**R. Samuel b. R. Nissim Masnuth**

Rabbi Samuel (Shemu’el) b. R. Nissim Masnuth, a biblical exegete, lived in Aleppo (Heb. *Aram Tzova*), Syria, during the thirteenth century. His name is followed by the toponym “Ṣiqili” (“[the] Sicilian”) at the beginning and end of his commentary to Daniel, and he is referred to as “a Sicilian in the city of Toledo” at the end of his commentary to Chronicles. On the basis of these appellations, we may reasonable assume that his family origins are in Spain or Sicily.

Most scholars identify him with the eminent R. Samuel bar Nissim who hosted Yehuda Alḥarizi at his home in Aleppo (in 1218). Alḥarizi offered praise to his host and wrote poems in his honor in his *Iggeret Leshon Ha-zahav*, in his *Takhkemoni*, and in the book *Kitab al-Durar.* If that identification is correct, then Alḥarizi’s works indicate clearly that R. Samuel held a high position in the royal court, he would be the grandson of the Palestinian *gaon* and *rosh yeshiva* R. Abraham b. Mazhir and the son of the *rosh yeshiva* R. Nissim, his brother would be called ‘Azariah and his sons would be known as Mazhir and El‘azar.

His extant works are in the field of scriptural exegesis. His commentary to Genesis survives in one lone manuscript and was printed by Ha-cohen. The manuscript does not include the commentary to Gen. 1:23–8:15 or 37:3–43:6. Richler has provided the commentary to 3:6–8. Buber gave the work the name *Midrash Bereshit Zuta*, but without justification (Ha-cohen, pp. 9–11).

His commentary to Job was published by Buber. His commentary to Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah was printed by Lange and Schwarz. The commentary to Daniel seems to have been written in 1276 (based on the comment to Dan. 7:25), in which case it was written when the author had reached an advanced age. Manuscripts yield fragments of his commentaries to Leviticus and Numbers, and to Kings and Chronicles as well. From his commentary to Neh. 10:1 we learn that he wrote commentaries to Ruth and Esther as well. It is reasonable to assume that he provided exegesis for other biblical books, of which no trace is left. One *piyyut* that he wrote survives, and he may well have written others that are no longer extant.

His exegetical method: The copyists labeled his books “*midrash*,” but that only partially reflects his method. His method is similar to that of other anthologists, such as R. Tuvia b. Eliezer, the author of *Leqaḥ Tov*, who wove together midrashim alongside *peshat* commentary. In his Pentateuchal commentaries, he indeed cites a plethora of rabbinic midrashim, sometimes quoting precisely and sometimes paraphrasing and rewording. In practice, though, in many instances he combined various passages from different midrashim, thus creating a new and independent work (Ha-cohen, pp. 12–14). Alongside the midrashim, he suggested, as we have noted, simple contextual interpretations (*peshat*) as well, some of them selected from predecessors’ works and some his own. In his commentaries to books from the Writings (*Ketuvim*), the cited midrashim are fewer and more space is allocated to *peshat* exegesis. In his commentaries he makes reference to issues of language and grammar, points of Jewish law, and matters of ethics, belief, and history.

R. Samuel was very conversant with talmudic literature and the works of rabbinic scholarship throughout the ages, of which he made extensive use. He mentioned the Josippon chronicle several times, referring to it by its Hebrew name, *The Book of Ben Gorion*. He also made use of the Aramaic Targum of Onkelos to the Pentateuch and of Pseudo-Jonathan to the Prophets. His *peshat* interpretations were gathered from the works of Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, *Leqaḥ Tov*, Maimonides, and R. David Kimḥi.

R. Samuel is unique in his use of the Syriac version, the Peshitta, to which most commentators paid no attention. In his commentary to Daniel, it is cited no fewer than 120 times. In contrast, in his commentary to Ezra he does not mention the Peshitta even once; perhaps the Peshitta to Ezra was unavailable to him. His familiarity with Arabic was frequently useful to him in explaining difficult words.