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ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

FROM DISQUALIFYING DEEDS TO DISQUALIFYING THOUGHTS: THE EARLY FORM OF MISHNAH ZEVAHIM

David Fialkoff

Chapters 1-4 of the Tractate of Zevahim form a cohesive and comprehensively edited unit that deals with a single topic: the laws regarding thoughts that invalidate a sacrificial offering. This article argues that in the phase preceding the final editing of the Mishnah, the laws regarding disqualifying thoughts were transmitted within a broader literary framework that also included the laws of invalid acts in sacrifices. However, in the editing process of the Mishnah, these chapters were reformulated as a unit dealing exclusively with the laws regarding improper thoughts, with the laws concerning inappropriate actions either omitted or else integrated into the discussion regarding inappropriate thought.

The beginning of the article presents a general analysis of the composition of chapters 1-4 that demonstrates the thematic cohesion of this unit, while revealing the anomalies within it. This is followed by a comparison of these four chapters with other, smaller units in the Mishnah, and with corresponding units in the Tosefta of Zevahim. These parallels aid in revealing the broader framework in which the laws of unsuitable thinking are discussed at the beginning of the tractate. The article concludes by raising two general questions regarding the nature of the older framework of the opening division of the Zevahim and the significance of the editing of these chapters.

A UNIQUE CAIRO GENIZAH MANUSCRIPT OF BABYLONIAN TALMUD TRACTATES SHEVU'OT AND KETUBOT

Elyashiv Cherlow

An unusual textual phenomenon appears in a fragment of the Babylonian Talmud from the Cairo Genizah (hereafter G1). Of the roughly twenty-five sugyot preserved in this manuscript, eight contain reversed versions. By “reversed versions” I mean talmudic discussions that are structurally—and often even verbally—identical to those preserved in other manuscripts of the Talmud, yet whose content represents, to some degree, a mirror image of the standard version. In several sugyot, multiple reversed versions are combined, systematically inverting the sugya as a whole. This article examines the phenomenon through close analysis of selected sugyot and by means of a general survey of the manuscript’s text. I argue that these variations are best understood against the backdrop of oral transmission, and may even be regarded as vestiges of the final stages in the formation of the Talmudic text.

“SHULHAN SHEL ARBA” OF R. BAHYA BEN ASHER:
EXPLORATIONS INTO ITS HISTORY AND SEVERAL
OF ITS KABBALISTIC SOURCES

Idan Pinto

This research examines the history of the book “Shulhan shel Arba” – the first of its kind Jewish eating manual authored by the commentator and Kabbalist Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher (late 13th century, northern part of the Iberian Peninsula). This work was already widespread in Spain before the expulsion, and has since been accepted by many Jewish communities throughout generations. Despite its widespread dissemination, fundamental questions regarding it have not yet been clarified, and this research seeks to address some of them for the first time. Among the topics discussed here are the content and structure of the work, its (mis)attributions to various historical figures, the estimated time period of its composition, its relation to Bahya’s other writings, its print editions and their relation to available manuscripts, commentaries associated with it, the history of its reception in the Jewish diaspora, and the practical role assigned to it by its author in light of less known documents. Another section of this research is dedicated to exploring the relationship between “Shulhan shel Arba” and the Zohar, as well as other Castilian literature of the time. It is argued that in his work, R. Bahya drew on Zoharic literature and the writings of R. Joseph Gikatilla (or anonymous texts attributed to him) while providing the rationales for several ritualistic meal practices. The exploration of the subject also includes an examination of Bahya’s unique adaptation of intellectual sources, and tracing the evolution of his teachings in later generations.

THE AWARENESS OF SCRIBES AND KABBALISTS TO MULTIPLE VERSIONS
OF TEXTS IN KABBALISTIC MANUSCRIPTS

Daniel Abrams

The article turns scholarly attention away from a history of ideas of kabbalistic manuscripts as the good or corrupt witnesses of the literary works that were written by certain authors in a particular time and place and instead focuses on later scribes and kabbalists as the producers and readers of manuscripts. This study amounts to a neglected chapter in the history of Kabbalah concerning the self-awareness of Kabbalists to the textual version found in any one manuscript and the many versions they found in many manuscripts. No doubt, the invention of the printing press influenced the thinking of kabbalists in this regard, and in this period they began to speak of the true or correct version. But alongside the construction of a history of how the kabbalists related to a written formulation as the text that is found in any one written document, this study shines a light on the status of textual versions amongst those who transferred esoteric knowledge from one generation to the next and did not identify Kabbalah with its literary works. Moreover, they did not identify a literary work of Kabbalah with the textual version found in any one manuscript.