The Commentary

As in the previous volume, this segment of my commentary on the Babylonian Esther-Midrash will include the following components:

1. Presentation of text in translation:

The translation, given in indented paragraphs, will consist of a literal rendering with full punctuation. Though existing translations have been consulted, the present one is my own. The text is based on the Yemenite manuscript Columbia University X893 T141 (designated as "MS Y"), which generally preserves the most faithful readings of any of the complete witnesses to the tractate.

The following conventions will be adopted in the presentation of the text:

• All biblical verses are printed in italics. Since it is well-known that scriptural citations in midrashic texts are often abbreviated, I usually opt for the fullest citation that is preserved among the available witnesses, whether or not the verse is actually found in this way in MS Columbia. The translations, where appropriate, follow the King James (Authorized Revised) version, which usually preserves faithfully the Hebrew word order and produces an impression of archaism that is analogous to the effect created when biblical Hebrew passages are quoted in rabbinic texts. All chapter and verse references to the Bible are given in full and without abbreviation. Except for those few instances where they affect the understanding of the text, I did not record variant readings of biblical verses.

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1 The following section is copied with only minor changes from the introduction to Volume 1.


4 Though it should be noted that MS Y does normally give full citations of biblical passages.
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• In those instances where the differences between textual traditions are too great to be conveyed as “variant readings” in the footnotes, the traditions are recorded in parallel columns. The witness which forms the basis of the main text will be identified at the beginning of the column, and the distribution of the other witnesses will be indicated in the notes.

• In those instances where it is clear that MS Columbia has absorbed extraneous material that is not part of the Talmudic text (usually from Midrash Panim aherim B), the addition will be indicated with a vertical line to its left.

• Square brackets indicate additions and emendations that are found in the textual witness. Parentheses indicate a deletion in the text. Braces ({})) normally designate explanatory phrases added in the translation.

• Following a useful convention employed in the Soncino translations of the Babylonian Talmud, answers to questions or objections are usually preceded by a dash (—).

• The Hebrew הַדָּוָּרָה הָרָעְדִּים, which should literally be translated as the cumbersome “the Holy One Blessed Be He,” will be rendered simply as “the Holy One,” more in keeping with the naturalness of the phrase in Hebrew or Aramaic.

• Proper names which appear in the Bible are usually given in their standard English forms, except where a more precise transliteration is required for word-plays etc.

• The title “Rabbi” is normally abbreviated as “R.” in those places where the equivalent abbreviation (ר) is employed in MS Columbia.

• In a departure from the conventions adopted in most translations of rabbinic texts, the word רָמָה, used to introduce rabbinic dicta, is treated as an Aramaic participle rather than a Hebrew perfect, and
translated accordingly as a present-tense verb ("says"), following the prevailing norms of the Mishnah and other Tannaitic works.5

2. Variant readings:

The variant readings accompanying the text are not intended to constitute a proper critical edition, which would at any rate be an absurdity in a translated text. They are expected to provide an idea of the variety that exists in the textual witnesses, insofar as this variety can be reflected in English translation. The listings do not record all the textual information. For example, one cannot know from this apparatus whether the omission of a witness from the listing of variants indicates that its reading agrees with MS Columbia or that there is a gap in the manuscript.6

The following conventions are adopted for the presentation of the variant readings.

• Variants are listed in footnotes. As a rule, I have tried never to mix textual variants and other information in the same paragraph, and usually not in the same footnote. The information in the footnote relates to the text preceding the footnote reference (in the case of variants) as defined in the lemma, or (in the case of additions) to the place where the footnote reference is inserted.

5 That this is the proper translation was proven by Hyman Klein, "Gemara and Sebara" JQR 38 (1 1947), 87 [reprinted in Abraham Goldberg, ed. Collected Talmudic Scientific Writings of Hyman Klein (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1979), 84, who notes how it appears in parallel with כב ה, which is unquestionably a participle. Shamma Friedman, ["A Critical Study of Yevamot X with a Methodological Introduction," in Texts and Studies, Analecta Judaica, ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky, 275-442 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977), 37, n. 110] notes further that the plural in these contexts is usually "יהבכ...".

6 I have generally tried to minimize the size of the listings. Thus if only one or two witnesses preserve a certain reading, it will be recorded as "Thus only in X and Y; all other witnesses read: ‘...’", without identifying all the witnesses which support the majority reading.
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•The textual information is provided in complete English sentences, rather than in technical notation. Accordingly, both the lemma and the variant reading are placed in quotation-marks, separated by a dash (—). The variant readings are understood to replace everything in the lemma.

•Variants to a single lemma are separated by semi-colons (;). Separate lemmas are separated by periods (.)

•In cases where lemmas are abbreviated (with a "..."), I have tried to remove any ambiguity about the extent of the citation. Where the opening word or phrase of the abbreviated lemma appears more than once in the passage, the reference may be presumed to be to the last occurrence.

•The tilde (~) indicates that the content of the lemma is missing in the designated witness or witnesses.

•I have not identified the Genizah fragments, which are referred to generically in the apparatus; nor can it be assumed that two reference to Genizah fragments in the same passage refer to the same fragment. (Hence, the words “Genizah fragment” do not appear in bold typeface like the rest of the sigla.)

The listing of sigla normally follows the following order:

1. Variants themselves are listed according to what I felt to be a logical order.

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7 As such there is some flexibility in the syntax. E.g., the sigla may appear before the readings (followed by a colon) or after them (preceded by a dash or the word “in” etc.).


9 E.g., if there were two primary traditions the order would be: (1) tradition #1 (that most similar to MS Columbia), (2) tradition #2, (3) conflations of the two traditions and, lastly, (4) witnesses which omit the text in question. For reasons of space, I have not usually commented on the significance or history of each reading, though the

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2. The witnesses to each reading are listed according to the following order: (1) complete manuscripts; (2) partial texts (including aggadic compendia in manuscript and print); (3) printings; (4) fragments.\(^{10}\)

3. Within each of these classes the witnesses are listed according to textual type: Oriental, Spanish, Ashkenazi. Where possible the readings are grouped into \textquotedblleft families\textquotedblright{} (see below).

3. Transliteration:

The transliteration system used here for Hebrew and Aramaic is, for the most part, standard. The following idiosyncrasies should be noted, most of which reflect my use of \textquotedblleft Sepharadic\textquotedblright{} pronunciation:

\(\text{1}\) is normally rendered \(\nu\) (not \(\omega\)), as is undotted \(\breve{\nu}\).

Left-dotted \(\breve{\nu}\) is not distinguished from \(\breve{\nu}\), both of which are rendered \(s\).

No distinctions were made between long, short or \textquotedblleft half\textquotedblright{} (\(\hat{\text{a}}\hat{\text{a}}\hat{\text{a}}\)) vowels. Similarly, sheva mobile (\(\text{na}^\ast\)) is indicated simply by an \(e\).

No distinctions were made between dotted and undotted \(\breve{\zeta}, \breve{\tau},\) or \(\breve{\eta}\), which are rendered indiscriminately as \(g\), \(d\) and \(t\) respectively.

Right-dotted \(\breve{\xi}\) is represented as \(sh\), and undotted \(\breve{\zeta}\) as \(kh\). Where the transliteration is referring to two separate consonants, they are separated by a hyphen (\(s\text{-}h, k\text{-}h\)).

Following current bibliographical conventions, a less precise transliteration system is employed for modern Hebrew (mostly in titles of books and articles). In such references, the definite article is rendered as \textquotedblleft ha\textquotedblright{} with hyphen and no doubling of the following

\...

interested reader will be able to draw conclusions from the manner in which I record the material.

\(^{10}\) Only actual manuscripts are designated as such (\textquotedblleft MS\textquotedblright{} or \textquotedblleft MSS\textquotedblright{}) in the apparatus.
consonant; and ס is transliterated as tz rather than s as in classical texts. ס at the beginning of a word is not indicated.

Where a European-language translation is provided in a Hebrew book or article (in an alternative title-page or table of contents, etc.), I refer to it by that title rather than by a transliteration.

4. The Textual witnesses and their sigla:

The following witnesses to the text of the Esther-Midrash are cited in the apparatus:

Oriental types:

Manuscripts:

Y MS Columbia University X893 T141

Partial texts and fragments:

N MS New York (JTS.ENA) 84
AgE Aggadat esther (ed. S. Buber)
MhG Midrash haggadol to the Pentateuch, cited according to the Mossad Harav Kook editions (no page references are supplied)

Genizah [see above]
fragment

11 Fuller descriptions may be found in "The Textual Traditions of Tractate Megillah in the Babylonian Talmud."
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Spanish types:

Manuscripts:

O  MS Oxford Bodleian 366 (Oppenheim fol. 23)
G  MS Göttingen 13
B  MS Munich 140

Partial texts:

EY  R. Jacob Ibn Habib's 'Ein ya‘aqov, cited from editio princeps, Salonika 1516-22
HgT  Haggadot hattalmud. The following two versions were consulted. Where no superscript is supplied their readings may be presumed to be identical:

HgT1  MS Parma 3010
HgT2  Constantinople 1511 printing
P  MS Parma 427

Ashkenazic types:

Manuscripts:

L  MS London (British Library) 400 (Harl. 5508)
M  MS Munich 95
R  MS Vatican 134

Partial texts:

V  MS Vatican 49/2
W  MS Warsaw (Jewish Historical Institute) 260
Mf  MS London Montefiore 88
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YS  
*Yalqut shмонi*, cited according to MS Oxford (Neubauer 2637) and *editio princeps*. Passages from Genesis and Exodus were compared as well to the Mossad Harav Kook editions]. Precise references are not provided.

**Printed editions:**

**Printings**  
Pesaro (c. 1510) and Venice (Bomberg, 1521) printings of the Babylonian Talmud.

In those few places where variants exist between these two texts, they are indicated in the apparatus; otherwise they may be presumed to be identical.

In order to simplify the presentation of the textual data, readings common to certain groups were recorded as “families” according to the following criteria:

- **“Yemenite family”**: Where there was agreement between MS Y, AgE and MhG (or MS G, which has close affinities with this family).

- **“Spanish family”**: The special readings of this tradition are very distinctive, consisting largely of explanatory glosses and expansions. The grouping was used to designate agreement among any three of the following witnesses: O, [B], EY, HgT, P.

- **“Ashkenazic family”**: This tradition is less consistent. I grouped the readings as a family only when there was agreement among all three complete manuscripts: L, M and R.

Square brackets ([ ]) around either a reading or a siglum indicate that the reading in question is found in an emendation or gloss to that witness.