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Megillat Ta'anit: Versions – Interpretation – History: With a Critical Edition, by Vered Noam (Heb.). Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003. Pp. 452. Price: \$59.00. ISBN 965–217–215–4.

The book is a thoroughly revised version of a doctoral dissertation presented in 1997 to the Hebrew University (supervisors J. Sussmann and D. Rosenthal). In the foreword Noam describes the Megillat Ta'anit as “the earliest Pharisaic text in our hands... and the only written book which lay before the sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud besides the Holy Scriptures” (11, cf. 19). The scroll is an Aramaic list of 36 days on which fasting is not permitted because of the joyous events which occurred on these days. The Aramaic text is commented upon in Hebrew, the so-called Scholion which offers an historical explanation of the individual days. The book consists of three parts: a critical edition of the text of the Megillah and the Scholion, the discussion and explanation of every single day in the list, and finally a history of the origin and the tradition of the work.

The critical edition with commentary generally used up to now was that of H. Lichtenstein (HUCA 8–9 [1931–32] 257–351). At his time, this edition was a great achievement. He knew and used already all the few manuscripts now exploited by Noam, except two small Geniza fragments which came to light afterwards, and edited them as a composite text. The great progress in Noam's textual analysis and edition concerns the Scholion. In an earlier article (“The Scholion to the Megillat Ta'anit: Towards an Understanding of its Stemma,” *Tarbiz* 62 [1992–93] 55–99) which in this book is only briefly summarized, she demonstrated that there were two distinct versions of the Scholion, one represented by a Parma manuscript, the other by a Sefardic manuscript now in Oxford and a few other texts, and a third independent version that underlies the Talmudic parallels. A hybrid version combined Parma and Oxford and added materials from the Bavli. This hybrid version was commonly the textual basis when discussing the relationship of the Scholion to the Talmud, and, consequently, its historical value. Both basic manuscripts, especially MS Oxford, are problematic and full of mistakes, as Noam points out time and again. Many details are left to reconstruction and conjecture, but in general the presentation of the texts is a model of how to do a critical edition. She offers first an edition of the Megillah itself, followed by a synoptic edition of the three versions of the Scholion and a separate

edition of all the Talmudic parallels with their own critical apparatus, presented synoptically with the versions of the Scholion. This kind of presentation allows the best possible access to all the textual materials necessary for a comparative study of the traditions. This edition shall without doubt replace Lichtenstein's text as the most authoritative edition.

The second part (pp. 163–315) is devoted to a discussion of every single day. Noam presents in great detail the history of earlier research, traces the development of the single versions of the Scholion and tries to identify what is authentic and early in every tradition. As is well known, the different versions of the Scholion connect many dates with a victory of the sages, commonly identified with the Pharisees, over the Sadducees or Boethusians. Some of the explanations can be supported by Josephus or other texts of the Second Temple period; in many other cases, Josephus has been used to reject the informations of the Scholion.

The readers of *DSD* will be most interested in the broad discussion of all attempts to connect the explanations of the Scholia with texts from Qumran. This is the case already with the first date, the first eight days of Nisan when “the *tamid* was established.” According to the Scholion this date celebrates a victory over the Sadducees who maintained that the *tamid* is brought as contribution of individuals whereas the sages maintain that it is the offering of all Israel. Most scholars who accept the information of the Scholion, identify it with the victory of the Pharisees under Salome Alexandra; others reject it because such a victory would not justify a feast of eight days and does not fit the expression of the Megillah. They rather refer it to the consecration of the sons of Aaron in the desert and the beginning of the daily sacrifice. This interpretation was renewed with the publication of the Temple Scroll. Y. Yadin (*The Temple Scroll* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983] 1.137–38; 2.61ff.) connects the date with 11QT 15:3–17:5 where the ordination sacrifices are prescribed as an annual obligation; during these days the consecration offerings and not the *tamid* were offered; this agrees with the position attributed to the Boethusians. “It was only when this practice was abolished and the continual offering reinstated that these days were instituted as a festival” (Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 1.138). A different interpretation was offered by Y. Erder (*JQR* 82 [1991–92] 263–83) in his discussion of Karaite traditions deriving from Qumran: both sides agreed that during the days of consecration no *tamid* was offered, but they disagreed on the date; for the Pharisees the eighth day of consecration was Nisan 1 and not 8. Noam (pp. 166–67) finds it hard

to imagine that there was a time when the consecration sacrifices were actually offered every year in the Temple; the Megillah does not say that the yearly consecration offerings were abolished nor does the Temple Scroll say that during these days there was no *tamid*. But 11QT does attest the possibility that in the Second Temple Period some people still celebrated the consecration of the Tabernacle which even later (tractate Soferim) motivated the prohibition of fasting during these days.

The end of the scholion for Nisan 1–8 adds that the daily offering is paid for from the funds of the Temple; and when they prevailed (Pharisees over Sadducees?) they ordained that they should weigh their shekels and put them into the chamber (mixed version). MS Oxford alone adds “every single year” (*kol shanah we-shanah*). 4Q159 1 ii 7 insists that it is paid only once in one’s lifetime! Together with Matt. 17:24–27 this confirms the controversy between the religious groups as to the Temple tax and the victory of the group behind the Megillah. Another date which has been connected with Qumranic texts is the fourth day of Tammuz which celebrates the abolishment of a *sefar gezerata*, generally understood as the Sadducean criminal law. Yadin (*Temple Scroll*, 1.374–78) discusses this text in connection with 11QT 64:2–13. There is no agreement as to whether there was a genuine discussion between the sects regarding the four forms of capital punishment or whether only the writing of the *halakhah* was disputed. Others prefer to see in the “book of decrees” pagan laws. Noam (p. 208) explains these differences of interpretation with different textual traditions in the Scholia. This, of course, does not solve the historical problems. As to the 15th of Ab, the festival of the wood offering is mentioned also in 11QT 23–25 (p. 217). Among other days with relevant parallels in Qumran is the 27th day of Marheshvan (11QT 20:9–12 and 4QMMT 5:9–13 concerning the cereal offerings, see pp. 251ff.). Many more texts are of general interest for the history of the Second Temple period; for some of them, Noam convincingly argues that the Scholia contain relevant historical data; others are more problematic as, e.g., the beginnings of Jewish settlement around Sebaste (pp. 248–49, 25th of Marheshvan).

Lack of space does not allow a more detailed discussion. Noam offers in this section a wealth of relevant informations. But there are also several instances where her reading and historical interpretation of the Scholia is rather doubtful (e.g., pp. 271–72 for the reading of Oxford). Small differences between the versions are too easily used as an argument that the Scholia do not depend on the Talmudic versions; there seems to be too static a view of the textual transmission. Possible interpretations of single words

are too easily counted as historical evidence without asking how the redactors of the Scholia could obtain such information. Sometimes I cannot avoid the impression of special pleading. In the discussion of the Scholion for the first eight days of Nisan, Noam suggests that the Scholion might be justified to connect the date with a victory of the Pharisees in the question of the half sheqel. But – she continues – even if that is not the case, there is no reason to doubt the value of the Scholion; the nature of the sources of the Scholion does not depend on the connection between these sources and the festivals of the Megillah. Even if this connection is erroneous on historical reasons, this still does not allow us to negate the authenticity of this connection. Many tannaitic traditions are not to be taken literally. “We are interested in the ‘literary truth’ of the traditions of the scholion, and only after that in the question of their ‘historical truth’ (p. 168). How should one understand this statement?

The third part of the book discusses origin and transmission of the Megillah and the Scholia. Here I miss a thorough discussion why exactly the Megillah should be Pharisaic, what purpose it had and who would have been able to enforce it if it was considered to be a halakhic text. The only text she can refer to for the origin of the Megillah, is a *baraita* in b.Shab. 13b. The use of Babylonian *baraitot* as evidence for the early Tannaitic period is highly problematic; since this is not the only case where Noam has only Babylonian texts for supposedly early rabbinic traditions, I should have expected some methodical discussion. Since nearly all rabbinic parallels to the Scholia are exclusively Babylonian, she should have discussed how she thinks these informations reached the redactors of the Bavli. The thorough comparison with the Talmudic traditions is very valuable, but there are too many aspects taken for granted. Regarding the post-Talmudic transmission of the Megillah and the Scholia, Noam is able to show that in the 10th century, both versions of the Scholion were already known in the East. The mixed text, first attested to in the Sefer Yerushalmi, is not an Ashkenazic recension, but seems to have been brought from Italy to Ashkenaz together with the Oxford recension in the 11th century, as a thorough study of a *piyyut* by Menachem beR. Makhir demonstrates. The Parma version was not known in Ashkenaz; after its appearance in the Geniza it resurfaces again only in the 14th century in Sefarad. The transmission history of the texts is a truly pioneering study of the highest importance.

To sum up: V. Noam has presented a critical edition of the Megillah and its Scholia which will be authoritative for a long time to come. Her clear separation of three

separate textual forms of the Scholion is innovative and convincing. Her interpretation of the individual dates in the Megillah is rich in details and offers a full survey of all earlier studies. Many connections of the Scholia with Qumranic texts are discussed in detail and will certainly provoke further research. Her use of rabbinic texts, mainly *baraitot*, is sometimes problematic, as are some of her historical reconstructions. The history of the further transmission of the Megillah and the Scholia is again exemplary and an important contribution to our knowledge of these texts in the Middle Ages. The author deserves our congratulations for an edition and a textual study which sets a high standard for future work.

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