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## A DIRGE ON THE DEATH OF DANIEL GAON

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FEW of the Hebrew manuscripts recently brought to light have yielded such a rich harvest of historical data as the *Dīwān* secured at Aleppo by Mr. Elkan N. Adler, of London, in 1898.<sup>1</sup> Poznański's work *Babylonische Geonim im nachgaonäischen Zeitalter*, in which an attempt is made to present a picture of Jewish life in Babylon during the centuries immediately after the so-called gaonic period, is to a large extent based upon this *Dīwān*. As early as 1856 Steinschneider published four poems by this poet from a fragment in the Bodleian Library.<sup>2</sup> Brody, too, published some specimens of this same *Dīwān* from a manuscript in the British Museum.<sup>3</sup> At that time the name of the poet could not be ascertained, and the conjectures made need not be repeated here. By a careful study of Mr. Adler's manuscript, which contains 281 poems and probably represents a great portion of the entire *Dīwān*, Dr. H. Brody was enabled to find the name of the author: Eleazar b. Jacob.<sup>4</sup> Brody correctly interprets the

<sup>1</sup> See *JQR.*, XI, pp. 682 ff.; Elkan N. Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1905), p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *He-Ḥaluṣ*, III, pp. 150 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie*, II, pp. 34-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, p. 23.

short poem addressed to Joseph al-Barkoli,<sup>5</sup> the first line of which reads :

נְטוּ שְׁעָפֵי אֶל-	שׁוּרוֹ רְקִיעַ שִׁיר
עַל רֹאשׁ נְבִיר יוֹסֵף	עֶזְרָ בְּנוֹ יַעֲקֹב

'Behold the firmament of song which the meditations of Eleazar the son of Jacob have spread over the head of the nobleman Joseph.' This line in itself is conclusive, and no further evidence is necessary. Brody's other proof, from a riddle in the *Dīwān*, tends to obscure matters rather than to clarify them. The riddle is about the name אלעזר, and, according to Brody, reads :

וְאִם כֹּל חַי בְּאַחֲרֵיתוֹ	וְשֵׁם נִשְׂם אֶל בְּרֵאשִׁיתוֹ
אֲנִי כֻּלּוֹ וּמִקְצָתוֹ	וְאִם לֹא תִדְעוּ אֹתוֹ

The first line is quite clear: a name whose beginning is God's name (אל) and whose end is 'the mother of all living' (that is Eve who is a 'help,' עזר; see Gen. 2. 18). But the second hemistich of the second line is obscure. Brody interprets this line as follows: 'If you do not know it (i. e. the name), I am the whole of it and the part thereof;' but he admits that the word וּמִקְצָתוֹ is unintelligible. His suggestion in note 4 that this word refers to זר, which is part of אלעזר, is far-fetched, as it necessitates the assumption that Eleazar b. Jacob had for a time been compelled to adopt Islam. This conjecture cannot be substantiated, and the poem upon which it is based is too fragmentary to admit of any definite conclusion.<sup>6</sup> Now as to the riddle, it is by no means certain that the word אֲנִי is correctly vocalized. The hint thus given about the solution is unusual: the reader who knows the author's name is actually

<sup>5</sup> Poem 116 in Adler's manuscript.

<sup>6</sup> See *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie*, IV, p. 26.

told the solution, while the one to whom the name is not known receives no additional information. It is possible that the author meant the word  $\text{בַּיָּמָה}$ , and he may have had in mind an ingenious combination of a boat (or vessel, Arabic  $\text{أَيْمَةَ}$ ) and its parts.

Nothing is known about this Eleazar b. Jacob, except that he flourished during the first half of the thirteenth century. This fact is definitely established by the poems addressed to his contemporaries. He has a dirge on the death of Abraham Maimuni who died 1237, while he seems to have known also Samuel b. 'Ali, Gaon of Bagdad, who, according to Poznański,<sup>7</sup> flourished about 1200. Whether this Eleazar b. Jacob is identical with the one mentioned by Zunz in his *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie*, p. 505, is a moot question. The identification seems obvious, though by no means conclusive. Both Brody and Poznański entertain no doubt about it, but it should be stated that Zunz places his païtan in the fourteenth century.

It is to be regretted that, despite the importance of this *Dīwān*, its publication has for some reason or another been delayed. Although twenty years have elapsed since it was brought to light, it still exists in proof and is accessible only to a few scholars. For the study of the fragment which I am herewith publishing, I have been able to make use of the poems inserted by Poznański in the third appendix of his book<sup>8</sup> and of Brody's edition of the first 182 poems which Professor Alexander Marx was kind enough to lend me. This fragment, which was brought from Cairo in 1891 by Dr. Cyrus Adler, is now at the Dropsie College. In my review of Poznański's book,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Babylonische Geonim im nachgaonäischen Zeitalter*, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-77.

<sup>9</sup> *JQR.*, N. S., VII, pp. 416 ff.

I gave a general description of this fragment, and hazarded the suggestion that the poem is by Eleazar b. Jacob, and that the Gaon whose death is lamented is Daniel b. Abi al-Rabi'. A careful study of the 182 poems has strengthened my conviction, and although I am unable to offer any positive and conclusive evidence, I should like to call attention to the similarity of a few expressions occurring in the *Dīwān* and in the fragment. Of course, it must at the same time be borne in mind that the author of the *Dīwān* is a 'minor poet', and both in phraseology and sentiment he imitates the older poets of the Spanish period. His dependence upon Samuel ha-Nagid and Moses Ibn Ezra is especially marked. This is no doubt due to the fact that these two poets were the most 'polished' of that period, and it is poets of that nature that usually serve as models for imitators. But when due allowance is made for the imitated style, the general impression obtained from reading these poems would lead one to ascribe the authorship of this fragment to Eleazar b. Jacob.

The resemblance between poems 4 and 5 of Adler's manuscript and this fragment is at once apparent on account of the same metre and rhyme employed in three of them. Poem 8, line 5 has **בְּצִלָּהּ יִשְׁבֵי חַיִּית וְכָל עוֹף**. This should be compared with ll. 7, 8 of our fragment. Then the sentiment expressed in l. 14 is frequently repeated in Adler's manuscript, as in poem 9, l. 23;<sup>10</sup> poem 179, l. 16;<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> יהי חלקו בעדן גן ויפיל  
אלהיו לו חבלים בנעימים

<sup>11</sup> יהי חלקה בעדן גן ותמצא  
חבלים בנעימים לה ומנות

poem 180, l. 18;<sup>12</sup> poem 203, l. 20<sup>13</sup> (quoted by Poznański, p. 75).

The last-named poem was composed on the death of a son of Daniel, and the author laments the fact that Daniel Gaon is no longer alive to punish the arrogant plagiarists.<sup>14</sup> Now, from the poems addressed to this Daniel, it is obvious that our poet was an intimate friend of his, and it seems strange that there is no dirge on the death of this Gaon in Adler's manuscript. Accordingly our fragment supplies the missing link. The poems in that manuscript do not follow in a strictly chronological order (Brody altered the numeration; see Poznański, *op. cit.*, p. 10, note 1), and it is possible that this dirge was put at the end of the *Dīwān*, which part has not been found yet.

The external aspect of this fragment offers a few interesting points for discussion. It is a narrow strip of parchment measuring  $15 \times 6\frac{1}{2}$  inches ( $= 38 \times 15.5$  cm.). It was originally a marriage document, dated *Fuṣṭāt*, Sunday, twenty-first day of Adar, 1374 ( $= 1063$ ). The bridegroom's name is Jepheth the son of Nissim, and the bride is named

<sup>12</sup>                   יהי חלקה בגן בינות תמימות  
ועם אמות בעד חברון ישנות

<sup>13</sup>                   יהי חלקו בעדן עם אבותיו  
אשר היו לשרת אל קרבים

<sup>14</sup>                   אהה כי נאספו עונשי יהירים  
פניהם מסעיף סלע חצובים  
נאוני דור אשר היו אריות  
ונורי דת בעינם כחנבים  
כדניאל נאון יעקב אשר שם  
נכון היום במותו כערבים

(ll. 13-15.)

Sitt al-Dar,<sup>15</sup> daughter of Isaac.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently this document was trimmed, the lower part being entirely cut off, and the blank side was used for writing down the dirge. That the document was written before the dirge is evident from the appearance of the fragment as well as from the consideration that a clean piece of parchment would be used for a marriage document. The dirge is written in a bold square character, but not by a professional scribe. This may be inferred from the nature of the writing as well as from the material employed. A professional scribe copying a *Dīwān* would naturally write in a codex, and would hardly use a stray piece of parchment with only one blank side. At first the possibility that suggests itself is that the dirge was copied as an exercise in penmanship. But this seems unlikely on account of the irregularity of the letters and the unevenness of the lines. Is it not possible that we have here an autograph of the poet? This fragment may have been used by him for the first draft of his poem which was afterwards given to a professional copyist to be incorporated into the *Dīwān*. This conjecture is to some extent supported by the circumstance that there are a few corrections in some of

<sup>15</sup> The meaning of this name is *Lady*, or *Mistress of the House*. סֵת is in Egypt the vulgar pronunciation or contraction of سيدة. See also Lane and Dozy, *s.v.* In Neubauer and Cowley's *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, vol. II, 1906, there are marriage documents in which the names סֵת אֶלְסָאדָה (P 2807, 20) and סֵת אֶלְכַפֵּר (P 2821, 16d) occur. These names have not been transliterated by the authors of that *Catalogue*. סֵת אֶלְסָאדָה means *Lady*, or *Mistress of Lords*, and סֵת אֶלְכַפֵּר means *Lady*, or *Mistress of the Village*.

<sup>16</sup> It is of interest to note that in this document we have the spelling הוֹאִי לִי לְאִנּוֹ, which proves that the 'traditional' pronunciation הוֹי is entirely wrong.

the lines.<sup>17</sup> On the whole the writing gives the impression of being the work of an old man whose hand was trembling. This is especially evident in the last few lines. Now Eleazar b. Jacob must have been an old man at the time of Daniel's death, and probably did not survive him very long.

The question now arises: where was Eleazar at the time when he wrote this dirge? Brody takes it for granted that he lived in Bagdad. This assumption apparently lends support to the identification of this poet with Eleazar b. Jacob ha-Babli mentioned by Zunz. Now our fragment, which had been in 1063 in Egypt and was discovered in that country in recent years, could not have been in Bagdad in the middle of the thirteenth century. This would therefore seem to disprove my conjecture. But no matter where the author of this *Dīwān* resided permanently, he undoubtedly was both in Egypt and Babylon, as he had a number of intimate acquaintances in both countries. As a matter of fact, Steinschneider,<sup>18</sup> without stating his reasons, says of this author: 'He lived at Alexandria, but travelled as far as Bagdad.' Even if this Eleazar bore the surname ha-Babli, it would be no conclusive evidence that his permanent residence was in Bagdad or Babylon. It would rather indicate that he was of Babylonian extraction but subsequently settled elsewhere.

The manuscript is unvocalized except in sporadic instances where the pronunciation is liable to be mistaken. The lines are continuous and are not identical with the verses, that is to say, if a verse ends in the middle of a line, another verse is started in the same line. The orthography is not consistent. Thus *בבכמותי* in line 1 b is *plene*,

<sup>17</sup> See below, notes 20, 34.

<sup>18</sup> *JQR.*, XII, p. 115.



while in line 3 a it is defective. The spelling כּאִיִּלִּים (line 7 b) should be contrasted with וְחִיָּה (line 4 a) and יְחִיָּה (line 5 b). As I supplied the vowel-points, I did not deem it advisable to reproduce this orthographic inconsistency. In all other respects I followed the manuscript, and put my emendations in the notes.

כְּדִנְיָאֵל<sup>19</sup> נֶאֱוָן רֵאשִׁי יְשִׁיבוֹת  
 בְּחֻכְמוֹתָיו<sup>20</sup> בְּמִטְרוֹת הַנִּשְׂיָאִים<sup>21</sup>  
 אֲשֶׁר מַעֲשִׂיוֹ וּמַפְעָלָיו יִשְׂרָיִם  
 מְהַרְצִים בְּמִים לְצִמָּאִים  
 וּבִינֹתָיו וְחֻכְמוֹתָיו יִפְרִצוּן<sup>22</sup>  
 עָלֵי חוּצוֹת וְכָל קְצוֹת<sup>23</sup> וּפְאִים<sup>24</sup>  
 וְחִיָּה בָּם עֵיפִים הִרְהוּהִים<sup>25</sup>  
 וְיִרְנֶה בְּגוֹנִים עַל פְּרָאִים  
 וְהוּא הָרֵאשׁ לְכָל רֵאשֵׁי נְאוֹנִים  
 וְסֵם רְפֹאוֹת יְחִיָּה הַרְפָּאִים

<sup>19</sup> The metre is Wāfir, which is a favourite with many of the mediaeval Hebrew poets. With very few exceptions all the poems in the Dīwān of Eleazar b. Jacob are written in this metre.

<sup>20</sup> In the manuscript the כּ is written above the מ.

<sup>21</sup> For the expression *like the rain of the clouds* and similar phrases as metaphors for *abundance* or *liberality* see my essay 'The Scansion of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry', *JQR.*, N. S., IV, p. 205.

<sup>22</sup> So it is in the manuscript with a vowel-point under the פ. We should, however, expect the קַל יִפְרִצוּן as in Prov. 5. 16, though the Hifil, too, is sometimes intransitive; see Exod. 5. 12; 1 Sam. 13. 8; Job. 38. 24.

<sup>23</sup> It is so vocalized in the manuscript on account of the metre, but grammatically it should be קְצוֹת, as it is in the absolute state.

<sup>24</sup> This plural of פְּאֵה is coined by the poet on account of the rhyme. In the Bible it is פְּאוֹת (see Exod. 25. 26; 37. 13).

<sup>25</sup> This form is probably due to a curious misunderstanding of the word הִרְהוּ occurring in Isa. 44. 8. The root רהה obviously belongs to the tertiae He class, but the poet took it to be a geminate verb, and formed its passive participle הִרְהוּהִים instead of הִרְהוּיִם, *the dismayed or terrified*.

וּמְרַגְלִית שֶׁהִיא ש<sup>26</sup> הַפְּדָרִים  
 וְהַפְּלֶף עָלַי כָּל הַקְּרוּאִים  
 וְהָאֵילָן אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבּוּ תַחֲתָיו  
 כְּאֵלִים וּפְרָחֵי<sup>27</sup> הַצְּבָאִים  
 וַיִּשְׁפֹּן<sup>28</sup> בּוֹ בְּנֵי עוֹפּוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת  
 וְאִין כְּמוֹ עֵטְלָפִים וְדָאִים<sup>29</sup>  
 כְּמַרְגְּלִית בְּעוֹלָמָהּ יַחֲדָה  
 וְלֹא נִמְצָא נְשִׁיָּה בְּמִצְוֹאִים  
 וְאִזִּי לְדוֹר אֲשֶׁר נִפְקַד בְּיָמָיו  
 אֲשֶׁר נִזְתָּרוּ לְדָלִים<sup>30</sup> חֵיל־בְּאִים  
 חֲטָפוֹ אֶל אֲדוֹנָי<sup>31</sup> הַנְּשָׁמוֹת  
 לְהוֹבִילוֹ לְמַקְהֵל הַיְרֵאִים  
 לְהַשְׁפִּינוֹ בְּמַכְלָל<sup>32</sup> הַחֲסִידִים  
 וַיַּהֲנֶה בְּיוֹי שַׁר הַנְּבִיאִים

<sup>26</sup> These letters, which make no sense whatsoever, are very distinct in the manuscript. Perhaps they are meant to be שְׁהִיא רֵאשׁ. For the vocalization שְׁהִיא, which is demanded by the metre, see Eccles. 2. 22; 3. 18.

<sup>27</sup> For פְּרָחַ, in the sense of *young*, compare the expression כְּהֵנָה פְּרָחַ (Yoma 1. 7). This word is similar to biblical פְּרָחַח (Job 30. 12) and אֶפְרָחַ.

<sup>28</sup> This word is very clear in the manuscript, but a plural would be more appropriate. It is, perhaps, meant for וַיִּשְׁבּוּ, the Waw being unintentionally lengthened.

<sup>29</sup> The plural is not found in the Bible. The poet wishes to say that Daniel Gaon was the patron of genuine talent, but would admit no imitators or plagiarists into his presence. This feature of Daniel's character is alluded to in the dirge on Daniel's son (poem 203, quoted by Poznański, p. 75). See above, note 14.

<sup>30</sup> We ought to read, perhaps, בְּדָלִים, unless the poet used the ל as the sign of the accusative (compare לְאֲבִנָּר, 2 Sam. 3. 30), and was influenced by Arabic أَصْبَحَ.

<sup>31</sup> This foot is short of a syllable. We ought to read, perhaps, אֲדוֹנָי, or supply בָּל.

<sup>32</sup> *Assembly, category*; a biblical noun with a new signification akin to mishnic בְּלָל and Arabic كَلِيَّةٌ.

לְהַדְרִיקוּ בְהוֹד בָּל<sup>33</sup> נִבּוֹן לֵב  
 וְכֹל יֵרָא אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ יְרָאִים  
 וַיִּנּוּחַ בְּמִשְׁכְּבוֹ וַיִּזְכֶּה  
 לְגַן עֵדֶן<sup>34</sup> וּמְלֹאכִים מְבִיאִים  
 אֶלְהֵינוּ יִקְרַב הַנְּאֻלָּה  
 וַיִּנְחִילָהּ<sup>35</sup> לְכֹל שָׂבִים וּבָאִים  
 וְהַשׁוֹכְנִים בְּחֶבְרוֹן בְּמַעְרָה<sup>36</sup>  
 וְהַקּוֹבְרִים<sup>37</sup> בְּהָרִים אֵין רוֹאִים<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This word is not clear in the manuscript. I read בל because it suits the sense, although the last letter, which seems to have been trimmed, hardly looks like the remnant of a ל. The metre demands another syllable, and we ought to supply some such word as איש.

<sup>34</sup> A word which looks like אשר was crossed out in the manuscript. The line as it stands is complete. If my conjecture that we are dealing with an autograph is right, it would seem that the poet intended to start the second foot of this hemistich in a different way.

<sup>35</sup> This word, which is quite clear in the manuscript, though apparently divided into two, is not appropriate. We should, perhaps, read וַיִּנְחִילָהּ.

<sup>36</sup> That is, the patriarchs.

<sup>37</sup> This seems to be a slip of the pen for וְהַקּוֹבְרִים.

<sup>38</sup> This refers to Aaron. Compare Num. 20. 28. The plural is probably general, but it may also include Eleazar (Joshua 24. 33). A third possibility, though an unlikely one, is that וְהַקּוֹבְרִים of the manuscript is correct, and refers to Moses and Eleazar.