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NOTES ON THE POEM OF ELḤANAN BEN SHEMARYAH

THIS poem from the Genizah, which was published by Davidson in the *JQR.*, New Series, IV, 53–60, is of especial interest because, though we possess Gaonic Responsa addressed to Elḥanan, nothing was known in print until now of his own literary productions. For it is hardly subject to doubt that the writer of this poem is identical with the correspondent of the last Geonim. The meagre data which we possess of Elḥanan have been collected by me in my *אנשי קירואן*, pp. 13–14 (comp. also *ib.*, p. 47), among them being the fact that in a poem by Solomon Ibn Gabirol to Nissim ben Jacob (in Brody-Albrecht, *שער השיר*, p. 37) it is stated *ושלום גם לאלחנן חניכו*, and I ventured the suggestion that this reference is perhaps to our Elḥanan. But at the same time I pointed out that this identification is impaired by the consideration that Elḥanan was older than Nissim, for while the former was still ordained by Sherira, with whom he stood in mutual correspondence, the latter's relations were restricted to Hai alone. Davidson would like to reverse this relation between Nissim and Elḥanan, and construing *חניך* in the sense of teacher declare Nissim a pupil of Elḥanan. To prove his point he refers to the variant reading in *Mo'ed Ḳaṭan* 25 b, *בעת חנינתו אבר חנינו*, instead of *בעת חניכתו אבר חניכו*. But this variant is certainly corrupt as proved by the continuation *אסיקו ליה חנו על שמויה*, apart from the fact that the form *חניך* does not occur elsewhere in the talmudic literature,¹ and that *חניכה* usually denotes *surname* (comp. Levy, *s.v.*). Besides, at another place in the same poem Solomon Ibn Gabirol employs the word

¹ Jastrow, to whom Davidson refers, is inaccessible to me.

חניך in the sense of pupil (ver. 6 : ויקח נא ברכה מחניכו ; comp. furthermore my קירואן, p. 43). Moreover, Elḥanan seems to have been a pupil in Kairowan² and not the head of an academy. It is therefore most probable that the allusion in Ibn Gabirol's poem is to another Elḥanan.³

The contents of the poem are sketched briefly by Davidson, pp. 54-5. However, that Elḥanan refers to certain contemporaneous events cannot be gathered with certainty from the contents, although it is not impossible, and notwithstanding the fact that Elḥanan sojourned in all the lands which suffered at the hands of Ḥākim.⁴

Elḥanan's poem, like many others of this type, is written in the musive style, and Davidson has noted down the corresponding verses of the Bible. But Elḥanan also paraphrases talmudic-midrashic expressions, to which likewise Davidson should have paid attention. Thus, l. 12, neither מַעְבֵּר nor מַעְרֵב is in place, but מַעְבֵּר, and l. 13 read תִּמְצֵא instead of תִּמְצֵא, for Elḥanan had in mind the saying of R. Johanan who interprets Deut. 30. 12-13 as follows (Erubin 55 a) : לא בשמים היא לא תמצא בגסי רוח ולא מעבר לים היא (Erubin 55 a) : לא תמצא בסחרנרם ולא בתגרנים—ll. 15-16 we have again a paraphrase of an assertion by Raba ('Abodah zarah 19 a) : כתיב בראש—To מרומים וכתיב עלי דרך בתחלה בראש מרומים ולבסוף עלי דרך l. 22 comp. Lev. r. ch. 19 beginning (see also Midrash Samuel, ch. 5, ed. Buber, p. 57 ; Cant. r. 5. 11) : . . . קוצותי תלתלים . . . שחורות כעורב . . . אמר ר' שמואל בר אמי דברי תורה צריכין השחרה ווערבה וכו' (this verse accordingly refers to the Law), and to l. 24 comp. the well-known maxim of R. Eliezer b. Azariah (Ḥagigah 3 b and parallel passages) : . . . נמשלו דברי תורה לדרבן : . . . בעלי אסופות אלו תלמידי חכמים שיושבין אסופות אסופות ועוסקין

² This I derive from Hai's Responsum (Harkavy, *Stud. u. Mitt.*, IV, 2) : ובשני גאון אבינו נ"ע שאל מ"ר אלחנן בן מ"ר שמריה אותו בתוך אגרת מ"ר יעקב בן מ"ר פטרון ותלמידים שהיו בקירואן וכו'.

³ Neither can Elḥanan b. Ḥushiel, Ḥananel's brother, be meant here, since he was already advanced in years when he came to Kairowan (see my קירואן, p. 13) and was likewise older than Nissim.

⁴ Comp. *REJ.*, XLVIII, 146, and the passages cited there.

בַּתּוֹרָה וְכוּ'.—l. 33 read perhaps יוֹרִי instead of יִמְרִי: Elhanan reproaches here those who 'teach without understanding anything themselves' (comp. Soṭah 22 a: אֵלֶּה הַלְּלִים הַפִּילָה זֶה ת"ח שֶׁלֹּא (הֵגִיעַ לְהוֹרָאָה וּמוֹרָה), and this will agree well with the continuation, l. 34: 'when they are asked concerning many things in the Torah they become stupid (נִוְאלוּ, comp. hereon Berakot 63 b: וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלֶּה שְׂמֵטֶפְשִׁים כְּתִיב הֵבֵא וְנִוְאלוּ וְכִתִּיב הֵתֵם אֲשֶׁר נִוְאלְנוּ) and are considered as strangers (to the Law)'.—l. 43 bears an allusion to the fate of Ḥananiah b. Teradyon ('Abodah zarah 18 a): הֵבִיאוּהוּ וּבְרַכּוּהוּ בִּסְ"ת וְהִקְיִפוּהוּ בַּחֲבִילֵי זְמוּרוֹת וְהִצִּיתוּ בְּהֵן אֶת הָאוֹר.—l. 58 we should probably read אֲפָרִים instead of פְּפָרִים and comp. it to p. Taanit II, 1 (fol. 65 a, l. 41): רֹאִין אֶפְרוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק כֹּאֲלוֹ: צָבוֹר עַל גְּבֵי הַמּוֹבַח (comp. also Ber. r., ed. Theodor, p. 513).

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