

Several comments on a Genizah fragment of Bavli, Eruvin 57B–59A



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This article refers to a Cairo Genizah fragment related to Bavli, Eruvin tractate 57b–59a, identified as Cambridge, UL T-S F1 (1) 85. FGP No. C 96541. The article begins with a description of the Genizah fragment and presents a reproduction of the fragment itself at the end of the article. Reference is made to the content and several comments are made in an effort to characterise the fragment.

Keywords: Genizah; Eruvin; Sugya; Aramaic words; Geographical sites.

Description of the Genizah Fragment

The Genizah fragment is identified as Cambridge, UL T-S F1 (1) 85, and here I shall discuss one folio (No. C 96541 at the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society) selected at random.

The fragment includes approximately 36 lines. The measurements of the folio are 26.5 cm × 32.3 cm. The measurements of the written area are 20.5 cm × 24.5 cm. The page is torn at the edges and a considerable part of it is faded and illegible. The legible part of the fragment, which parallels that of the printed version (Vilna), begins with the words '...ve-ha at hu de-amrat' (והא את הוא דאמרא) (57b) and ends with the words 'ein, le-makom' (אין, למקום) (59a).

The scribe added occasional signs above or below some words in the fragment as necessary in his opinion. The purpose of the upper signs is to note deletion of letters or decoration of the word *mishna*, and of the lower signs to note how the words should be read. Between the lines, there are emendations in a different hand. The writing style is Square Eastern (Goldberg 1986:55).

Paleographically, the formative features of the letters have a greater similarity to letter specimens written in 995 AD (unknown place) and to letter specimens written in Cairo, Egypt, in 1003/4 (Beit-Arié 1987:15, 17).

Geographical sites

The fragment mentions several matters also mentioned in the various versions stated above (sometimes with minor linguistic changes), such as geographical places and special words. The names of the geographic places mentioned in the fragment are 'Ardashir' (Neaman 1972:145–146; Obermeyer 1929:263–265; Oppenheimer 1983:223–234) (ארדשיר) (5) and 'Tigris' (Epstein 1935:404; Obermeyer 1929:90) (דגלת) (6). Ardashir was a large settlement on the west bank of the Tigris river, which in the time of the amora Raba was connected to a town named Ktesifon by means of an *eruv techumin* (Eshel 1979:36–37; Neaman 1972:136–138). In Hebrew, the Tigris is called *Hiddekel* (חידקל) and in the Talmud it is mentioned in its Aramaic name: *Diglat* (דגלת) (Eshel 1979:91). All these places belong to the Mehoza area (Oppenheimer 1983:223–234).

Unique words that appear only in this text

Special words in this fragment are the words, 'flanks of a wall'¹ (אֶצְמַחַתָּא דְּשׁוּרָא) (6), which appear with vowelisation marks to note how the words should be read and mean 'flanks (i.e., sides or projecting parts) of a wall' (Aruch HaShalem 1955:62). Another possible interpretation is:

[F]lanks (i.e., sides of a building or projecting parts of a building) like caves, and they stand in the water (as though connected to the flanks of a wall² [in seventy cubits and some]).³

1. See Aruch HaShalem 1955:62, entry: *atma* (אַטְמָא): *atmahata deshurah*; Jastrow 1967:43, entry: *atma* (אַטְמָא).

2. R., Hananel, Eruvin 57b.; Jastrow, 1967: 'Flanks (projecting parts) of a wall'.

3. Tosafot, Eruvin 57a s.v. *R. Huna*.

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Yet another interpretation is 'parts of the wall that are like its wings' (Krauss 1921:64) or probably 'certain foundation walls which are incorporated into the *Hiddekel*'.⁴

Such also is the word *apeskima* (אפסיקימא) (13), meaning 'a rope made of the bark of a nut tree',⁵ 'ropes made of the fibres of the Indian nut', 'anything weaved from palm leaves' or 'rope made of dates'.⁶

The word *apeskima* (אפסיקימא), according to the first expression in the text of the sugya, is a fibre that grows around the palm tree,⁷ from whence the measuring rope is manufactured. And there is a dispute between R. Abba and R. Jacob about the meaning of the word *nargila* (נרגילא) (13) and of the word *navra* (נברא)⁸ (14). According to R. Abba, the meaning of the *nargila* is 'dates'. R. Abba defines the word *nargila* by its name. However, R. Jacob defines the word *nargila* by its description, 'A palm-tree which has only one bast' (14), and the meaning of the word '*navra*' is 'woven rope' and the meaning of 'A palm-tree which has only one bast' is, according to R. Jacob, 'dates that need (enough to) weave them (into) one rope'.⁹ Another interpretation of 'A palm-tree which has only one bast' is 'a palm tree that has only one branch',¹⁰ and there are other interpretations of the word *nargila*.¹¹

According to the second expression in the text of the sugya (others read), the dispute between R. Abba and R. Jacob concerns identification of the species called *apeskima* from which the measuring rope is made.

According to R. Abba, the species is called *nargila* (נרגילא) with no added explanation of this word, and according to R. Jacob this species is called 'A palm-tree which has only one bast', which means 'a fibre that twists and climbs around the palm tree',¹² and there are other interpretations of the word *navra* (נברא).¹³ In fact, the differences between these two expressions derive from alternate versions embraced by different scholars (Aminoah 2016:1006).

In ancient times, ropes were woven from palm leaves and also used for measuring purposes because this type of rope

4.Sokoloff 2002:107, entry: *atma* (אטמא).

5.Aruch HaShalem, vol. 1, p. 224, entry: *afsikima* (אפסיקימא); Massoret HaShas, Eruvin 58a explains that the interpretation of the Aruch HaShalem must be according to the second version in the text (Others read).

6.Aruch HaShalem 1955; cf. Jastrow, vol. 1, p. 106, entry: *afsikima* (אפסיקימא): '(Rope) twisted of palm-leaves'.

7.Rashi, Eruvin 58a, s.v. *navra* (ארבנ).

8.Aruch HaShalem, vol. 5, p. 303, entry: *navar* (נבר): '*navra* is the main text rather than *navara*'.

9.Aruch HaShalem, vol. 1, p. 224, entry: *afsikima* (אפסיקימא).

10.Aruch HaShalem, vol. 5, p. 303, entry: *navar* (נבר); Sokoloff 2002:727, entry: *navra* (נברא).

11.Sokoloff 2002:777, entry: *nargila* (נרגילא): 'coconut fiber ... expl. *afsikima* band, string'.

12.Rashi, Eruvin 58a, s.v. *navra* (נברא); Aruch HaShalem, vol. 5, p. 303, entry: *navar* (נבר).

13.R. Hananel, Eruvin 58a; Jastrow, vol. 2, p. 870–871, entry: *navra* (נברא): '(A rope made of fibres of) a palm'; Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, p. 727, entry: *navra* (נברא): 'A date palm of one web'.

would not shrink in the sunny season nor expand in the rainy season. These measurement techniques were regularly used by surveyors and they were also appropriate for measuring distances in the context of the Sabbath limits (Safrai & Safrai 2009:161).

Another word that begs interpretation is *megeg* (מגג) (16), 'megeg rope' (חבל המגג) (17). *megeg* is a type of reed (a species of water plant from the Cyperaceae family that grows in swamps and on the banks of streams – Cyperus), papyrus,¹⁴ and 'megeg rope' is a type of reed used to make rope¹⁵ that resembles rubber or a type/species of rubber.¹⁶ A similar interpretation is a grass called *megeg* used to make a rope that resembles rubber (Epstein 1982:104). Yet another option is 'megeg'- oil in the Arabic language – Araqiya' (Lewin 1934:172).

The verb *mekaded* (מקדר) (=pierce) (2 × 21) has several interpretations with an almost identical meaning. The word means: cut¹⁷ or pierce (the mountain).¹⁸ Some think that there is no real difference between these versions¹⁹; however, the source of the word is unclear (Safrai & Safrai 2009:162). In Aramaic dictionaries, the meaning of the verb *kadad* (קדר) is to measure distances in a mountainous region²⁰ and the meaning of the verb *kadar* (קדר) is to measure,²¹ and some of the researchers interpreted the *Mishna* accordingly (Safrai & Safrai 2009:162).

There are differences between the fragment and the other versions contained in the manuscripts and in the Vilna edition mentioned above, evident mainly in linguistic aspects such as the adding or removing of a linguistic form, linguistic exchanges and changes in the linguistic order, as well as multiple use of vowel letters. The differences in each of the words mentioned above derive from variant versions of the different scribes, or as varying linguistic forms, for instance, with regard to the word *mekaded* (מקדר).

The fragment's version does not contribute to understanding problematic issues in the sugya, such as the discrepancy between the second expression, 'some there are who read' (25), and the first, 'What may be the depth of a glen? – R. Joseph replied: Two cubits. Abaye raised an objection against him ... He holds the view of "Others"' [=R. Meir] (26). The problem that arises when comparing these two expressions is that according to the second form, the difficulty brought on behalf of Abaye and the resolution (not voiced by Abaye (Halivni

14.Aruch HaShalem, vol. 5, p. 72, entry: *megeg* (מגג); Jastrow, vol. 2, p. 726, entry: *megeg* (מגג): 'A species of reed'.

15.Jastrow 1967: 'A rope made of *megeg*'.

16.Massoret HaShas, Eruvin 58a.

17.R. Hananel, Eruvin 58a; Jastrow, vol. 2, p. 1317, entry: *kadar* (קדר).

18.Aruch HaShalem, 1955, vol. 7, p. 63, entry: '(=kadad) kad' («קדר»), Rashi, Eruvin 58a s.v. *mekadrin* (מקדרין); Rashi, Eruvin 35b s.v. *bezo amar* (בוזו אמר); Korban HaEdah, Eruvin 5:3; Lieberman 1962:379.

19.Goldberg, *The Mishna Treatise Eruvin*, p. 145; Albeck 1958:103; Sokoloff 2002:982, entry: *kadad* (קדר).

20.Sokoloff 1990:474, entry: *kadad* (קדר).

21.Sabar 2002:273, entry: *kadar* (קדר): 'to measure'.

1982:156–157) but rather by the redactors of the sugya – presented in the first expression – in fact ‘do not exist and were never brought’ (Albeck 1969:536; Halivni 1982:157; Weiss 1954:229), and these two forms are opposites (Weiss 1937:135). But the version in the fragment, similar to the other versions in the manuscripts mentioned above, does not solve this problem.

In addition, the fragment contains a word from the *Mishna* – ²²*ha-mumche* (המומחה) (=‘only along the beaten track’ [an expert, skilled surveyor]) (34). This word joins the other versions of manuscripts (such as, MSS Munich 95, Vatican 109, Oxford 366) where the same word *ha-mumche* (only along the beaten track) was also mentioned. This version in the fragment does not support Rashi’s version, who has the form *ella mumche* (אלא מומחה) (only beaten track).²³ R. Hananel too has *ha-mumche* (המומחה) (only along the beaten track) as in the fragment, but he interprets the meaning of the word (based on a verse)²⁴ as saying that it is necessary to measure the area of the city’s limits – in a straight line with the city.²⁵ Rashi, in contrast, who has *ella mumche* (אלא מומחה) (only beaten track) understands that the person fit to measure the limits should be an expert – someone proficient in surveying,²⁶ and many commentators and scholars side with Rashi.²⁷

There is another suggestion, to read (in the version of the *Mishna*) *bemeshicha* (במשיחה), that is, with a measuring rope (of flax [Goldberg 1986:143; Lieberman 1962:383]), instead of *ella min ha-mumche* (אלא מן המומחה) (only along the beaten track). This in light of the correspondence between the language of the *Mishna*, which brings the short form *en modedin ella min ha-mumche* (אין מודדין אלא מן המומחה) ([The Sabbath limit of a town] is measured only along the beaten track), and the language of the Tosefta,²⁸ which has: *en modedin... ella bemeshicha* (אין מודדין... אלא במשיחה) ([The Sabbath limit of a town], is measured only with a measuring rope ([of flax])). According to this suggestion, the version in the *Mishna* was disrupted to form *ella min ha-mumche* (אלא מן המומחה) (Dinner 1895:52) (only along the beaten track) instead of *bemeshicha* (במשיחה) (only with a measuring rope ([of flax])) as in the Tosefta.

All these interpretative suggestions raise exegetical, linguistic and syntactic difficulties.²⁹ For example, with regard to the *Mishna*’s version of the words *min ha-mumche* (מן המומחה). If the *Mishna*’s version is *min ha-mumche* and the word *mumche* (מומחה) means a person proficient in measuring (as interpreted by Rashi and later by R. Ovadia of Bartanura),

22. Eruvin 5:5.

23. Rashi, Eruvin 58b, s.v. h.g. [hachei garsinan] en modedin (“הכי גרסינן אין מודדין”).

24. Nm 34:11.

25. R. Hananel, Eruvin 59a; Aruch HaShalem, vol. 5, p. 162–163, entry: *mumche* (מומחה); Tosafot, Eruvin 58b s.v. en modedin (אין מודדין).

26. Rashi, Eruvin 58b; S. Safrai, Z. Safrai, *Mishnat Eretz Israel*, p. 163.

27. R. Ovadya Mibartenura, Eruvin 5:5; Tosafot Yom Tov, Eruvin 5:5; Lieberman 1934:300; Albeck, *Mavo LaMishna*, p. 103; Goldberg, *The Mishna Treatise Eruvin*, p. 147; Safrai and Safrai (2009:163); Jastrow, vol. 2, p. 743, entry: *mumche* (מומחה).

28. Tosefta, Eruvin 4(6):16, Lieberman edition.

29. Rishon LeZion, Eruvin 5:5; Tosafot Hadashim, Eruvin 5:5.



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FIGURE 1: Cambridge, UL T-S F1(1) 85.

then the word *min* (מן) is redundant. And indeed, some versions, for instance Rashi’s version, do not have the word *min* but rather *en modedin ella mumche* (אין מודדין אלא מומחה). However, some scholars are of the opinion that even this version is incorrect, rather it should be *en modedin ella mumchin* (אין מודדין אלא מומחין) or *eno moded ella mumche* (אינו מודד אלא מומחה).³⁰

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Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Author(s) contributions

U.Z. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

30. Albeck, *Perush LaMishna, Eruvin*, p. 433.

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