is also known, as we have already seen, by Rabbi Yitzchak ben Moshe, the author of the *Or Zarua*, who was active in Vienna, during the first half of the thirteenth century. This finding is of particular interest as we have already seen that it is quite possible that the original manuscript to which fragment A belonged was also in Vienna during that very same time.

In conclusion – the discovery of this new fragment of *Megillat Ta'anit* provides a significant contribution to the research of an unusual and interesting composition. It also serves to contribute to the research of Talmudic texts in general and to the historical research as well.

Let us hope that the continuing search for Hebrew binding fragments in Austrian libraries will discover yet additional leaves of this manuscript, which will enable us to complete the study of this important version of *Megillat Ta'anit*.

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Fig. 2: St. Paul im Lavanttal, Cod. 39c/4, VDS verso (abgelöst) 59



Fig. 1: St. Paul im Lavanttal, Cod. 39c/4, VDS recto (abgelöst)



Fig. 2: St. Paul im Lavanttal, Cod. 39c/4, VDS verso (abgelöst)