Abstract

In 1927, in his book *Masoreten Des Westens*, Paul Kahle published fragments from a large collection of liturgical poems dedicated to the 24 Priestly Divisions (*mishmarot*), vocalized with Palestinian vocalization.

The poems were published on the basis of a single, beautiful manuscript, written on parchment, discovered in the Cairo Geniza. Today, most of this manuscript’s folios are kept in the Oxford University Library, a few in the Cambridge University Library, and fragments of certain folios have ended up in the Mosseri Collection and the University of Manchester.

Of the 24 poems that were originally contained in the collection, Kahle published fragments of the nine that were preserved in the manuscript at his disposal – from the poem dedicated to the Divison of Elyashiv, the eleventh in the list of Priestly Divisions in I Chronicles 24, through the poem dedicated to Priestly Division of Petahya, the nineteenth in the list.

In addition to facsimiles of the fragments, Kahle also included a Hebrew transcription and a German translation, accompanied by explanatory notes. In a review of Kahle’s book, scholars noted that the poet’s signature was identifiable in a certain section of a poem; the resulting acrostic was “Hadutahu”, H-D-W-T-H-W.

During that time, another poem was found in the Geniza, signed Ḥedveta [H-D-W-T-’], and many people identified Hedveta with the “Hadutahu” who wrote poems about the Priestly Groups, relying on the interchanges of guttural consonants in the language of early liturgical poets. Thus, for example, Y. N. Epstein wrote: “There is no doubt that Haduta (H-D-W-T-H) and Haduta (H‑D‑W‑T-‘) are one and the same; the H merely takes the place of H for the purpose of the alphabetical acrostic, because the pronunciation of the two letters was identical.”

In 1939, M. Zulay, in his article “On the History of Liturgical Poetry in the Land of Israel”, published new fragments of that manuscript, which had been discovered; they contained fragments of *qerovot* for the Division of Malkiya (the fifth in the list), and the Division of Miyamin (the sixth in the list), and further passages completing the *qerova* for the Division of Petahya. In his publication, Zulay distinguished between Hedveta and Hadutahu, and establishes, beyond all doubt, that these are two different poets.

An additional fragment of the manuscript, completing a folio available to Kahle, has been discovered by J. Yahalom in the New Series of the Taylor-Schechter Collection in Cambridge, and contains a poem for the Division of Elyashiv; it has yet to be published in print. The most recent identification of a piece of this manuscript took place approximately half a year ago, in the library of the University of Manchester. All that we have at this stage is one photograph of two attached folios, which contain the end of the poem for the Division of Aviya (the eighth), and the beginning of the poem for the Division of Hakoẓ (the seventh); but only a few words are readable. A request has been directed to the library, in England, to obtain further photographs of the manuscript, in better quality, but as of now, no substantial response has been received.

In 1984, E. Fleischer began delving into this topic, and published an extensive article, “Haduta – Hadutahu – Chedweta: Solving an Old Riddle” (*Tarbiẓ* 53, 1984, pp. 71–96). In his article, he surveys what has been written so far on the topic, and decides, quite decidely, in accordance with Zulay’s position, that Hadutahu and Ḥedveta must be distinct; he brings support from a new poem that he has found, a *shiv‘ata* for the Sabbath [poem recited in the seven blessings of the *‘amida* prayer],signed “..uthu, be strong!” (The first two stanzas, which would have been recited in the first two blessings of the *‘amida* prayer, are missing in the manuscript.) According to him, there is no doubt that the author of this poem is Hadutahu; therefore, it supports the thesis that Hadutahu and Ḥedveta are two different poets, and that the author of the poems on the Priestly Divisions is the same as the author of this *shiv‘ata*.

Aside from the poems on the Priestly Divisions, and the *shiv‘ata*, no other compositions are known with the signature “Hadutahu”. (Regarding the meaning of the name, it is possible that it is derived from the word *hedva*, “joy”, with the interchange of the guttural consonants *het* and *he*.)

Fleischer establishes that Hadutahu’s work must be situated in the generation of the poems of R. Simeon b. Megas – after Yannai, and before Eleazar the Kalir, in the early days of Classical liturgical poetry. One must add to this hypothesis that the manuscript in which the *qerovot* of the Priestly Divisions are copied, which is vocalized in rich Palestinian vocalization, has been dated by Zulay to the eighth or ninth century, which would make it one of the earliest manuscripts found in the Genizah. It must be noted further that the copyist of Hadutahu’s poems copied poems also by Yannai and Yose b. Yose, and we do not find that he ever copies poems by the Qallir (though sometimes these have been added in a later hand in the margins of the pages).

R. Eleazar b. Kalir was active, as far as we can tell, in the first half of the seventh century CE. According to Fleischer, he seems to have been born around 570 CE, and died shortly after the Arab conquest, perhaps in the year 640.

Hadutahu also does not mention the Arabs in his poems; when he discusses Israel’s enemies, he directs his words against the Kingdom of Edom, which, in liturgical poetry, is identifiable as the Byzantine Christian Empire. (See, specifically, the poems for the Division of Hezir and the Division of Pitzetz.

On the basis of old liturgical poems and various hints in Talmudic literature, past scholars have supposed the existence of an early *baraita* [rabbinic prose teaching, external to the Mishna] in which the names of the 24 Priestly Division were listed alongside a list of villages in the Galilee. This supposition is supported also by archeological findings: in several early synagogues, fragments of inscriptions have been found, in which the list of Priestly Divisions appears. These inscriptions are indicative that the memory of the Priestly Divisions was retained, and perhaps they were even mentioned as a fixed part of the liturgy.

In a fragment preserved in the Cairo Genizah, dated to the year 1034, there is a direct testimony to the mention of the Divisions each Sabbath; each week was associated with one of the Priestly Divisions. It seems that Hadutahu’s poems were designated to be recited on Sabbaths, perhaps following a schedule similar to what appears in the Genizah fragment.

Scholars are divided about the question of the value of the list of the Divisions and the villages. Some attribute a high level of historical reliability to it, and believe that the village that is mentioned alongside each Division is the village where the associate family of priests lived; whereas other believe that we are dealing with an artificial attachment of two lists that each contain 24 items, and thus, that there is no real connection between the Division and the village that is listed alongside it.

In any event, there is not doubt that Hadutahu’s poems are constructed on the basis of that list. Each poem is dedicated to a specific Priestly Division, and the language of the poem comes back, again and again, to wordplays around the name of the Division, the name of the village associated with it, and sometimes around its number in the list of Divisions.

The main content of the poems is a constantly repeat prayer addressed to God, that He should restore the Division to its service in the Temple, and, more generally, a prayer for victory over the enemies, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and complete redemption. The poet relies a great amount on Biblical verses; and in the later sections of the poems, where the writing is freer, also on midrashim from the Talmudic sages; but all this is situated inside the general context of prayer for redemption and building of the Temple.

In this work, the poems about the Priestly Divisions have been edited, and supplied with a commentary; and the *shiv‘ata* attributed to Hadutahu is included, as well. In the introduction to the work, I attempt to deal with the structure of the poems, in relation to the known structure of similar compositions from the same period, in relation to the contents of each poem, and in relation to the poet’s language. Similarly, I discuss the historical value of the specific linguistic features of the poems, and essentially strive to show that the poet makes use of many metonymies and linguistic allusions. Therefore, in many cases, a literary explanation of the words is preferable to a factual interpretation, which would attempt to uncover historical testimonies in their words.

A linguistic tendency that is special in Hadutahu’s poems is a high incidence of exchange between the guttural consonants, in the poems’ rhymes. Although he observes strict principles of rhyme throughout almost all sections of the poems, he does not refrain from rhyming consonants such as ḥet and ‘ayin, such as, for example, in the following quotation from the poem for the Division of Yaqim:

 Bring gladness to the people who [repent, and thus their] hearts [they] tear (*yiqra‘*),

 O protector of Ethan the Ezraḥite (*ezrah*).

Exchanges of consonants in rhymes are familiar to us also in the compositions of other poets, but Hadutahu has such exchanges even in the acrostic – a phenomenon that is hardly found in early liturgical poetry.

Thus, for example, in the poem for the Division of Elyashiv:

 May their sin (*hattatam*) be wiped away like a cloud,

 Bring goodness (*hetiv*) to Elyashiv, in the presence of his acquaintances.

The first line begins with the letter *het*, and the second line should, as well, according to the poem’s structure – but the poem uses a word that begins with the letter *he*, apparently because of the fact that the two consonants were pronounced sufficiently similarly to him. (Additionally, there is a graphic similarity between the two letters.)

In my work, I have strived to survey these types of exchanges in the poems, to describe them, and to characterize them.

A second linguistic fact that we can learn from the poems in front of us deals with the pronunciation of the furtive *patah*. In the Palestinian vocalization that appears in the poems, there is no symbol anywhere for the furtive *patah*; some have considered this evidence that the helping vowel was not pronounced in the period when the poems were composed. (This is familiar to us from other traditions of the Hebrew language, such as those of some Yemenite communities.) However, from the rhymes in the poems about the Priestly Divisions, we can learn that although the *patah* is not indicated, it was indeed pronounced by the author of the poems.

For example, this is how we should explain the following passage, from the poem for the Division of Huppa. (The meaning of the line is: “Protect Israel, who are redeemed in the merit of Abraham.”)

Hover in the merit of the one who travelled progressively (*ve-nasoa‘*),

The nation that includes blind and lame (*u-fiseah*).

Even if we ignore the interchange of the consonants *het* and *‘ayin*, the poet could not have rhymed these words together if he had not pronounced the helping vowel before the final consonant.

In the field of vocabulary, the work surveys the new forms that the poet uses, not used by his predecessors. There are instances where the poet uses a certain verb in a new conjugation, which use is never attested earlier; and there are instances where the poet invents a new form. Thus, for example, in the poem for the Division of Elyashiv, this line appears:

 To restore the *terev*, the branch, and the twig to its measure.

According to the databases of the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language Academy, the word *ṭerev* is not attested in any other source; this is the only instance of it in the databases. Apparently, the word means “leaf”, and we are dealing with an alternate form of the word *teref*, with the consonant exchanged for another. Other words that are attested for the first time in Hadutahu’s language are: *zahala*, *ye’eson*, *oveket*, *ketzumim*, *tarmimenu*, *teshur*, *shevetz,* and others.

In this research, I have tried to explain these words, and to locate their sources.

An additional linguistic feature that is prominent in the poems is the use of construct (*semikhut*) forms. The poets frequently use a syntactical construction called “inverted construct”, in which the two elements of the construct switch their positions in the pair of words. Thus, for example, in the poem for the Division of Bilga, the poet uses the pair *bosem ‘aruga*, “spice of the flowerpot”, which is based on Song of Songs 5:13, “his cheeks are like flowerpot of spices (*‘arugat ha-bosem*). In order to rhyme with the name of the Division, Bilga, the poet switches the order of the components in the construct pair. In the work, I suggest that the poets gave themselves license to use this construction because the Bible contains many construct pairs in which the two components are synonyms, such as “boulder of the rock” (*halmish tzur*). In such pairs, of course, one may switch the order of the components, and indeed we find the reverse construction, “rock of the boulder” (*tzur ha‑halamish*), in the Bible. It is possible that because of these reversals of constructs, the poets expanded this method, and created reverse construct pairs even when the elements were not synonyms.

The language of the poems is sometimes difficult to understand; I hope that at least in some of the instances, I have successful understood the poet’s intention, and thus joined in his prayer.