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SUMMARIES

THE SEVENTEENTH OF ELUL IN MEGILLAT TA'ANIT

by Vered Noam (pp. 433–444)

Among the joyous days listed in Megillat Ta'anit is the seventeenth of Elul, on which – according to the scroll's testimony – the Romans withdrew from Jerusalem. Graetz identified this event with the slaughter of the soldiers of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem carried out by Eleazar ben Hananiah and his supporters at the outset of the Great Rebellion. However, Scholium A to Megillat Ta'anit attaches to this date the event relating to the persecution of the virgins (*Jus Primae Noctis*), commonly ascribed to the Hellenistic period. The event itself appears in a number of variations elsewhere in rabbinic literature.

The majority of scholars who addressed this particular testimony in Megillat Ta'anit completely dismissed the statement in the scholium, inasmuch as it appears totally removed from the event described in the megillah itself. However, the predominant motif in Scholium A – the torture of women – as well as the inclusion of the rare phrase 'they set up *castra*'ot' (הושיבו קסטראות) may point to a connection between the scholium and the event referred to in the megillah. In a passage found in Midrash *Shir ha-Shirim Zuta* there is a description of the Romans residing in the 'Castra' in Jerusalem, as well as of the victory of 'Eleazar and his disciples' over them. Liberman understood this to refer to the slaughter of the garrison's soldiers carried out by Eleazar ben Hananiah in Jerusalem. This midrash also mentions the rape of women, and the uncommon phrase 'הושיבו קסטרא' appears there as well.

It would seem that the basis for the statement in Scholium A can be found in the same early source that also served the author of Midrash *Shir ha-Shirim*. The early scholium correctly explained the event mentioned in the megillah, and connected it with the slaughter of the Roman soldiers. The allusion to the torture of women aroused in later generations an association with the popular legend regarding the decree against the virgins. That legend subsequently found its way into Scholium A, pushing aside the earlier and more reliable stratum that originally existed.

HASKALAH AND SCRIPTURE IN THE EARLY WRITINGS OF MOSES MENDELSSOHN

by Edward Breuer (pp. 445–463)

One of the cultural and intellectual features characterizing the German Haskalah was its sustained interest in the study of Scripture. Decrying centuries of Ashkenazic neglect,

eighteenth-century Maskilim called for renewed attention to the literary and grammatical qualities of the Bible and serious pedagogic regard for *peshuto shel mikra*. This phenomenon has generally been understood in light of the Haskalah's internalization of Enlightenment cultural ideals and the potential socio-economic benefits of acculturation.

Moses Mendelssohn's early writings yield a further understanding of the cultural realities which shaped this attention to Scripture. The two sources examined here sought to explicate Rashi's medieval interpretation of the Talmudic dictum, '*min'u beneikhem min ha-higayon*'. On the one hand, Mendelssohn used Rashi's reading of this dictum to support his call for pedagogic change, arguing that this medieval scholar never eschewed the value of Bible study, nor did he regard a mastery of Biblical Hebrew and *peshuto shel mikra* as an inherently questionable endeavor. On the other hand, Mendelssohn abandoned the thrust of Rashi's interpretation – that time devoted to Bible study needed to be circumscribed by the pedagogic primacy of halakhic-rabbinic learning – in favor of a reading that explained the Talmudic dictum in specific methodological-substantive terms as a warning against pernicious ways of handling or interpreting the Bible.

Towards this end, Mendelssohn's writings provided two different though complementary views of what the Talmud was proscribing. In the earliest source, Mendelssohn identified the warning with a text-critical handling to the Hebrew Bible that threatened to undermine the authority of the Masoretic text. A few years later he identified the Talmudic warning with readings of Scriptures whose unconditional independence threatened the authority and integrity of rabbinic traditions of interpretation. In both instances, it appears that Mendelssohn's concerns were directed at the practice of Biblical scholarship and interpretation in eighteenth-century Europe, especially the work of writers – enlightened Churchmen and *Aufklärer* with interests in classical Judaism – that directly challenged deeply-rooted Jewish traditions.

These writings, then, reflected Mendelssohn's response to the particular historical circumstances which gave rise to the Haskalah. While appreciating the culture of eighteenth-century Europe and encouraging Jews to participate in its attainments, Mendelssohn acknowledged that not all of it could be assimilated. He recognized that the culture and scholarship of eighteenth-century Europe was shaped by Christians in ways that were antithetical to Judaism, and as such, he understood that any attempt to broaden the patterns of Jewish cultural life necessitated a concomitant effort to circumscribe its challenges.

‘THE CAUSELESS HATRED IS ONGOING’:
THE STRUGGLE AGAINST BRATSLAV HASIDISM IN THE 1860S

by David Assaf (pp. 465–506)

This article describes the historical and social background of the oppression of Bratslav Hasidim by other Hasidic sects, focusing on events that transpired in the Hasidic communities in the southern part of the Russian empire in the 1860s. Various aspects of the anti-Bratslavic

agitation, its scope and its motives are examined. The internal Hasidic attacks against Bratslav had already begun during the lifetime of R. Nahman (d. 1810), and they reached their peak during the reign of his disciple, R. Nathan Sternharz of Nemirov (d. 1845). The controversy was renewed in the early 1860s under the leadership of some Zaddikim of the Twersky family (the Chernobyl dynasty). The struggle employed two tactics: physical attacks on Bratslav Hasidim who came every Rosh HaShanah eve to R. Nahman's grave in Uman, and attempts to dismantle their economic and institutional independence.

An important source for the study of these events is the Haskalah literature (mainly the Hebrew periodicals). The Maskilim's relationship to Bratslav Hasidim was one of ambivalence. On the one hand, they despised and belittled them (as a result of the legacy of satirical writings of Yosef Perl); and on the other hand they were curious, empathetic and also expressed solidarity with the oppressed. A comparative study of the Maskilic sources with the Hasidic ones and the memoir literature clarifies the true background of the internal Hasidic struggle against Bratslav.

In the front line of the struggle against Bratslav stood the followers of the Zaddik David of Talnoye (1808–1882). The unexpected cessation in 1865 of the attacks against Bratslav, near R. Nahman's grave, can be understood in light of the 'Rzhishchev Case'. R. David had left his court a few months earlier on a journey of 'conquest', the purpose of which was to convince new Jewish communities in Kiev-Guberniya to sign a special agreement ('*Ktav Magidut*') that would ensure his control over all nominations in the community and all ensuing financial income. This specific journey to the town of Rzhishchev led to major quarrels between different Hasidic groups, and ultimately to the intervention of the Russian authorities, who forbade the Zaddikim of the region to leave their courts without explicit permission. It is possible – as a few contemporary sources suggest – that these events had an indirect effect on the temporary restraint of the anti-Bratslavic agitation.

Various sources enable us to define and describe the model of 'the Hasidic conquest' of new communities. These models were characterized by intense and exciting events taking place within a very short time, their purpose being not only to crown the Zaddik in a new place but also to unite the Hasidim and to shape their spiritual life by a social experience.

Another cause of tension was connected to the attempts of 'The Holy Kibbutz' of Bratslav Hasidim in Teplik to nominate a ritual slaughterer of their own. This community was under the authority of the Zaddik Yitzhak of Skvira (1812–1885), son of R. Mordecai of Chernobyl and brother of R. David of Talnoye, who disqualified the slaughterer because he did not keep his commitment to refrain from reading R. Nahman's book '*Likutei Moharan*'. The Bratslav Hasidim confronted the Zaddik and R. Aharon, the local head of the Rabbinical Court. They called the Zaddik to a Din Torah and petitioned R. Shlomo Kluger of Brody who received the arguments of both sides. The Bratslav Hasidim considered the struggle against the slaughterer a continuation of the unfounded hatred which evolved from the controversy over R. Nahman himself. R. Aharon, the head of the Rabbinical Court in Teplik, who claimed to represent the attitude of most of the inhabitants of the community, explained the objections to the nominee in a purely legal manner as a breach of contract. From his letter, however, it becomes clear that the main reason for the struggle against Bratslav was their refusal to recognize the rabbinical or hasidic authorities of the time. The duty to obey

the authorities had become an important element in the world view of East European Jewish orthodox society and every attempt to oppose the authority of the 'leaders of the generation' was thought to undermine the consensus of this society.

A reconstruction of these events also reveals the human consequences, i.e. the continuous oppression of Bratslav Hasidim by their co-religionists, who were not able to accept the social and spiritual uniqueness of Bratslav. The harrassment of Bratslav continued until World War I and only the political changes which came with the Soviet regime put a stop to it. From the point of view of the Bratslav Hasidim, the oppression and humiliation were considered a part of their uniqueness, and paradoxically these conflicts contributed to their internal unification and devotion to their legacy.

RESEARCH NOTES

THE MIDRASH ABARBANEL LIBRARY AND STEINSCHNEIDER'S BIRTHDAY

by Zvi Baras (pp. 507–511)

Shortly before the centennial anniversary of the Jewish National & University Library (JNUL; held on May 1992), the Department of Manuscripts & Archives received a group of letters stemming from the Library's early stages, when it was still called 'The Midrash Abarbanel Library' (MAL).

Among these documents is an enigmatic letter, sent by the board of directors of the MAL to a very distinguished scholar on the occasion of his 80th birthday. The letter referred to: 'Moshe Even Mehokek'; 'Moshe Mehokek Avanim', which literally means – 'Moshe the stone carver'. This was in fact an attempt to translate into Hebrew the German name of the great Jewish scholar Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907).

As Steinschneider was to become an octogenarian on March 30 1896, his students and friends intended to present him with a special Jubilee Volume (*Festschrift*). This was a proper occasion for the board of directors of the MAL to address Moritz Steinschneider, to congratulate him on his 80th birthday and to bring to his attention the existence of the MAL in Jerusalem. They proposed to honor him in the manner similar to that bestowed on other important personalities. Steinschneider was kindly requested to send his books and articles to the MAL in Jerusalem, where they would be kept in a separate bookcase bearing his name.

Although the MAL did not receive a direct gift from Steinschneider, some of his books later came into its possession (His important library ended up in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York). This was due to the 'Otzrot Hagola' (Treasures of the Diaspora) operation, conducted immediately after World War II, in order to rescue hundreds of thousands of volumes confiscated and stolen by the Nazi Regime from Jewish homes and

institutions and concentrated in various locations and depots, among them in the city of Offenbach A.M.

The ancient proverb ‘Habent sua fata libelli’ – books have their own fate – seems to be true; a copy of Moritz Steinschneider’s Jubilee volume, bearing the stamp ‘Archival-Depot Offenbach A.M.’ reached the JNUL, thus closing a full circle.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A NOTE ON A PRESUMED ACT OF *KIDDUSH HA-SHEM* IN JERUSALEM

by Nadia Zeldes (pp. 513–514)

In Mary Minty’s article (*Zion*, LIX [1994], p. 215), *Annales Sancti Disibodi* published in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, XVII (Hannover 1861), has been cited as a testimony to the self-immolation of the Jews of Jerusalem during the First Crusade. A careful analysis of this source shows that the events described there transpired in Germany while the crusaders were making their way towards Jerusalem, and not in the Holy Land. In fact, this source describes the well known pogroms carried out by the crusading armies in Europe.

