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A NOTE ON R. HAI'S LITURGIC FRAGMENT

IN his interesting "Studies in Gaonic History and Literature," Prof. Alexander Marx published a fragment of a *piyyūṭ* by R. Hai Gaon on circumcision.¹ Like all other poems by that Gaon, this fragment is written in an easy and fluent style. Two words, however, occur in it which form an exception: בלָתַח (line 7) and בתוּתַח (line 8) are not readily understood. The latter occurs only once in the Bible (Job 41, 21), and probably denotes *javelins*, while the former may be derived from מלָתַחַה (II Kings 10, 22), which again is a *hapax legomenon*. One is at first sight inclined to suggest that, as מלָתַחַה—whatever its derivation—denotes a wardrobe, R. Hai coined the word לָתַח which he intended to signify *a garment* = בְּנָה. The meaning of this line would then be *he put fringes on the garment*. The second word, which yields no sense when ב is retained, may perhaps be emended to כְּתוּתַח like *javelins*. The allusion would probably be to R. Eliezer ha-Gadol's implied statement that the phylacteries inspire the Gentiles with awe and terror.²

It must, however, be admitted that, although we are not infrequently driven to adopt forced explanations in liturgic poetry, the above interpretation is not very convincing. Through the courtesy and kindness of Prof. Schechter I have had easy access to that portion of the Cambridge Genizah which is now in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The original of the poem under investigation is a fragment of two leaves. Some leaves are missing in the middle, as leaf 2 is no continuation of leaf 1. The fragment evidently formed part of a collection of liturgic poems, the difficult words of which were now and again explained. Thus leaf 1a bears the following superscription:

¹ *JQR.*, New Series, I, p. 103, Text 2.

² וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך ותניא ר' אליעזר
הגדול אומר אלו תפילין שבראש (quoted in b. Berakot 6a and other places).

תלכין בעין אלפאין³ את ערובת ה.ם.
ליחזקאל הכהן אלדנורי סניא נהור בן עלי
נ ע

מן כט אפרים בן עזריהו

An exposition of some words of (the piyyūt) את ערובת by Ezekiel b. 'Ali ha-Kohen; taken from the writing of Ephraim b. 'Azaryāhu; i. e. Ephraim annotated Ezekiel's piyyūt. Among the words explained are כוסי הרבות (specified as biblical), גרפיהן (specified as targumic), שובכם (specified as mishnic). These notes break off at the end of 1b. On 2a another piyyūt is written which is completed on top of 2b. Then follows R. Hai's fragment. On the margin of the latter opposite the word בלתח there is the following note written by the same hand: פ' מן דטלנת כנף, which shows that the commentator took this word to be a cryptograph disguising the word כנף a corner. Now by this note we only obtain נ from ת. But what about the other two letters? The כ from ל at once suggests itself by *Atbash*. (comp. ששך = בבל, Jer. 25, 26), and we may obtain כ from ח by the same system by including the final letters. This is, however, unlikely, as we should require a different system for each letter. Then תותח which is more difficult would still remain unexplained. It therefore may not be hazardous to suggest that both לתח and תותח are here cryptographs, from which כנף and ראש זרע, respectively, are reproduced by calculating the numerical values of these words by the system known as קטן, in which no letter is allowed to have a value greater than one digit. Accordingly

$$\begin{cases} \text{לתח} = 3 + 4 + 8 = 15. \\ \text{כנף} = 2 + 5 + 8 = 15. \end{cases}$$

Similarly

$$\begin{cases} \text{תותח} = 4 + 6 + 4 + 8 = 22. \\ \text{ראש זרע} = 2 + 1 + 3 + 7 + 2 + 7 = 22. \end{cases}$$

Thus R. Hai obtained rhymes for פתח by a device customary in Hebrew literature.

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³ This evidently = אלפאט. In the Genizah fragments which I examined ז sometimes stands for ט, as מנתטר = מנתצר.

⁴ This word is not quite clear, but it obviously is part of the piyyūt.