

THE PIYYUṬ, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE TEXTUAL STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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EVER since Old Testament scholars have busied themselves with their many-sided researches on the Bible, the critical study of comparing the Old Testament text with texts of the various other versions has occupied their minds. Here scholars have been concerned mainly with the LXX and—to a lesser extent—the Vulgate and the Targums. The recent Judean finds, which comprise among other texts two versions of the book of Isaiah,¹ have naturally added another valuable source of study in this direction. One source, however, has hardly been dealt with. This is the payyetaṅic literature, which comprises a vast quantity of material capable of yielding, quite apart from many other aspects, a number of interesting studies bearing on the Old Testament,² not excluding textual studies. The following article, while introducing the payyetaṅic literature in general and the special type of piyyuṭ which has a direct bearing on our study in particular, is a modest attempt to direct attention to what may well prove to be a fruitful field of investigation.

One has to distinguish between piyyuṭ³ in the broad sense,

¹ The one manuscript, comprising practically the whole of the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah as known to us, is in the possession of the Syrian Metropolitan of St. Mark's Monastery of Jerusalem and has been edited (along with the Habakkuk Commentary) by Millar Burrows and published by the American Schools of Oriental Research, New Haven, 1950; the other, comprising Isaiah xli-lxvi without interruption and parts of xvi, xix, xxii-xxiii, xxviii, xxxviii-xxxix, in the possession of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Only a few fragments from this manuscript, namely, chapters xlvi. 17-xlix. 7 and l. 7-li. 8, have been edited by E. L. Sukenik in *Meghilloth Genuzoth*, second survey, and published by the *Mosadh Bialik*, Jerusalem, 1950.

² See the concluding lines of this article.

³ Pl. piyyuṭim.

which may include all manner of poetry,¹ as the Greek word, *ποίητης*, from which it is derived, would suggest, and *piyyuṭ* in the narrower sense, which comprises songs of praise to God, intended as a rule by its composer, called *payyeṭan*,² to be added to the older liturgy.³ Using Zunz's apt phrase, one may describe it as *synagogal poetry*, for it is mainly the creation of the synagogue. It is with the latter that we shall deal.

It is convenient to speak of four periods in this connection : 1. The anonymous period, the inception of which is merged in the Talmudical era when the obligatory prayer was gradually being shaped. It ends apparently in the time of Yosē ben Yosē, say about the sixth century C.E. 2. The period beginning with Yannai, about the seventh century. 3. The period of the Jewish poets of Spain.⁴ 4. The period beginning about the thirteenth century and still to a certain extent in being amongst some Jewish communities in the Near East.⁵

The *payyeṭanim* of each of the above periods have, individually, their own peculiar characteristics, but at the same time some prominent features are common to all of them. However, because the term *piyyuṭ* to-day is mainly applied to the liturgical compositions of the second and the third periods to the partial exclusion of the first and to the complete exclusion of the fourth, we shall proceed to examine the first three periods only, enlarging on the second and the third.

The Anonymous Period

The Anonymous Period has not produced a great number of *piyyuṭim*, or at least it can be said that only a small number of *piyyuṭim* of this period have come down to us. The exact dates

¹ Cf., for instance, Gen. Rab. s. lxxxv, where it is used in the general sense of "fiction", etc.

² Sometimes, especially after the conquest of Palestine by the Arabs (C.E. 636), called *Hazan*, meaning the Reader. Al Qirqisani, the Karaite, a contemporary of Sa'adiah Ga'on, uses the word *Hazana* in connection with the *piyyuṭim* composed by Yannai.

³ Called *Tephillah shel ḥobhah* (obligatory prayer).

⁴ Some would call this period the Sa'adiah period, which begins about the tenth century and is lost in the age of the Jewish poets of Spain.

⁵ See Davidson's Introduction to *'Ozar ha-Shirah veba-Piyyuṭ*, vv. i-iv.

of its various compositions are not known, but it is perhaps safe to say that most of them originated in Palestine, say between the third and the sixth centuries and were later incorporated in the prayer-book. These piyyuṭim are better known to-day by the name of songs or prayers, although they exhibit some marked characteristics of the later piyyuṭim, chief amongst them being the alphabetical¹ and the *tashraḳ* acrostics.² In rare cases allusions to the Midrashic literature are also found.³ They also betray an attempt at metre, but have no rhyme. Their language, unlike that of the piyyuṭim of the later periods, is straightforward and as a rule presents no ambiguities and no complications.

The Second and the Third Periods

The piyyuṭim of these two periods form the major part of all the piyyuṭim which have survived in the various prayer-rites for the week-days and festivals. Also the greater part of the several hundreds of thousands of fragments in the Cairo Genizah,⁴ is made up of piyyuṭim, and mainly piyyuṭim of these two periods.

By force of custom and tradition, according to which one has to introduce daily some new feature in prayer (cf. Ber. 29b, and see *Rashi ad hoc*), the Palestinian readers of the synagogues, who seem to have been the first payyeṭanim, continued to compose fresh pieces of liturgy even after an obligatory prayer-rite was fixed for all the year round.

Three main forms of piyyuṭim emerged one after the other : 1. The *Qerobhah*⁵ ; 2. The *Yozer*⁶ ; 3. The *Ma'arabha*.⁷ The

¹ Cf. 'El 'adhon, a piece recited on Sabbath—perhaps one of the later compositions of this period (see S. D. Luzzatto, *Toledhoth ha-Shirah be-Isra'el*, pp. 12-13, published by *Maḥbaroth le-Siphuth*, Tel-Aviv, 1948).

² Cf. *Tikkanta shabbath*, recited on Sabbath.

³ Cf. *ra'ah ve-hithḳin zurath ha-lebhanah*, in 'El 'adhon (referred to in n. 4 above). In this connection one should note that some of the Tosaphists read . . . *ve-hiḳtin* . . . , instead of . . . *ve-hithḳin* . . . , a reading more in keeping with Midr. Rab. s. vi, upon which it is based. See *Da'ath Zeqenim*, p. 1, and cf. n. 4 above.

⁴ Schechter estimated the number of fragments carried away by him from Cairo to Cambridge in 1896 to be about 100,000 ; and at that time there were known to be thousands of other fragments in Oxford, Petrograd (Leningrad), and other places. See P. E. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*, pp. 2-8.

⁵ Pl. *Qerobhoth*.

⁶ Pl. *Yozeroth*.

⁷ Pl. *Ma'arabhoth*.

Qerobhah, however, is our main study here, leaving out the two other types of piyyuṭim altogether. The *Qerobhah* is the first in time and contains a greater number of complete Biblical verses than do usually the other types of piyyuṭim. It therefore deserves a more detailed examination. The *Qerobhah*¹ is the general term for a chain of piyyuṭim, the links of which are intended to be interwoven in the prayer known as *Shemoneh 'Esreh*. The number of the links differs according to the number of benedictions in the prayer of the day. For certain particular week-days, for example, there are eighteen pieces,² each of which bears a name according to the place assigned to it at the end of each benediction. On the Sabbath we distinguish between two kinds of *Qerobhoth*, the one called *Qedushta*, associated with the prayer where *Qedushah* is recited, the other called *Shibh'atha* for the prayer where no *Qedushah* is recited. In Palestine, the birth-place of piyyuṭ, *Qedushah* was recited only in the Morning Prayer of the Sabbath and the festivals. Hence, every *Qedushta* composed by Palestinian payyetaṇim—and by payyetaṇim of other countries who followed them—is a *Qerobhah* for the Morning Prayer, whereas the *Shibh'atha* is a *Qerobhah* for the other prayers of the day. It is interesting that this distinction is discernible in a number of countries other than Palestine.

The first to compose a *Qerobhah* was Yannai of Palestine who seems to have lived the greater part of his life when Palestine was still ruled by the Byzantines. His *Qerobhoth* are closely bound up with the triennial cycle, namely, with the custom prevalent in Palestine where the Reading of the Law was spread over a period of three years instead of one year.³ The number of his *Qerobhoth* for the days of Sabbath alone total over 150.⁴ Yannai is the grand architect of the *Qerobhah* and has been extensively

¹ Drawn, as it would appear, from the Aramaic verb *qrbh*, "to lead in prayer". Cf., for instance, . . . *de-qribh* . . . , 'they noticed that the reader of the synagogue led in prayer and said . . .' (Midr. Till. to Ps. xix). Cf. also Lev. Rab. s. 30.

² Not nineteen as customary to-day. This is in accordance with an old custom which prevailed in Palestine and in its neighbouring countries.

³ See Meg. 29b.

⁴ See *Piyyuṭē Yannai* (Liturgical Poems of Yannai, collected from Genizah MSS. and other sources by Menaḥem Zulay, Berlin, 1940. Henceforth abb. P.Y.Z.), p. xi.

copied and imitated by a great number of payyëtanim many generations after him. It is therefore fitting that we should examine one of his *Qerobhoth*.

Most of Yannai's *Qerobhoth* are of the *Qedushta* type, the contents of which are based on the Weekly Portion (called in Hebrew *Parashah*, or *Sedher*) and its assigned *Haftarah*. Its main subject-matter is therefore fixed. The contents of the *Shibh'atha*, on the other hand, are not necessarily connected with that of the Weekly Portion and its *Haftarah*. The pieces of the *Shibh'atha* are seven—the number of the benedictions of the appropriate prayer. The pieces of the *Qedushta* bear only on the first three benedictions, but on the other hand, a goodly number of pieces bear on the third benediction. Each of its pieces has its own peculiarities which are common to all the appropriate pieces of all the *Qedushoth*, so that all of them appear as if cast in one mould.

The *Qedushta* as a rule comprises nine pieces, each of which has its own peculiarities. The first three concern us most here, for at the end of each of them there comes a group of Biblical verses. It will therefore not be out of place if we give some description of them :

(a) The first is a piyyuṭ intended for the first benediction. It is composed of three verses, each of which consists of rhymed lines. These lines, twelve in number, embody an alphabetical order up to the letter *lamedh*. The last line, which bears an allusion to the first verse of the *Sedher*, is followed by a few other verses drawn from different parts of the Bible which have some bearing on the words or ideas of the piyyuṭ, and are intended to reinforce its message. After this comes a concluding verse (*Hathimah*), consisting of three or four rhyming lines which open with the word which ended the preceding Biblical passage. The last line of this verse alludes to the first benediction called *Maghen*.

(b) The second piyyuṭ, intended for the second benediction, resembles in structure the preceding one. It continues with the alphabetical order, namely, with the letter *mem* onwards, and ends with an allusion to the second verse of the *Sedher*. This is reinforced with a group of Biblical verses at the end of which

comes a concluding verse as above bearing on the second benediction called *Meḥayyeh*.

(c) The third is a piyyuṭ comprising four verses embodying the acrostic *Yannai* (*Yodh, Nun, Yodh, Yodh*, the Palestinian spelling of the name of the author). It ends with an allusion to the first verse of the appropriate *Haftarah*, followed by a group of Biblical passages as above.

The importance of these verses to Old Testament scholars is self-evident. We have here a great number of Biblical verses appended at a comparatively early date. It is true, we have to make allowance for possible errors by copyists, but on the other hand, it is worth remembering that copyists at all times paid strict attention when dealing with Biblical passages, so that not all deviations should be attributed to errors. The Biblical scholar, therefore, may expect to find in these passages much fresh material for investigation.

The first question for the investigator would naturally be: Do these verses rigidly follow the Massoretic Text or do they follow other versions that are extant? And now that two Isaiah Texts of the Judean Scrolls have been added the problem becomes more interesting. Without entering into details the answer to this question is that as a rule they follow the Massoretic Text and therefore testify to its trustworthiness. There are, however, noteworthy exceptions, and here are a few examples:

The M.T. of Is. xlix. 10 reads, "for he that hath mercy on them (*meraḥamam*) shall lead them". Yannai¹ in one of his piyyuṭim seems to have read, "from the womb (*merehem*) he shall lead them".² Cf. "I was cast upon thee from the womb" (Ps. xxii. 11). Cf. also, ". . . which are born by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb" (Is. xlvi. 3).

The M.T. of Mi. vii. 19 reads, "and thou wilt cast all *their sins* (*Haṭ'otham*) into the depths of the sea". Y. reads, ". . . *our sins* (*haṭ'othenu*) . . ." ³, a reading more in keeping with the text. The LXX and the Syriac and other versions have *our sins*. It is interesting to note here that after the word *haṭ'othenu* there come the words: "and all the sins of thy people—the house of Israel

¹ Henceforth abb. Y.

² See *P.Y.Z.*, p. 60, l. 3.

³ *P.Y.Z.*, p. 327, ll. 122-126. See Zulay's note, p. 327.

into a place where they will not be remembered nor will they be visited nor occur to one's mind", which are absent from the M.T. and from the other versions. They are, however, to be found at the end of the *seliḥoth* recited on *Yom-Kippur*, which begins with *Mikḥah 'abhdeḳha*. They are also to be found in the prayer called *Tashlich*, recited on the second day of *Rosh ha-Shanah*.

The M.T. of Prov. xxvi. 3 reads, "A whip for the horse, a bridle (*methegh*) for the ass". Y. reads, ". . . and a bridle (*u-methegh*) . . .",¹ a reading in keeping with the LXX and other versions.

The M.T. of Job xxxvi. 11 reads, "If they obey and serve him they shall complete (*yeḳhallu*) their days in prosperity and their years in pleasure". Y. reads, ". . . they shall spend (*yebhallu*) . . .",² a reading found in other versions. Cf. Job xxi. 13.

The M.T. of Is. lvi. 1 reads, "Thus saith the Lord". Y. reads, "For (*ḳi*) thus saith the Lord".³ It is interesting to note that the Is. of the Judean Scrolls⁴ agrees here with Y. against the M.T.⁵

Apart from actual passages, the piyyuṭim are known to have been saturated with phrases and expressions drawn from the O.T. And here one can learn much regarding the text in the mind of the payyeṭan. Here are a few striking examples :

The M.T. of Ps. xxiii. 4 reads, ". . . thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (*yenaḥamuni*)". Y. reads, ". . . they guide me (*yanḥuni*)".⁶

The M.T. of Is. xl. 10 reads, *hinneh be-ḥasaq yabho*. The difficulty of *be-ḥasaq* is obvious, for we have here an adjective when a noun is required. Y., however, while speaking of the power of God, makes use of this phrase by saying *ve-thabho*

¹ P.Y.Z., p. 81, l. 4.

² P.Y.Z., p. 251, l. 4. Yannai also reads *u-shenotham* instead of the M.T.'s reading *u-shenehem*.

³ P.Y.Z., p. 104, l. 17.

⁴ *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery*, vol. i, ed. M. Burrows, plate xlvi, l. 10.

⁵ The difference between Y. and the Is. of the Judean Scrolls is only as regards orthography, the first one having *ḳi* and the other one *ḳi'*.

⁶ P.Y.Z., p. 82, l. 3. See E. Burrows, *J.R.A.S.*, 1925, p. 281. See also Th. Fish, *Melilah I* (published by Manchester University Press, 1944), p. 149, n. 1.

be-ḥoseq ("and thou shalt come with strength").¹ The Is. of the Judean Scrolls² again agrees here with Y. against the M.T.

Space does not allow me to say anything here about the orthography of the Biblical verses under question nor to evaluate the various variants of those verses—two most desirable subjects for discussion. These, I hope, will be dealt with elsewhere.

¹ *P.Y.Z.*, p. 209, l. 5.

² *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery*, vol. i, ed. M. Burrows, plate xxxviii, l. 10.