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**Addendum to November 2011's** Fragment of the Month FRAGMENT OF THE MONTH ARCHIVE

A New Judaeo-Syriac Fragment from the Genizah: ENA 3846.2

Alan Elbaum

pharmaceutical lexical list.<sup>4</sup>

In Baghdad, a thousand years ago, a debate arose in the yeshiva of Pumbedita about the correct interpretation of a verse from Psalms. The head of the academy, Hayya Gaon (served 1004–38 CE), ordered a student to go and inquire from the patriarch of the Church of the East about the translation of that verse in the Peshitta (the Syriac translation of the Bible). Hayya silenced objections by asserting that "our pious forefathers" routinely sought out comparative linguistic knowledge from members of other religions, not to mention shepherds and cowhands.<sup>1</sup>

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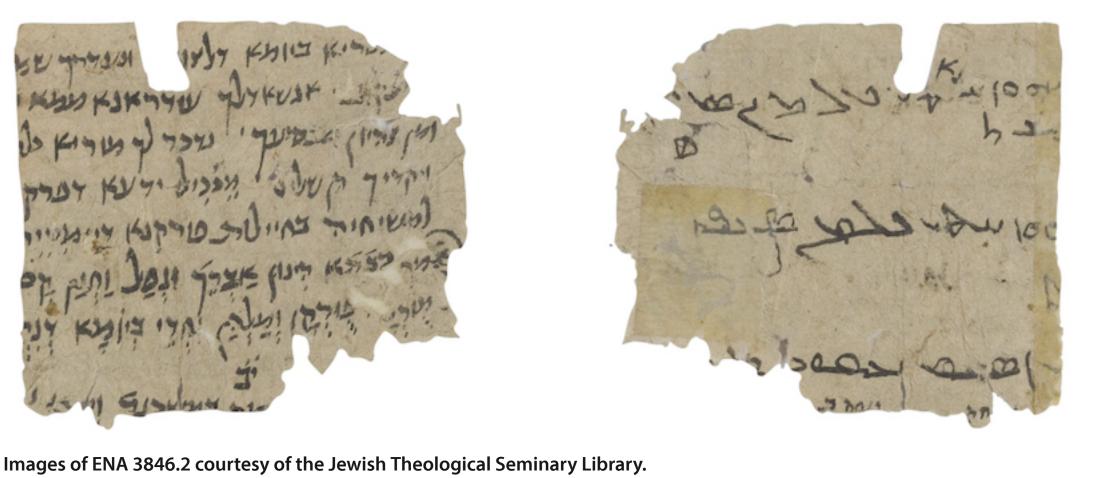
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Hayya Gaon would no doubt feel vindicated if he knew about the recent, remarkable boom of scholarship on interconnections between Jews and Syriac Christians in late antiquity and the medieval era. Yet despite a wealth of indirect evidence for intellectual interchanges between the two communities—religious, literary, linguistic, and so on—the evidence remains sparse for understanding how, and to what extent, Jews directly engaged with the Syriac language, with Syriac texts and with the Christians who could teach the language and explain the texts.

The phenomenon of Judaeo-Syriac, the Syriac language written in Hebrew script, is especially important for answering these questions. Depending on how you count, there are about a dozen known examples of Judaeo-Syriac, nearly all medieval, most of them quotations embedded in larger Hebrew works.<sup>3</sup> The Cairo Genizah has played a major role in the study of Judaeo-Syriac ever since Siam Bhayro's 2012 discovery of T-S K14.22, which is written in Judaeo-Syriac and which contains a rare trilingual (Greek-Aramaic-Middle Persian)

In such a tiny corpus, even a fragment containing eight incomplete lines is cause for celebration, and I am pleased to announce another Judaeo-Syriac text from the Genizah: ENA 3846.2.5



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Syriac writing exercises.

This fragment is significant for another reason: it is the first known standalone fragment of the Peshitta in Hebrew script. The text

preserved on recto is Psalm 20, verses 2–4 and 7–10, followed by the beginning of Psalm 15 (for some reason labeled "12"). The hand is

that of a skilled Jewish scribe and strikes me as typical of 12th-century Egypt, or at any rate, the classical Genizah period of the 11th-

**Left:** Recto contains Psalm 20 and the beginning of Psalm 15 from the Peshitta, transcribed into Hebrew script. **Right:** Verso contains

13th centuries. The material is paper. The lower part of the leaf has either been cut or torn away, and a narrow vertical strip, which contained the ends of the lines on recto and the beginnings of the lines on verso, has also been cut away. Like other Judaeo-Syriac texts, the orthography does not reflect historical Syriac orthography but is rather a combination of phonetic forms and forms influenced by Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. (Examples will be provided in the edition and commentary below.) This scribe was clearly interested in the pronunciation of the Syriac text, since he (or she) adapted the Tiberian vocalisation system in order to partially vocalise II. 4–5 and fully vocalise II. 6–7. The phonetic orthography here and in other Judaeo-Syriac texts raises a question: how

did Jews know how Syriac was pronounced? Like Hebrew and Arabic, Syriac is often written unvocalised or only partially vocalised; furthermore, unlike Hebrew and Arabic, Syriac has many silent letters. The different kinds of divergences from the standard Syriac text found in this fragment offer tentative glimpses into the process of transcription itself. Some divergences suggest that this scribe was being aided by an informant knowledgable about Syriac pronunciation. He omits letters that are silent in Syriac (e.g., אַבְרֵך becomes אַבְרֵך), he omits one letter which is not officially silent but which is apt to be elided in recitation (ממאקדשיה becomes ממאקדשיה), and he adds prosthetic initial vowels which are not written but which are pronounced

case the scribe seems to simply forget a letter (אנשאדרלך should have been אנשאדרלך), and he replaces one word in the last verse with an erroneous word that appears in the first verse of the next psalm (בעב, "answer us," becomes נָחָדֵי, "rejoice"). The writing exercises on verso support the supposition that this possibly 12th-century scholarly Jew was in fact taking a Syriac class from a Christian neighbor or friend in Fustat. 10 George Kiraz has previously described the verso of this fragment as follows: "two lines of war." امم ('bgd hwz) and a third line with عصمت حصمت 'Isaac, Jacob.'"<sup>11</sup> These exercises are written in the Serto (postclassical) script in the crude hand that one would expect from a learner. The term "\'bgd hwz\" mentioned by Kiraz refers to a mnemonic for segmenting the Syriac alphabet known from other learners' exercises and from classical grammars. 12 Although the Hebrew-script captions underneath

"Isaac" and "Jacob" are insufficiently preserved for a handwriting comparison to be definitive, their mere presence indicates that the

exercises on verso were written by a Jewish learner, and they do seem to match the handwriting of recto.

(e.g., אנסיעך becomes אנסיעך). Other divergences are more consistent with the errors that arise from copying a written manuscript. In one

Let's return to the Hayya Gaon anecdote and the historical background of this fragment. Although in one sense that anecdote implies a willingness of some Jews to seek linguistic knowledge from Syriac Christians, as Christian Stadel has pointed out, it equally implies that no version of the Peshitta legible to Jews was readily available in 11th-century Baghdad. However, something must have happened in the intervening centuries such that the 13th-century Aleppene Jewish scholar Shemuel b. Nissim Masnūt (a.k.a. Masnuth) was able to liberally cite the Peshitta in his biblical commentaries. As Stadel writes, "The prevalence of Peshitta quotations from Daniel and Genesis in particular makes it likely that Masnuth had before him a full square-script transliteration of these books (if not the full Old Testament). Obviously, one has to assume a similar cultural milieu for the evolution of Targum Proverbs, the most famous Judaeo-Syriac text."13 (The Jewish Targum of Proverbs was adapted from the Peshitta; nearly three-quarters of the text is identical. 14) Masnūt's contemporary across the Mediterranean, the Spanish scholar Naḥmanides (d. 1270), similarly made use of the Syriac versions of the deuterocanonical texts of Judith and the Wisdom of Solomon. 15 Judaeo-Syriac was a significant albeit never widespread phenomenon. We have long known of medieval Jewish scholars from Baghdad to

have learned Syriac from Christians nor any extant specimens of Peshitta manuscripts in Hebrew characters like those that Masnūt and potentially Naḥmanides would have consulted. Despite its modest dimensions, ENA 3846.2 provides crucial evidence for a previously unattested stage of Jewish engagement with Syriac and hopefully heralds further discoveries and publications of Genizah fragments in Judaeo-Syriac. I conclude with an edition and commentary.

Aleppo to Girona who made use of the Peshitta for exegetical purposes. But until now, we have not had direct evidence of how Jews would

## Red indicates words or phrases that are found in one version but not the other.

**Edition:** 

Grey indicates text from the Peshitta that was skipped in ENA 3846.2.

Transcription of ENA 3846.2, with some lacunae tentatively filled in based on the standard text combined with this scribe's spelling habits:

1. נעניך] מוריא ביומא דלצו[נא] ונעדרך שמ[א דאלהיה

נדכר לך מוריא כל[הון קורבניך: 16 נדכר לך מוריא כל 4. ויקדיך הן שלום : מֱ[[.]]כֶיל ידעא דפרק [אלהא 5. למשיחיה בחיילות פורקנא דַיימִינֵיה [ ואטיבן (?) מר רבתא(?) הִינוּן אַבְרֵך ונְפַל וַחְנן קָם[ן(?) ואטיבן . . . 6 7. מֶורְיָא [נ]פֶוּרְקָן וְמַלֹכַן נִּחְדֵי בְיוֹמָא דְנִקְ[ריו 8. יב

2. ד]יעקוב: אנשאדלך עודראנא ממא[קדשיה

0. . . מוריא מנו נע]מר במשכנך ו0מו נשרי . . . .

Transliteration of ENA 3846.2 into Syriac script:

 $\Sigma$ . محے ہمی کسمی : بدحہ لم حدہ نہ حل[می مہاحیہ اللہ عن اللہ میں عماد کی .3

חשלי א] דד איישט [אי] איישט אייסט עליסט [איישט [ר. דער]

2. ה] עם הילאו אידאה (סידיש מבא [סידיש

٨. معتب من عرد ([.]] أن : عمل من معاد من معاد ما الماد على الماد لحسس حسله لا وهذمت أسخُشه [ ٥. . . حب نصلان شُش بُحثُ م مقل مسل مُحل (١) مهاليد 7. حُده نُک [ ] قُه هُ مُ مُحُلِحٌ نُسْدُر حِيه حُک وَنُم [ نِيه أَنِي

9. מהיא מה ה]מן במזכאי ה[מן שה ודיא

arbitrary): 17 חשאה אשב איזשם השלמה השמש היש עד .1

The Peshitta of Psalm 20, divided according to the lines of the Geniza fragment for easier comparison (the break between lines 5 and 6 is

2. השמב עדי לא אמרוא כל מפניאש 3. מכך שמש ושנבי לא כביא כלשם סטבריאי

4. مقدم مه دم بلال به حدث عب لحر معب حلف لانعمار بتعلم وبعد حدث منحم وعدم وبعل المواجع بحد حدث علم وحمل

5. למדיוש היתיוש ביתיא נסטנדש ביתוא נפטנסא ניתיוש שף כמבכרף 6. השל כבבד היי כדמש נמניא אתש הד שיי כוכי היקף היי סבל פאליבי 7. מיא עים ממלב ענה בנממא העימח,

**Commentary:** 

The Peshitta of the beginning of Psalm 15:

מניא מה המני במזכאי ווא שו הביא מיבי

## Note that this commentary is the work of an amateur whose knowledge of Syriac is perhaps on par with that of the scribe who gave us ENA 3846.2. This fragment assuredly deserves the kind of linguistic—especially phonological—analysis that I am unable to provide. The scribe consistently uses matres lectionis as vowels, 18 so I will only comment on plene spellings that are noteworthy for some other

reason Line 1: י דלצונא for דלצונא is a phonetic spelling. Line 2:

■ אנשאדלך is two words collapsed together, and it is missing a *resh*. The prosthetic initial *alef* is a phonetic spelling.<sup>19</sup> ■ ממאקדשיה is two words collapsed together, and it is missing a *nun*. This is probably a phonetic spelling. Interestingly, the same phenomenon occurs in Quranic recitation, where such a *nun* gets assimilated and nasalised (*idghām bi-ghunna*). Line 3:

אנסיעך has a prosthetic initial alef. ■ נדכר is a phonetic spelling, which is also found in Syriac manuscripts. Line 4:

■ שלום/בגאת is not part of the Peshitta, but it does seem to be Syriac (תֻ באסק), perhaps meaning "thusly complete," since שלום/באסק is not part of the Peshitta, but it does seem to be Syriac (תֻ באסק), perhaps meaning "thusly complete," since imperative form.<sup>20</sup> Two verses are then skipped. • מֵנכִיל and an extra letter I cannot account for. It looks like either מֵנכִיל or מֵנכִיל. The mark above the extra letter may be a deletion. 

the active participle written here is actually more faithful to the Hebrew ידעתי than is the Peshitta.<sup>21</sup>

Line 5: ■ למשיחיה for בדישנה is a *plene* spelling influenced by Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. Several words are then skipped. ■ בחיילות פורקנא for ביישלא הפסר ביישלא הפסר ביישלא הפסר ביישלות פורקנא is discussed above in note 9. It also uses a digraph for consonantal /y/, a common feature of Judaeo-

■ בחיילות uses the same digraph as בחיילות and has the same *plene* spelling as למשיחיה. Several words are then skipped. Line 6:

I do not have an adequate reading for the first two words, which do not seem to be part of the Peshitta. ■ הִינוּן has an unexpected initial vowel (I would have expected הֵינוּן).

Thesaurus doesn't offer any clearly more compelling options.

• אַבְרֵך has two noteworthy features: it has been transformed from a P'al verb into an Aph'el verb, and it is missing the silent terminal *vav* (a phonetic spelling). וּנְפֵּל is similarly missing the silent terminal *vav* (a phonetic spelling). ■ קם has an unexpected *mem sofit* (I would have expected קמן).

מוּרְיָא has an unexpected initial vowel (I would have expected מֵוּרְיָא). 🔳 נפֶּוּרְקָן has an unexpected vowel (I would have expected נפֶּוּרְקַן, especially in comparison with the very next word וְמַלֹכַן). • נְחְדֵי has an unexpected initial vowel (I would have expected נֶחְדֵי). Also, it exhibits the standard Judaeo-Syriac representation of wordfinal  $/\bar{e}/$  with the mater lectionis  $\cdot$  rather than  $\prec$  as in Syriac (this is influence from Jewish Babylonian Aramaic). Lastly, it is the wrong word, probably accidentally plucked from Psalm 21:1. That is good news for us, because it is a tiny trace of a third psalm on this

■ I do not know why Psalm 15 should be headed "12," nor, for that matter, why Psalm 15 should come after Psalm 20. Line 9:

**Acknowledgments:** My sincere thanks to George Kiraz and Simcha Gross for helping me understand the text and the significance of this manuscript.

■ Fortunately, just enough of this line is preserved to make the reading במדבאי/במשכנך fairly certain. The only verses in Psalms containing this word are 15:1 and 61:5, and the former is the better fit. It could theoretically be a text that is not from Psalms, but the Syriac

## **Footnotes**

diminutive fragment.

Line 7:

Line 8:

1 For the most exhaustive treatment of this episode, see Yosaif Dubovick, "Oil, which shall not quit my head': Jewish-Christian Interaction in

## thread from March 2021: https://twitter.com/Simcha\_Gross/status/1368584753864204288. 2 To name only two notable examples from the last two years: Aaron Butts and Simcha Gross, eds., Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections Across the First Millennium (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck: 2020); Nick Posegay, Points of Contact: The Shared Intellectual

History of Vocalisation in Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew (Open Book Publishers, 2021). 3 Christian Stadel, "The Judaeo-Syriac Version of Bel and the Dragon: An Edition with Linguistic Comments," Mediterranean Language Review 23 (2016), 1–31. Christian Stadel, "Judaeo-Syriac: Syriac Texts in Jewish Square Script," in Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections Across the First Millennium, ed. Aaron Butts and Simcha Gross (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck: 2020), 281–90. Siam Bhayro,

"Judaeo-Syriac," in *Handbook of Jewish Languages*, ed. Lily Kahn and Aaron D. Rubin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 630–33.

Eleventh-century Baghdad," Entangled Religions 6 (2018): 95–123. For an engaging summary in laypeople's terms, see Simcha Gross's Twitter

4 Siam Bhayro (with Ben Outhwaite), "The first discovery of Judaeo-Syriac: T-S K14.22," Cambridge University Library, Genizah Research Unit, Fragment of the Month: August 2013. Siam Bhayro, "A Judaeo-Syriac Medical Fragment from the Cairo Genizah," Aramaic Studies 10 (2012), 153–72. Siam Bhayro, "Remarks on the Genizah Judaeo-Syriac Fragment," Aramaic Studies 12 (2014), 143–53. Christa Müller-Kessler, "A Trilingual Pharmaceutical Lexical List: Greek - Aramaic - Middle Persian," Le Muséon 130 (2017), 31–70. Müller-Kessler argues that this text is actually Eastern Standard Literary Aramaic and not Syriac, but it seems to me (an avowed non-expert) that the

orthographic peculiarities she cites as proof (in section 3.1) are fully consistent with a Jewish scribe transcribing Syriac into Hebrew script. 5 This is either the third or the fourth Judaeo-Syriac fragment known from the Genizah, as Gideon Bohak announced the discovery of two additional Judaeo-Syriac fragments subsequent to T-S K14.22. (To the best of my knowledge, the shelfmarks have not been divulged, and these remain unpublished.) Gideon Bohak, "Manuals of Mantic Wisdom: From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Cairo Genizah," in Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism, ed. Hindy Najman (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 202n28. 6 There is a caveat: we do not know whether or not this fragment was embedded in a larger text, nor, if it was, what kind of larger text. The presence of writing exercises on verso suggests that it could have been an isolated leaf rather than part of a larger text. Against that, the presence of a numbered heading and two different psalms suggests that it could have been a collection of psalms or excerpts. 7 In fact, the hand seems so annoyingly familiar that I expect there are additional fragments in the same hand and that the scribe may

well be identified one day. 8 See Stadel, "The Judaeo-Syriac Version of Bel and the Dragon," 14f. 9 There is one more especially interesting divergence: בחיילות פורקנא (l. 5). The manuscripts of the Peshitta offer two versions of this phrase: the more common בעלא הפסלסטא and the less common בעלא הפסלסטא, which would have been transcribed respectively into בחיילא ופורקנא and בחיילא ופורקנא. While it is possible that the Syriac template for ENA 3846.2 contained the otherwise unattested , it is also possible that somebody dictated the standard text בעבא הפסלםא, it is also possible that somebody dictated the standard text בשלא הפסלםא, it is also possible that somebody dictated the standard text

preceding a voiceless consonant (i.e., assimilation), and that the Jewish scribe heard and recorded בחיילות פורקנא. Nevertheless, the vowels in בחיילות and in בחיילות are quite different, which is evidence against the mishearing theory, as is the fact that בسلم is perfectly good Syriac and synonymous with בעלא הפסלסעא. My thanks to Simcha Gross for thinking through this with me. 10 On the medieval Christian communities of Fustat, see Audrey Dridi, "Christians of Fustat in the First Three Centuries of Islam: The

Making of a New Society" and Tasha Vorderstrasse, "Linguistic Diversity at Fustat," in A Cosmopolitan City: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo, ed. Tasha Vorderstrasse and Tanya Treptow (Chicago, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2015), 33–42 and

11 George Kiraz, "Learning Syriac and Garshuni in Early Modern Egypt: Evidence from the Cairo Genizah," Intellectual History of the

the name in Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic as opposed to the standard spelling in Syriac. 12 Ibid., 7. 13 Stadel, "Judaeo-Syriac," 285.

Islamicate World (2020): 1–26, at 23. Note that the scribe wrote مصبح instead of مصبح, i.e., in accordance with the standard spelling of

15 Stadel, "Judaeo-Syriac," 286. 16 The reading of the first part of this word is uncertain. It looks almost like אל or even ואל.

53-62.

Brill, 1980).

14 John Healey, "Targum Proverbs and the Peshitta: Reflections on the Linguistic Environment," in Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon, ed. Geoffrey Khan and Diana Lipton (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 325–35.

17 The Peshita Institute, The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshita Version, Part II, Fascicle 3: The Book of Psalms (Leiden:

18 This is common in Judaeo-Syriac. Stadel, "Bel and the Dragon," 14–17. 19 Also attested in other Judaeo-Syriac texts. Ibid., 17.

20 My thanks to Simcha Gross for this suggestion. 21 My thanks to Simcha Gross for helping me understand this. 22 Stadel, "Bel and the Dragon," 17.

23 Ibid., 16. If you enjoyed this Fragment of the Month, you can find others here.

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