

Chapter Eight

Megillat Taanit – The Scroll of Fasting

Vered Noam

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Introduction

Talmudic scholars have on occasion wondered at the lack of historiography and historical awareness in the literature of the sages. Many have concluded that our rabbis were indifferent to the events of their day as well as to the rest of the post-biblical Jewish history. These scholars have argued that the rabbis had viewed their own purpose as limited solely to their work in the fields of halakha and exegesis.¹ In this light, it is surprising to discover that a document of a semi-historical character is the first to have been produced by our early sages, and that they regarded this document with respect and granted it special status. This Document is Megillat Taanit.

MegTa'an originated among the sages of the Second Temple era and is the earliest known Pharisaic document to have survived. The Scroll is essentially a list of about thirty-five dates drawn up in Aramaic and arranged in calendar order. Its goal, as stated in its opening sentence, is to keep the Jews from fasting on 'days on which miracles had been performed for Israel'.² On days commemorating especially important events, in the opinion of the compiler of the Scroll, it was forbidden not only to fast, but even to eulogize the deceased. The dates listed are, in the main, those of joyous events of various kinds that befell the Jewish people during the Second Temple era. The Scroll is aimed at preserving their memory and turning them into minor festive days.

¹ See e.g. Herr, 'Conception of History'.

² See yTaan 2:13, 66a [= yMeg 1:6, 70c] (Neusner Translation p204; all Yerushalmi translations are from Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, with adaptations where necessary).

MegTaan does not belong to the genre of historical writing, but rather to the halakhic genre, as may be concluded from a number of its characteristics: (a) its purpose, as declared by its initial sentence, is halakhic: to prohibit fasting and eulogizing on certain dates of the year; (b) the historical events commemorated on these dates are hinted at in the Scroll only in brief, little or no relevant detail being provided; (c) events are listed in the Scroll in calendar order, rather than chronologically. Nonetheless, the Scroll reflects a paradoxical relationship between an overt halakhic aim and a covert historical goal. Whereas the historical events mentioned in the Scroll are adduced only for a halakhic purpose, the prohibition of fasting exists only in order to preserve the memory of those very same historical events!

It may thus be said that MegTaan does, in fact, reflect an interest the early sages showed in the history of the Jewish nation in the Second Temple period, and the religious significance they accorded to this history. The redactors of the Scroll singled out about 35 events they deemed worthy of being fixed in the Jewish calendar. These events had transpired during a period of c. 500 years, from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah to the times, at least, of Caligula. However, the means they adopted to shape the collective memory were, typically, not those of historiography, but rather those of halakhic authority.³ This feature, namely the ambition to shape some kind of historical awareness, alongside the abstention from historiography, has important ramifications for our understanding of the sages' outlook and self-image, in the generation of the creation of the Scroll, as in subsequent generations that maintained it and delivered it to their successors.

It must be noted that the commonly employed name of this compilation, lit. 'Scroll of Fasting', is misleading. It concerns not a list of fast days, but a list of days of rejoicing on which it was *not* allowed to fast. The original name of this list may well have been merely מגילה, 'Scroll', in which case only later was the word תענית, 'fasting', added to it.⁴

An explanatory commentary in Hebrew was later added to the Scroll, known in scholarly literature as the 'Scholion'. Its intention is to identify and elaborate on the events intimated in the Scroll. Thus it adds stories, legends

³ See Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 5-26.

⁴ The mss reflecting the Palestinian version of the Mishna (Kaufman, Parma, Cambridge-36) as well as the first printed version of the text in Naples, all read in mTaan 2:8 'Any day whereof it is written in the Scroll...' (cited, as all Mishna passages, from Danby, *Mishnah*, adapted where necessary), and not 'Any day whereof it is written in the Scroll of Fasting...', as in the other printed versions of the Mishna (for this mishna see *infra*). The name Megilla, rather than Megillat Taanit, is also to be found in other sources. Grätz, *Geschichte*, 559 n1 viewed it as an abbreviated form. On the assumption that the original name of the document was indeed Megilla, and that it had degenerated into Megillat Taanit at a later stage, see already Dalman, *Dialektproben*, 2; Cassel, *Messianische Stellen*, 71; Ratner, 'Notes on Megillat Taanit', 501; Zeitlin, *Megillat Taanit as a Source*, 4; Lichtenstein, 'Fastenrolle', 258; Urbach, *The Halakha*, 248 n43. But see also: Bar Ilan, 'Character and Origin', 114 n4.

and homilies of various types, relating directly or indirectly to those dates. The Scholion has been transmitted in two versions.

Text,⁵ Translation, Structure

1. (אתחיל מגלת תענית בסד)
2. אלין יומיא דלא לאתענאה בהון ומקצתהון דלא למספד בהון
3. מן רש ירחא דניסן עד תמניא ביה⁶ איתוקם תמידא דלא למספד
4. מן תמניא ביה ועד סוף מועדא איתקין חגא⁷ דלא למספד
5. בשבעה לאייר חנכת שור ירוש' ודלא למספד
6. בארבעה עשר ביה פסחא זעירא ודלא למיספד
7. בעשרים ותלתא ביה נפקו בני הקרא⁸ מן ירושלם
8. [בעשרים ושבעה ביה איתנטילת כלילא מירושלם ומיהודה דלא למספד]⁹
9. בארבעה עשר לסיון אחידת מגדל [שר]¹⁰
10. בחמשת עשר ביה ובשיתא עשר ביה גלו אנשי בית שאן ובקעתא
11. בעשרים וחמש ביה [נטלון]¹¹ דימוסנאי מן ירוש'
12. בארבעה¹² בתמוז עדא ספר גזרתא
13. בחמשה עשר באב זמן אעי כהניא ודלא למספד בהון¹³
14. בעשרים וארבעה ביה תבנא לדיננא
15. בארבעה באלול חנכת שור ירוש' ודלא למספד
16. בשבעה עשר ביה נפקו רומאי מן ירוש'¹⁴
17. בעשרין ותריין ביה תבו¹⁵ לקטלא משמדיא
18. בתלתא בתשרי אתנטלת¹⁶ אדכרתא מן שטרא

⁵ The text herein is that of ms Parma de Rossi 117 [hereunder: ms Parma]. Where necessary, I have made slight corrections to the wording of the ms. Significant additions have been inserted in parentheses, and their nature has been explained in the footnotes. No technical details have been added here, such as superscript or subscript letters and so on. In the footnotes a number of prominent textual parallels have been noted from other mss. For complete details, see: Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*.

⁶ ביה - מן - yTaan 2:13, 66a [= yMeg 1:6, 70c]: 'On the first day of the month of Nisan'. According to this wording, the festivity lasted a single day, not eight days as in the extant version.

⁷ איתקין חגא In ms Oxf-Bodl Michael 388 [hereunder: ms Oxf] and in the mss of the Hybrid Version (see *infra*; henceforth HV), and also in bTaan 17b; bMen 65a, in almost all the versions of the text: איתחב הגא דשבועיא (The Festival of Shavuot was restored). According to this version, the event is the 'restoration' of the festival of Shavuot (Pentecost) and not the establishment of an unknown festival.

⁸ בני הקראים This phrase is distorted in ms Oxf: 'Karaites'.

⁹ This date is missing in ms Parma, but appears in ms Oxf and HV.

¹⁰ שר This is what it should be, but it is distorted in the mss of the Scroll as צר, צור. For the variants and the identification of the site with Straton's Tower – Caesarea see Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 193-195.

¹¹ Distorted in ms Parma. For the textual variants see Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 44.

¹² בארבעה עשר In ms Oxf: בעשרה. In the sources of the HV: בארבע.

¹³ Missing in ms Oxf.

¹⁴ איתנטילו ביה חומאי ביהודאי ומירושלם: [נפקו - ירוש']

¹⁵ תבו In ms Oxf and in HV: תבנא.

¹⁶ איתנטלת In ms Oxf: אתנטלת.

19. בעשרים ותלתא למרחשון סתור סורגיא מן עזרתא
 20. בעשרים וחמשה ביה אחידת שומרון שורא
 21. בעשרים ושבעה ביה תבת סולתא למיסק למדבחה
 22. בתלתא בכסלו אתנטלו¹⁷ סמואתא מן דרתא
 23. בשבעה בו [יומא טבא]¹⁸
 24. בעשרים ואחד בו יום הר גריזים
 25. בעשרים וחמשה בו חנכת יומין תמניא¹⁹ ודלא למספד
 26. בעשרים ותמניא לטבת יתיבת כנשתא על דינא
 27. בתרין בשבט יום טוב ודלא למספד²⁰
 28. בעשרין ותרין ביה בטילת עבידתא דאמיר סנאה לאיתאה להיכלא ולא
 למספד
 29. בעשרים ותמניא ביה נטל אנטיוכוס מן ירוש'
 30. בתמניא ובתשעה לאדר יום תרועת מטרא
 31. [בתרין עשר ביה יום טוריינוס]²¹
 32. בתלת עשר ביה ניקנור
 33. בארבעה עשר ביה ובחמשת עשר ביה יומי פוריא אנון ולא למספד
 34. בשיתת עשר ביה שריאו למבני שור ירוש' ולא למספד
 35. בשבעה עשר ביה קמו עממיה על פליטת ספריה במדינת כלבוס בבית זבדי
 והוה פורקין
 36. בעשרים ביה צמו עמא²² על מטרא ונחת להון
 37. בעשרים ותמניא ביה אתת בשורתא טבא ליהודאי דלא יעדון מן אורייתא²³
 ולא למספד
 38. להן אנש דאיתי עלוהי אסיר בצלו²⁴

1. (I shall begin Megillat Taanit with Heaven's help).
2. These are the days on which one is not to fast and on some of which one is not to eulogize.
3. From the beginning of the month of Nisan until the eighth of it²⁵ the daily sacrifice was settled – one is not to eulogize.
4. From the eighth of it [Nisan] until the conclusion of the festival the holiday was fixed²⁶ – one is not to eulogize.
5. On the seventh of Iyyar – the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, one is not to eulogize.

¹⁷ עדו: ms Oxf: [אתנטלו].

¹⁸ Missing in ms Parma but found in ms Oxf and HV. [יומא טבא]

¹⁹ In ms Oxf: [חנכת יומין תמניא]. יומי חנוכה.

²⁰ Missing in ms Oxf. [ודלא למספד].

²¹ This date is missing in both mss Parma and Oxford; it is found in the HV and is mentioned in both Talmuds. In the Yerushalmi the reading is: יום טיריין.

²² Missing in ms Oxf. [עמא].

²³ Missing in ms Oxf. [דלא-אורייתא].

²⁴ Missing in ms Oxf. Appears in the HV and is cited in both Talmuds. [להן-בצלו].

²⁵ According to the wording in the Yerushalmi, this occurrence was on the first day of Nissan only. See n6 *supra*.

²⁶ According to a variant reading: 'The festival of Shavuot was restored'. See n7 *supra*.

6. On the fourteenth of it [Iyyar] – the Little Passover, and one is not to eulogize.
7. On the twenty-third of it, the men of the Akra [the fortress] left Jerusalem.
8. [On the twenty-seventh of it, the coronation tax was removed from Jerusalem and from Judea, and one is not to eulogize.]
9. On the fourteenth of Sivan, Sher Tower [= Straton's Tower,²⁷ later Caesarea] was captured.
10. On the fifteenth of it and on the sixteenth of it, the people of Beth Shean and the Valley went into exile.
11. On the twenty-fifth of it the 'Demosnaei' [= tax collectors²⁸] left Jerusalem.
12. On the fourth of Tammuz, the book of decrees was removed.
13. On the fifteenth of Av [falls the] time for the wood of the Priests, and one is not to eulogize (on them).
14. On the twenty-fourth of it we returned to our law.
15. On the fourth of Elul, the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, and one is not to eulogize.
16. On the seventeenth of it, the Romans left Jerusalem.
17. On the twenty-second of it, they²⁹ began again to kill the apostates.
18. On the third of Tishri the mention was removed³⁰ from the documents.
19. On the twenty-third of Marheshvan the *soreg* (latticed partition) was torn down from the [Temple's] courtyard.
20. On the twenty-fifth of it Samaria was captured – the wall.
21. On the twenty-seventh of it, the fine flour was once again offered up on the altar.
22. On the third of Kislev the banners of the Roman Emperor³¹ were removed from the courtyard.
23. On the seventh of it [a festival].
24. On the twenty-first of it – the day of Mount Gerizim.
25. On the twenty-fifth of it – Hanukka of eight days,³² and one is not to eulogize.
26. On the twenty-eighth of Tevet the 'Kenishta'³³ took its seat for judgment.
27. On the second of Shevat a festival and one is not to eulogize.³⁴
28. On the twenty-second of it, the (pagan) cult which the enemy ordered to bring into the Temple was cancelled, and one is not to eulogize.
29. On the twenty-eighth of it, Antiochus left Jerusalem.
30. On the eighth and ninth of Adar – the day of the rain blast.
31. [On the twelfth of it – the day of Turianus³⁵.]
32. On the thirteenth of it – [the day of] Nicanor.

²⁷ Στράτωνος πύργος, see Josephus, Ant 13:324-335.

²⁸ Probably from the word δημοσιῶναι, tax collectors.

²⁹ They] According to ms Oxf and the HV: תבנא = in first person. See *supra* n15.

³⁰ Was removed]. According to ms Oxf and the Bavli: 'was nullified'. See n16, *supra*.

³¹ In the Aramaic original סמארתא. Probably from the word σημάται, 'standards'. See Josephus, War 2:169-174.

³² Hanukka of eight days] or 'the days of Hanukka'. See *supra*, n19.

³³ 'Kenishta' – Kneset, Sanhedrin.

³⁴ one is not to eulogize] See n20, *supra*.

³⁵ Turianus] See n21 *supra*.

33. On the fourteenth of it and the fifteenth of it – these are the days of Purim, and one is not to eulogize.
34. On the sixteenth of it, they began to build the wall of Jerusalem, and one is not to eulogize.
35. On the seventeenth of it the gentiles rose up against the remnant of the scribes in the city of Chalcis³⁶ in the House of Zabdi, and a salvation occurred.
36. On the twentieth of it the people³⁷ fasted for rain, and it [rain] fell on them.
37. On the twenty-eighth of it good tidings arrived for the Jews that they need not deviate from the Tora,³⁸ and one is not to eulogize.
38. Except for a person who has [previously] taken a fast-vow [who has taken it upon himself in prayer?].³⁹

The list has a halakhic heading, stating ‘These are the days on which one is not to fast’. It also closes with a halakhic utterance, restricting the validity of the prohibition on fasting and allowing only a person who already ‘has taken a fast-vow’ to fast on those days. A baraita cited in the Talmud alongside these words explains them in the following manner:⁴⁰

An individual who accepted upon himself [to fast] every Monday and Thursday (and Monday) of the entire year and holidays recorded in MegTaan occurred on them: If his vow preceded our decree, his vow will nullify our decree, and if our decree preceded his vow, our decree will nullify his vow.

According to this ancient commentary, the Scroll states that ‘its decree’, as the prohibition on fasting in the Scroll is called in this source, applies from the day on which the Scroll was made public on, but not retroactively.⁴¹

The main part of the Scroll is a list made up of short sentences, each of which includes a date and an event that occurred on it. The list follows the calendar, rather than the chronological order of events mentioned. It breaks down into months according to the biblical calendar, from Nisan to Adar. The first date in each month mentions the name of the month; those that follow use the notation ביה, ‘in it’. The various events are referred to in the Scroll by means of mere hints, characterized by extreme brevity. The time, circum-

³⁶ Chalcis] This name has become distorted in the mss of the Scroll. See Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 48. This is the correct reading, and it appears in this way in the Yerushalmi.

³⁷ The people] see n22, *supra*.

³⁸ Need not deviate from the Tora] see n23 *supra*.

³⁹ The meaning of the word בצלו is disputed: ‘by vow’ or ‘in prayer’. This entire sentence is obscure and difficult to understand. The sages of the Talmud already questioned its spelling and meaning. See bTaan 12a, as well as the commentaries of Rosenthal, ‘Words Sorting’, esp 36-43 and Schremer, ‘Concluding Passage’. Further opinions were adduced by Schremer *ib.* 413-414 and n9; see also Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 337 n42.

⁴⁰ bTaan 12a. This baraita can be found, with certain textual changes, in both Scholia (see Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 130, and below).

⁴¹ A number of medieval commentators suggested another interpretation, more remote from the simple meaning of this baraita. See Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 337f.

stances and protagonists of those events are not explicit, and consequently many of them have remained obscure.

Historical Events Mentioned

Many scholars who have studied the Scroll, starting with Heinrich Grätz,⁴² classified the festive days in accordance with the periods of the historical events that gave rise to them. The descriptions of these days are, however, laconic and obscure, and the nature of about half of the events hinted at, is uncertain. Each scholar established identifications following his own preferences, resulting in great differences of opinion. An attempt shall be made here to classify the events listed in the Scroll in as objective a manner as possible, separately discussing festive days which can be identified with certainty and those which are doubtful, in accordance with the various hypotheses prevalent in the scholarly literature.⁴³

The events the Scroll puts on the calendar took place, in the main, during the Second Temple period. Among those identifiable with certainty, nine relate to the Hasmonean era down to the times of Alexander Yannai, and another four or five with probability. Only a few events precede the Maccabean insurrection, while a very few belong to the Roman period. Almost half of the events cannot be identified with any degree of certainty.

Events identifiable with certainty are: the Hasmonean dedication of the Temple (25 Kislev, l. 25); the victory over Nicanor (13 Adar, l. 32); Antiochus' departure from Jerusalem⁴⁴ (28 Shvat, l. 29); capture of the Jerusalem Akra (23 Iyyar, l. 7); a date linked with a new dating formula used in documents from the Hasmonean period⁴⁵ (3 Tishri, l. 18); the conquest of Samaria (25 Marheshvan, l. 20); the conquest of Beth-Shean (15-16 Sivan, l. 10); the destruction of the Gerizim Temple in the days of John Hyrcanus (21 Kislev, l. 24); the capture of the 'Sher Tower' – Straton's Tower – in the days of Alexander Yannai (14 Sivan, l. 9).

It is probable that at least one of the three dates of the building of the wall of Jerusalem (7 Iyyar, 4 Elul and 16 Adar; ll. 5, 15 and 34) commemorates the completion of a Hasmonean wall. Likewise, it would seem that at least one of

⁴² The first comprehensive study of MegTaan was made by Grätz, *Geschichte*, 559-577, as an appendix to the third volume of his great work. This served as the jumping-off point for all those who followed him. Grätz was the one who informed the world of the nature of the distinction between the Scroll and its Scholion, and also coined the term, 'Scholion', for this commentary. He was the first to interpret the events referred to in the Scroll independently of the explanations proposed in the Scholion.

⁴³ For a detailed discussion of the identification of all dates to be listed *infra*, see Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 163-315, 'The Meaning of the Moadim'.

⁴⁴ Scholars argue whether the Antiochus mentioned was Antiochus Epiphanes or Antiochus Eupator. In either case, the relevant period was doubtlessly the early Hasmonean era.

⁴⁵ The precise nature of the event is unclear. Yet this obscurity does not cast doubt upon its accepted belonging to the Hasmonean period.

the dates of 27 Iyyar and 25 Sivan (ll. 8, 11), dealing with the cancellation of taxes, refers to one of the cases known from the Hasmonean period,⁴⁶ in which a burden of taxation was lifted from the shoulders of the Jews.

The nature of the event hinted at on 23 Marheshvan (l. 19) is obscure. Yet the wording of the Scroll at this point, together with the language of the relevant explanation in the Scholion, points to the Hasmonean period. The mysterious ‘Salvation’ that occurred in Lebanon (17 Adar, l. 35) has been ascribed by several scholars (following the Scholion) to the days of Alexander Yannai, while others see it as relating to the war waged by Yonatan the Hasmonean. In either case, it, too, belongs to the period of the Hasmonean kingdom.

Only two dates from the entire list belong clearly to the Roman period: the voiding of the ‘idolatry in the Temple’ decree in the days of the Emperor Caligula (22 Shevat, l. 28), and the mysterious departure of the Romans from Jerusalem on 17 Elul (l. 16). Whatever event this may be referring to, it seems that it, just like the first, occurred before the destruction of the Temple.

Besides these, the Scroll commemorates two biblical festive days (14 Iyyar and Purim, ll. 6, 33) and another which reflects an ancient custom of bringing wood to the Temple, the precise inception of which is difficult to define (15 Av, l. 13). It is possible that yet another date, one of three dates relating to the construction of the Jerusalem wall (7 Iyyar, 4 Elul or 16 Adar), is early, referring to the days of Nehemiah.

Between fourteen and seventeen dates in the Scroll are unclear and uncertain: 1-8 Nissan (l. 3); 8 Nissan to the end of the festival (l. 4); 4/10 Tammuz (l. 12); 24 Av (l. 14); 22 Elul (l. 17); 27 Marheshvan (l. 21); 3 Kislev (l. 22); 7 Kislev (l. 23); 28 Tevet (l. 26); 2 Shvat (l. 27); 8-9 Adar (l. 28); 12 Adar (l. 31); 20 Adar (l. 36); and 28 Adar (l. 37).⁴⁷

The Scholion explains six of these dates as denoting the victory of the sages over the Sadducees or the Boethusians: 1-8 Nissan; 8 Nissan until the end of the festival; 4/10 Tammuz; 24 Av; 27 Marheshvan; and 28 Tevet. These commentaries of the Scholion have been studied thoroughly in the scholarly literature dealing with the Second Temple period, especially in the framework of the historical debate concerning the nature of the ‘sects’ of Second Temple Judaism. Some scholars rejected *a priori* all the anti-Sadducean commentaries on the dates adduced in the Scroll,⁴⁸ while others accepted them.⁴⁹ Those who

⁴⁶ A minority opinion links the date 27 Iyyar with the banishing of idolatry, rather than with an exemption from taxation. Yet even according to this opinion, the event occurred at the onset of the Hasmonean period.

⁴⁷ The only ones listed here are those whose historical period is entirely unknown. Doubts concerning details of the events exist also in the cases listed above. To this list of ‘doubtful’ cases one may add the three dates of the construction of the wall noted *supra*. One of these may refer to the days of Nehemiah, one or two of them – to the Hasmonean Period, and one might actually commemorate the third wall begun by Agrippas and completed at the onset of the Great Revolt.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Zeitlin, ‘Nennt Megillat Taanit’; Wellhausen, *Pharisäer und Sadducäer*, 56-63; Moore, *Judaism*, vol 1, 160; vol 3, 27, 46; Efron, *Studies*, 167-171.

basically accept the Scholion's exegesis of these six dates, link the Pharisaic victories hinted at in the Scroll with the days of Queen Shelomtsion (Salome Alexandra, early first cent. BCE) or even earlier. Others reject the identification with Pharisaic victories over the Sadducees and tend to explain the Scroll's intimations⁵⁰ as the renewal of the sacrifices in the Temple or the removal of gentile rule following the Hasmonean victories. One way or the other, these dates belong to the Hasmonean period.

Of the other doubtful dates four have been linked, according to a few scholarly opinions, with the Roman Era. 1. One of the two dates defined in the Scroll as 'a festive day' without further explanation (7 Kislev, 2 Shevat – ll. 23, 27) is explained in the Scholion as commemorating the death of Herod.⁵¹ 2. The *סמאות* expelled from the courtyard on 3 Kislev (l. 22) have been identified by many scholars with the Roman *signa*, banners, and the date has generally been explained as the removal of the banners of the Emperor Tiberius from Jerusalem. 3. The date 12 Adar (l. 31), according to its wording in the Babylonian Talmud: Turyanus day, and the tale that appears there as an explanation, has been linked by scholars to the period of the Emperor Trajan. 4. The 'good tidings' of 28 Adar (l. 37) have been ascribed by some, in accordance with one of the two versions of the Scholion and its parallel in the Bavli, to the abrogation of Hadrian's decrees.

In summation, MegTaan fixes for commemorative purposes a long series of Hasmonean victories, together with several early dates and a few isolated later ones. The later events are from the seven decades between the death of Herod and the destruction of the Temple. Two dates may cautiously be interpreted as relating to events from the second century CE and, if so, may have been added at a later stage. It would seem that many of the semi-festive dates listed in MegTaan were already well-established when the Scroll was redacted, during the decades immediately preceding the destruction of the Temple (see below). This is certainly true of the biblical dates, the date of the Wood Sacrifice and a number of Hasmonean dates (the fixation of Hanukka and Nicanor Day and the commemoration of the capture of the Akra appear explicitly in Maccabees I). The opinion held by many that the compiler combined well-known ancient dates with later ones fixed by him and his 'faction'⁵² therefore seems reasonable. One cannot be sure whether he was responsible for the precise halakhic wording whereby it was 'decreed' forbidden to eulogize or to fast, thus transforming a mere anthology of historical events from popular

⁴⁹ See, e.g. Lichtenstein, 'Fastenrolle'; Mantel, 'Megilat Ta'anit'; Herr, 'Who Were the Boethusians?' esp 7-9.

⁵⁰ The settling of the issue of the daily sacrifice, the fixing of a festive day, the removal of the book of decrees, the return to the law, the restoration of the fine flour to the altar, the convening of the 'Kenishta' to judge.

⁵¹ The Scholion to 7 Kislev. Many scholars, however, ascribe this explanation to the other date – 2 Shevat.

⁵² bShab 13b, see below.

tradition into a halakhic document.⁵³ Alternatively, the prohibition of fasting on these occasions may have been transmitted while embedded in the custom of earlier generations, the final redactor being merely an available scribe. It may be noted in passing that the term גזירה, ‘decree’, used in the Scroll in connection with the prohibition to fast,⁵⁴ is typical of anonymous, institutional halakha of the earliest Tannaim.⁵⁵

Date and Origin

Both internal features and external indications testify to the time when Meg-Taan was compiled. Its antiquity is demonstrated by the very authority of its composers to impose ‘decrees’ of fast prohibition overriding vows. The picture we get of the multiplicity of fasts⁵⁶ and vows⁵⁷ is characteristic of Second Temple Jewish society in the Land of Israel. Furthermore, the Aramaic dialect in which the Scroll is written matches that of contemporary Intermediate Aramaic. The latest event which can be identified with certainty⁵⁸ (22 Shevat, 1. 28) relates to Caligula’s plot to introduce an idol into the Temple and the abrogation of his decree upon the timely murder of the Emperor. These events took place in the years 39-41 CE, and the Scroll must have been written after that date. However, it is difficult to assume that the initiative to promote events such as provisional Jewish victories over the Romans (see 17 Elul, 1. 16) to actual festive days was taken after the destruction of the Temple, when the bitter result of the insurrection against the Romans became obvious. These considerations limit the period during which Meg-Taan was compiled to the last thirty years prior to the destruction of the Temple, i.e., between 41 and 70 CE. Such internal conclusions are compatible with the testimony of a baraita in bShab 13b: ‘The Rabbis taught: Who wrote Megillat Taanit? They said: Hanania ben Hizkia and his faction, who cherished (the memory of) the troubles.’ The baraita was adduced in the Talmud because Hanania ben Hizkia was mentioned in the Mishna (mShab 1:4) discussed there: ‘...These are among the halakhot which the Sages enjoined in the upper room of Hanania ben Hizkia ben Garon when they went up to visit him. They voted, and Beit Shammai outnumbered Beit Hillel; eighteen things did they decree on that day.’⁵⁹ Further on in the Babylonian *sugya* we read:

⁵³ See, e.g., the opinion of Urbach, *The Halakha*, 44, 248.

⁵⁴ See *supra*, ‘Text, Translation, Structure’.

⁵⁵ For the antiquity of the term גזירה ‘decree’, its meaning and relevant literature see Urbach, *The Halakha*, 11, 15f, 55-57, 239 n1, 254 n59.

⁵⁶ See Margulies, ‘Moadim ve-tsomot’; Grintz, *Sefer Yehudith*, 132; Alon, ‘The halacha’, 189f; Alon, ‘Le-yishuva shel baraita ahah’; Gilat, ‘On Fasting’, 3-7 [= Gilat, *Studies*, 110-114]

⁵⁷ See S. Lieberman, *Greek*, 115 ff.

⁵⁸ For events which possibly belong to the second century CE, see above, ‘Historical Events Mentioned’. Nevertheless, these identifications are doubtful, see *ib.*

⁵⁹ Danby, *Mishnah*, 100.

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Indeed, that man is to be remembered favourably, Hanania ben Hizkia is his name, because if not for him, the Book of Ezekiel would have been concealed because its words contradicted the words of the Tora. What did he do? They brought up to him three hundred barrels of oil and he sat in an upper chamber and expounded them.⁶⁰

The legendary figure of the sage who ‘wrote Megillat Taanit’ combines three extraordinary features: in his upper room, Beit Shammai outnumbered Beit Hillel; he struggled over the preservation of Ezekiel; and he headed a ‘faction’ that tried to fix a commemoration of miracles because of its predilection for ‘troubles’, i.e., for the salvation that follows them. One version of the Scholion repeats the tradition about the composition of the Scroll with a minor change: ‘The faction of R. Eliezer [*sic*] ben Hanina ben Hizkiah from Goron: they wrote down Megillat Taanit because they were not used to troubles and there were no troubles which befell them...’ A number of Tannaic traditions mention the name of *Elazar* ben Hanina ben Hizkia.⁶¹ It would seem from these traditions that the son of Hanania ben Hizkia lived at the time of the Temple,⁶² that he too was close to Beit Shammai,⁶³ and that an attempt to resolve textual questions in the Book of Ezekiel⁶⁴ was attributed to him as well.

A fascinating historical hypothesis about this person and his work was proposed by Grätz.⁶⁵ He identified Elazar ben Hanania, the disciple of Beit Shammai and the alleged compiler of MegTaan, with Eleazar son of Ananias the priest, the *strategos* of the Temple and leader of the zealots mentioned by Josephus – indeed the man to interrupt the sacrifice for the Emperor at the outbreak of the insurrection.⁶⁶ According to Grätz, a zealous-patriotic trend from the insurrectionist camp, the men of Beit Shammai, was an undercurrent of the composition of the Scroll. These people desired to perpetuate and magnify past Hasmonean victories in order to stir up the national insurrectionist spirit in the present. To these historical glorious victories they added temporary achievements made at the onset of the Revolt against the Romans, for which they determined days of commemoration as well. According to this theory, the precise time of compilation of the Scroll is to be restricted to the years of the Great Revolt against the Romans, the very last years the Temple stood.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Cf bHag 13b and bMen 45a.

⁶¹ See the discussion by Grätz, *Geschichte*, 819 n1.

⁶² Semahot 6:11, p135.

⁶³ See MekRY, Ba-hodesh 7 (p229). Compare the words of Shammai, MekRSbY 20:8 (p148); bBetsa 16a; PesR 23 (115b).

⁶⁴ SifDeut 294 (p313).

⁶⁵ Grätz, *Geschichte*, 805-813.

⁶⁶ Josephus, War 2:408.

⁶⁷ The proponents and opponents of this theory are listed by Ben-Shalom, *The School of Shammai*, 252f and n7-9. See also Epstein, ‘Sifrei Zuttah Parashat Parah’, 52f [= Epstein, *Studies*, 147f]; idem, *Prolegomena*, 513; Lieberman, *Greek*, 182-184. Ben Shalom *ib.* 252-272 and Hengel, *Zealots*, 203 accept Grätz’s theory almost word for word and state that MegTaan and the ‘eighteen

Grätz's theory combines internal and external testimony into an impressive historical picture. Yet one should remember that the political trend Grätz associated both with the controversy between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel and with the compilation of MegTaan is a construct based upon a hypothesis. The combination of Josephus' Eleazar son of Ananias with the legendary attribution of MegTaan to the Tanna Elazar ben Hanania is tempting but far from depicting historical facts. Thus there is no compelling need to assume the existence of a political background for the composition of MegTaan.

Bearing in mind all of this we might conclude that the combined internal and external data indicates that the Scroll was written sometime during the three decades preceding the fall of the Temple. It may have originated in circles close to Beit Shammai, and it is possible that the motivation behind its writing was a zealous, nationalistic doctrine, though there is no unambiguous evidence for this hypothesis.

The Scholion and its Two Versions

From ancient times an explanatory tradition dubbed the 'Scholion' has been appended to the Scroll. In its extant form the language of this document combines Mishnaic Hebrew spotted with ancient terms, with infelicitous, incorrect phrases and influences from Babylonian Aramaic. Large sections of the Scholion contain parallels to the Talmud and to other Tannaitic and Amoraic literature, but nearly half of it is unknown from any other source. Scholars differed as to the degree of literary and historical authenticity to be ascribed to this unique testimony to the Temple period, just as they differed as to its nature in general. Some have viewed it as an anthology of very early traditions edited either at the conclusion of the mishnaic period or during that of the Talmud, while others have suggested that it is nothing but a late mixture of isolated quotations and independently phrased passages, compiled in the later Middle Ages.⁶⁸ However, many of these scholars have studied the traditions of the Scholion in light of a prior reconstruction as to the sectarian struggle during the Second Temple period and the nature of the spiritual movements prevalent in those days.⁶⁹ Moreover, a renewed examination of the manuscripts has revealed that many historical conclusions were based on philologically uncertain grounds.

The printed version of the Scholion which was at first available for scholarly research is, in fact, a late medieval composition which combined and

things' decrees 'were perpetrated by Zealots who had an important role in the development of the events which led in the end to the outbreak of the Great Revolt'; see Hengel *ib.* 93, 154, 235-236, 264, etc. It is possible that the explanation of one of the dates in the Scroll confirms this theory to some extent, see Noam, 'The Seventeenth of Elul'.

⁶⁸ For a bibliographical review of the advocates of the various opinions see Noam, 'Scholion', 56f n11.

⁶⁹ See *ib.* 57f and footnotes.

mixed two separate and, on occasion, mutually contradictory commentaries of MegTaan. The contradictions contained in this hybrid work and the secondary processing it underwent at the hands of its redactors has misled scholars and concealed from them the content and nature of the original documents.⁷⁰ It actually appears that there was not a single Scholion, but two separate editions of a commentary to the Scroll which are preserved in their purest state in one single late manuscript each, apart from additional Geniza fragments. I have dubbed these two editions ‘Scholion O’ and ‘Scholion P’, after the Oxford and Parma manuscripts which preserve them.

In about half their length, the two editions lack even a single point of contact, handing down completely different basic reasons for the same festive dates. For an example let us cite the explanation of the festive date of 24 Av. The Scroll itself defines this date as follows: בעשרים וארבעה ביה תבנא לדיננא, ‘On the twenty-fourth of it [Av] we returned to our law.’ The two Scholia explain:

The Sadducees used to judge on the basis of their own laws, saying: A daughter inherits with the daughter of a son. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to them: On what grounds do you say so? But they could bring no proof from the Tora...The day on which they (the sages) overcame them (the Sadducees), they designated as a festive day. (Scholion P)

During the kingdom of the Greeks judgment was rendered according to gentile law, and when the kingdom of the Hasmonean House got the upper hand, they went back to render judgment according to the law of Israel. (Scholion O)

Scholion O explains the festive day as a return from ‘gentile law’ to ‘Jewish law’ during the period of Greek ascendancy, while Scholion P relates the date to an internal legal dispute: the disagreement between Pharisees and Sadducees over problems of daughters inheriting. As mentioned above, in about half their length the two Scholia hand down a different reason for the festival. A comparison of the two Scholia with regard to the other half of their explanations shows common features ranging from two quite different texts to similar content handed down in slightly different wording. Sometimes a single nuclear tradition is common to both scholia, but this tradition is then phrased in two different versions, regarding either the actual event or various particulars associated with it. Each redaction is also characterized by distinct terms for identical concepts. The date of 4 Tammuz can serve as an example. The event mentioned is: בארבעה בתמוז עזא ספר גזרתא, the book of decrees was removed. The explanation given in the Scholia is as follows:

Because thus there was written and kept [i.e. publicized] by the Sadducees a book of decrees: These are to be burned, these are to be slain (and) these are to be strangled. And should someone say to them: How [is it learned] that this one is liable to stoning and this one is liable to burning? – they were unable to bring proof from the Tora, only that a book of decrees was written and kept by them

⁷⁰ On the misleading nature of Lichtenstein’s critical edition see *infra*, ‘Editions’.

[i.e. publicized]. The day they [the sages] annulled it [the book] they designated as a festive day. (Scholion P)

For the Boethusians used to write down halakhot in a book, and a person would ask and they would show him in the book. The sages said to them: But does it not state: ‘According to [lit. “following the mouth of”] these things I have drawn up a Covenant with you and with Israel;’⁷¹ ‘According to [lit. “following the mouth of”] the Tora that they teach you etc.’⁷² – this teaches that we may not inscribe [halakhot] in a book [but rather divulge them by word of mouth]. A different matter [= Another explanation]: [‘A book of] decrees’: The Boethusians used to say: [‘An] eye for [an] eye, [a] tooth for [a] tooth’⁷³ – if [one] knocked his fellow’s tooth, his tooth shall be knocked; if one blinded his fellow’s eye, his own eye should be blinded, and both shall be equal; ‘And they shall spread out the garment before the elders of the town’⁷⁴ – the actual garment; ‘And she shall spit in his face’⁷⁵: that she should actually spit in his face. The sages said to them, Has it not been already said: ‘The Tora and the commandment which I have written to teach them’⁷⁶, and it is written: ‘And now, write down this song for yourselves and teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouth’⁷⁷ – ‘and teach it’: this refers to the written Tora; ‘put it in their mouth’: these are the halakhot [= the Oral Tora]. (Scholion O)⁷⁸

In this case, there is a single infrastructure underlying the two explanations. The abolition of the ‘Book of Decrees’ is interpreted in both, unexpectedly, as a victory over the rivals of the Pharisees. But from this point on, the two versions are decidedly different. Scholion P deals, as always, specifically with the Sadducees. It attributes to them a ‘book’ in which the various death penalties enforced by the courts were inscribed, as the Sadducees ‘did not know how to bring proof’ for them from the Tora. In this explanation there is no trace of any complaint made by sages against the dissident sect. No mention is made of the prohibition to write down halakhot in a book, nor of a literal interpretation of biblical verses. Even the term ביייתוסין, ‘Boethusians’, does not appear in it, nor anywhere else in Scholion P. However, Scholion O describes two specific disputes with the Boethusians. In this version there is no mention of Sadducees, court-enforced death penalties, or adducing proofs from the Tora. Scholion O itself integrates two clearly distinct traditions, the second one being introduced by the phrase דבר אחר, ‘a different matter’ or ‘another explanation’. The first tradition focuses on the dispute between ‘the sages’ and the Boethusians on the inscribing of halakhot in a book, while the other lists disagreements over the interpretation of three biblical phrases. The Boethusians

⁷¹ Exod 34:27.

⁷² Deut 17:11.

⁷³ Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20.

⁷⁴ Deut 22:17.

⁷⁵ Deut 25:9.

⁷⁶ Exod 24:12.

⁷⁷ Deut 31:19.

⁷⁸ For a detailed treatment of these traditions see Noam, ‘From Philology to History’.

believe these phrases should be understood literally, while the sages reply that there is no ‘biblical verse’ without accompanying ‘halakhot’. While the allegation levelled against the Sadducees in Scholion P is that they were unable to adduce proof from the Tora, in Scholion O the Boethusians are accused of adhering to a literal interpretation of the biblical verses.

Generally, there is a relative distance between the traditions of Scholion O and the parallel traditions brought in the Babylonian Talmud, while in certain points it is more similar to Genesis Rabba,⁷⁹ the Yerushalmi,⁸⁰ and the teaching of a Palestinian Amora.⁸¹ This gives one the impression of a Palestinian origin for these traditions, as opposed to a more ‘Babylonian’ origin of Scholion P. This impression is reinforced by the history of its transmission: Scholion O was transferred along the Italian-Ashkenazi route, common to Palestinian traditions, while Scholion P was known in medieval Spain, heir to the Babylonian tradition.

As to the value of the Scholion’s evidence, research has shown that some rare, authentic units of literary and historical significance are integrated into both redactions of the Scholion. They each contain historical facts unparalleled in Tannaic literature.⁸² Some of these are confirmed by external sources such as Maccabees, Josephus, and Philo, or Qumran writings. At the same time, we find both in O and in P complete units which are nothing but faint, artificial inventions. In many cases it is clear that the compilers were not using any authentic tradition, but merely paraphrased the language of the Scroll or settled for a shallow, evasive wording.⁸³ Sometimes a fixed literary formula appears in the comments on a number of different festive dates.⁸⁴ In both Scholia the language of quotations from the Mishna shows signs of editing. On occasion, certain inner erosion has taken place in one of the compositions, causing vari-

⁷⁹ See Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 202-205.

⁸⁰ See Noam, ‘The Seventeenth of Elul’, 438.

⁸¹ See Noam, ‘From Textual Criticism’, 23f.

⁸² See Noam *ib.* and the cross-references there.

⁸³ See, e.g., Scholion P for 14 Sivan, 15-16 Sivan, 3 Kislev, Purim, 17 Adar; Scholion O for 23 Marheshvan and 3 Kislev.

⁸⁴ Thus did Scholion P interpret the three dates of the building of the wall (7 Iyyar, 4 Elul, 16 Adar) with the following formula: *יום שהתחילו לבנותו עשאוהו יום טוב*, ‘Because the gentiles came and destroyed from its wall; the day they began to build it, they designated as a festive day.’ Wherever the redactor of Scholion P encountered in the Scroll references to hostile elements leaving Jerusalem (23 Iyyar, 17 Elul, 28 Shevat) he attached to it the obscure description: *מפני שהיו מצירים להם, ולא יכלו לצאת ולבא מפניהם אלא בלילה, יום שיצאו משם עשאוהו יום טוב*, ‘Because they were troubling them and they could not exit and enter because of them, but at night; the day they left, they designated as a festive day.’ Similarly, the compiler of Scholion O made the following non-obligatory statement on three separate occasions (7 Kislev, 2 Shevat and, similarly, 15-16 Sivan): *ששמחה לפני המקום במות רשעים*, ‘Since there is happiness before the Lord when the wicked ones die.’

ous dates or details in their explanations to merge with one another.⁸⁵ On top of all this there are, at least in the extant Oxford and Parma manuscripts, omissions, fragmentation, and serious transmission errors. After generations of debate on the reliability of the Scholia, it seems that one may sum up by saying that neither Scholion O nor Scholion P is a uniform text. Both include vague supplements, difficult spots, and errors. But alongside this reservation, one would do well to recall that a considerable part of the material in both versions represents a small but highly consequential section of ancient traditions of the sages. With regard to their literary and historical value, these sections are not inferior to rabbinic literature as a whole, and should be judged as an integral part of it. This ancient source, however, has suffered two types of damage during its final redaction and transmission: foreign materials have been inserted into it, while its entirety has been adversely affected by a thin layer of errata and omissions.

It appears reasonable to assume that mss O and P reflect two independent attempts at assembling tradition units to constitute a continuous commentary on the Scroll. It seems that the two redactors drew on sources that differed in time and possibly also in location. These collections of sources included historical baraitot as well as aggadic and halakhic homilies. Most of these existed *per se*, without any connection with MegTaan. Only a few were especially composed to explain or comment on a particular date in the Scroll.⁸⁶ In some cases the association of a date in the Scroll with a particular event was commonly known, and so it was passed down to both redactors. On occasion they relied on two variations of a single theme. In other cases, an authentic source reached one of the redactors, but not his colleague. It seems that several of the dates lacked explanations or explanatory traditions, as far as both redactors were concerned. So they, or their successors, made up for the deficiencies in an artificial manner, loosely attaching the subject of the date with suitable aggadic or halakhic homilies, developing and expanding the language of the Scroll into an ‘explanation’, or using vague wording of their own invention.

It seems likely that Scholion O, Scholion P, and the version of the Scholion that is partially adduced in the Bavli, are only three coincidental representatives out of a larger group of aggadic anthologies that were appended to MegTaan during the talmudic period. These anthologies, like all orally transmitted traditions and especially aggada, may have been rather incoherent at the outset, both by content and editing. They may have been open to penetration of various aggadic materials over the generations. It is also likely that they were originally incomplete, with various dates being unexplained. One of them had

⁸⁵ See, e.g., the way Scholion O for 15-16 Sivan uses the explanation of the previous date (14 Sivan), the penetration of elements from the explanation for 21 Kislev into the explanation for 22 Shevat in Scholion P, and the identical motives in the sectarian explanations of Scholion P.

⁸⁶ This may be so with the explanation of Scholion O for 14 Sivan; the two explanations for 8-9 Adar, and the Hebrew baraita לגורתנו קודם לגורתנו, ‘Each person whose vow is previous to our decree’, attached to the sentence concluding the Scroll.

the good fortune to be partially quoted in the Bavli, with which it was transmitted and preserved, to be studied again and again by the Bavli adepts. If this text originally contained defects and lacunae, these were rapidly glossed over by the talmudic copyists and experts. However, the non-talmudic commentaries on MegTaan continued their independent and dynamic existence until they reached a final form. When MegTaan went into practical disuse, interest in the dates it mentions waned. The interest in the non-talmudic commentaries aroused only marginal interest, leaving them at the mercy of chance error. Many of their original units were truncated and their language lost more and more of its clarity. Two of these compilations, Scholions O and P, then reached us by chance, both being familiar to us almost solely from the final stage in their transmission: the two unique but defective and erroneous late medieval manuscripts.

All other mss of MegTaan and its commentary, including the printed version, are representative of the artificial combining and processing of the O and P editions carried out in the Middle Ages and reflecting the influence of the Bavli as well. I have named this version the ‘Hybrid Version’. The hybridization process was sometimes effected by the simple joining of the O and P versions sequentially.⁸⁷ At other times the compiler showed a preference for the wording of one of the two versions, while integrating into it expressions or short phrases taken from the other.⁸⁸ There are also instances where one of the basic versions has been inserted between sections of the other: the beginning and the end reflecting O, with the middle section representing P.⁸⁹ This is the case, for example, with the aforementioned comment on 24 Av.⁹⁰ The explanation referring to the date as that of an external victory (O) – ‘During the kingdom of the Greeks, judgment was rendered according to gentile law’ – was carelessly joined to its explanation as an internal dispute (P): ‘...Because the Sadducees used to say...’⁹¹

When was this coarse compilation created? There are some clues which may reveal its provenance. First to cite the Hybrid Version are two medieval compositions: a tenth century compilation based on the Jerusalem Talmud, known as ‘Ha-Yerushalmi ha-Ashkenazy’ and created in the vicinity of Italy; and the eleventh century *paytan* R. Menahem be-R. Makhir, who was a transmitter of Italian traditions from Italy to Germany and used the Hybrid version in a poem written for Hanukka.⁹² A mention of Karaites which entered the Hybrid Version from a copy of Scholion O demonstrates that it could not predate the eighth or ninth century. It would thus seem that the Hybrid Version originated between the ninth and the tenth centuries somewhere in the Mediter-

⁸⁷ For details and examples see Noam, ‘Scholion’, 68-74 and n95.

⁸⁸ Details and examples *ib.* 75-77 and n99.

⁸⁹ *Ib.* 77-79 and n100.

⁹⁰ See above p351.

⁹¹ See Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 86f, 223-225.

⁹² For these citations see Noam, ‘Two Testimonies’.

ranean basin, where similar anthologies and compilations were common at this period.

The Scroll's Status in Rabbinic Literature

All of rabbinic literature was delivered orally, not only according to its own testimony but also as appears from the phrasing of its rulings, its dialectics and its terminology. The sages and teachers are named תנאים, oral transmitters, and אמוראים, speakers.⁹³ Yet, this literature consistently refers to our Scroll as a 'written' work. In other words, MegTaan was the only written work used by the Sages, besides the Holy Scriptures. Rashi expressed this as follows: 'All other mishnayot and baraitot were not written down, for it was forbidden to write them down, yet this one was indeed written as a memorial... , therefore this one was called a *megilla*, as it was written in a book scroll.'⁹⁴ The extraordinary character of MegTaan is evident not solely from its unusual description as a 'scroll',⁹⁵ but also from the terminology adopted by the rabbis who cite the Scroll using the root *k.t.v.*: 'Who *wrote* Megillat Taanit?';⁹⁶ 'Festive days *written* in the Scroll';⁹⁷ 'These days which are *written* in Megillat Taanit';⁹⁸ 'Everything *written* in the Scroll';⁹⁹ etc. The sages of the Talmud viewed MegTaan as an unambiguous example of a ruling 'written and deposited' and unassailable by doubt.¹⁰⁰ The phrase used by the Talmud to describe MegTaan, כתיבה ומנחה, 'written and deposited', is an expression of Second Temple period origin meaning 'determined in writing', or 'made public and known to all'.¹⁰¹

The halakhic authority assumed by MegTaan is overwhelming. The strict Tora prohibition against violation of an oath¹⁰² is set aside, as we have noted, in favour of the rabbinical prohibition in the Scroll, for if anyone has vowed to

⁹³ See Sussman, 'Oral Tora Literally'.

⁹⁴ Rashi's commentary on bShab 13b *s.v.* מגילת תענית. See also Rashi to bEr 62b *s.v.* כגון מגילת תענית.

⁹⁵ Recognised as early as Grätz, *Geschichte*.

⁹⁶ bShab 13b; see above for the discussion of this baraita.

⁹⁷ tTaan 2:4; see also bTaan 10b top.

⁹⁸ bRH 19b, and cf bTaan 12a and the Scholion on the last sentence in MegTaan, ופגעו בו ימים טובים, 'And he was encountered by festive days which are *written* in Megillat Taanit.'

⁹⁹ mTaan 2:8. See the commentary attributed to Rashi to bTaan 15b *s.v.* '...And that which is said: All that is written in Megillat Taanit – as if it was the Bible;' and *ib.* 12a *s.v.* בצלו, 'That which is said 'that it is written' is because Megillat Taanit was written alone.'

¹⁰⁰ bEr 62b.

¹⁰¹ See Lieberman, *Hellenism*, 86.; Urbach, 'The Derasha as a Basis', 181 [= Urbach, *World of the Sages*, 65]; Rosenthal, 'The Teacher', 8; Kister, 'Notes', 134f; Kister, 'Additions', 44-48; Friedman, 'Publication of a Book'.

¹⁰² See Num 30:3. For an oath overriding the performance of a Tora commandment see mNed 2:2. For the attitude of the sages and of the masses towards the severity of an oath see Lieberman, *Greek*, 115-143; Epstein, *Prolegomenas*, 376-378. For the oath as an institution during the Second Temple period see Benovitz, 'Prohibitive Vow'.

fast on one of the dates listed in the Scroll, his vow is nullified!¹⁰³ Moreover, the Mishna teaches us that those who decreed the prohibitions against fasting contained in MegTaan also issued additional restrictions to strengthen them. mTaan 2:8¹⁰⁴ states it as follows:

Any day whereof it is written in Megillat Taanit: ‘one is not to eulogize’, it is [also] forbidden to eulogize [the day] before; but it is permitted the following day; R. Yose says: It is forbidden both the day before and the following day. [where it is written] ‘one is not to fast’, it is permitted [to fast on the day] before and the following day; R. Yose says: it is forbidden [to fast the day] before but permitted the following [day].

From this mishna we learn that a public fast must be decreed not only on the days listed in MegTaan,¹⁰⁵ but also on the adjoining days; which ones, is disputed between the first anonymous opinion and R Yose.

Tannaic literature quotes and discusses MegTaan from the generation of Yavne onwards.¹⁰⁶ Hence we may conclude that it was already widely known towards the end of the Second Temple period. From the direct or indirect halakhic discussions of the Tannaim about the Scroll, the impression is gained that the rules promulgated in it were considered valid after the destruction of the Temple as well. Nevertheless, changes did take place in its status on two levels. The applicability of its fasting prohibition was restricted, and its potential expansion was barred. In the Yavne period, Rabban Gamliel rejected the Scroll’s prohibition of fasting on Hanukka and Purim (and it is likely that this applied to the other dates listed in the Scroll as well) in the case of a series of fasts which was already under way.¹⁰⁷ After Rabban Gamliel’s decease, R. Eliezer and R. Joshua attempted to ‘lessen the effect of his ruling’ and to strengthen the position of the dates of the Scroll, but to no avail.¹⁰⁸ Another reduction in the status of MegTaan is revealed in a surprising comment from his son, Raban Shimon ben Gamliel at bShab 13b:

The Rabbis taught: Who wrote Megillat Taanit? They said: Hanania ben Hizkia and his faction, who cherished (the memory of) the troubles. Said Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel: We, too, cherish the troubles, but what can we do? For if we were to come and write, we would not manage [to do so]. Another explanation: a fool is never hurt. Another explanation: the flesh of a dead person does not feel the scalpel.

We may observe that in the generation of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, during the Usha period, no miracles and no new dates were added to the Scroll, whether because the ‘troubles’ – and the subsequent miracles – were too nu-

¹⁰³ See *supra*, ‘Text, Translation, Structure’.

¹⁰⁴ Danby, *Mishnah*, 197 (adapted).

¹⁰⁵ See also mTaan 2:10; tTaan 2:4; bTaan 10a.

¹⁰⁶ See tTaan 2:4-5; R. Joshua’s statement in the baraita, bHul 129b.

¹⁰⁷ mTaan 2:10.

¹⁰⁸ tTaan 2:5 and parallels.

merous ('we do not manage'), or because Rabban Gamliel's generation lacked the sensitivity required to identify miracles, like 'the dead' or 'a fool' who do not feel pain.

The comment by Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel shows that he defined the Scroll as a chapter already sealed. It also reflects an attitude of distant respect for MegTaan. When added to our above discussion of mTaan 2:8, this teaches us that the Scroll was well known to the generation of R. Akiva's disciples and that they accepted its halakhic rulings as valid.¹⁰⁹ Some sages even adduced the Scroll as an authority for more remote halakhic issues.¹¹⁰

As to Amoraic literature, the opening and the conclusion of MegTaan are quoted in the Bavli, in addition to eleven of the dates it lists. The Yerushalmi adduces the opening as well as the conclusion, together with seven dates. The Bavli also sports a commentary on the dates of the Scroll, a kind of 'Scholion', as it were, referring to eleven of the twelve passages to which we have an explanatory commentary.¹¹¹ In most of these cases, the explanation is not presented as a separate commentary, but rather as a direct continuation of the Scroll itself, subject to the first introductory phrase of each date. Thus, for example, the discussion in bShab 21b cites the date of 25 Kislev, Hanukka, as follows:

- (1) What is Hanukka?
- (2) [For it is taught]:
- (3) On the twenty-fifth of Kislev <commence> the days of Hanukka, eight [are] they, on which one may not eulogize [and may not fast].¹¹²
- (4) For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils in Temple and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one crouse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient [quantity] only for one day's kindling; yet a miracle was wrought therewith and they kindled [the candelabrum] from it for eight days The following year they designated and appointed them [the days] a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.

After (1), the talmudic introductory question, follows unit (2), the introductory phrase, then (3), the quotation from MegTaan, and (4) the explanation, a kind of talmudic scholion which is presented directly following the words of the Scroll without any distinguishing sign.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Though from a baraita adduced in bRH 19b we learn that R. Yose is of the opinion that the entire Scroll was invalidated at the time of the destruction of the Temple. Yet this baraita itself, worded as it is in the Tosefta and in the Yerushalmi, undoubtedly focusses on the days of the wood sacrifice alone, rather than on the dates appearing in the entire Scroll. See Tabory, 'When was the Scroll of Fasts Abrogated?'; Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 349f, 355-359.

¹¹⁰ See e. g. the statement by R. Joshua in the baraita, bHul 129b.

¹¹¹ For the opening paragraph of the Scroll neither of the Scholia available to us has any explanation either.

¹¹² ודלא להתענאה בהון – a mistaken addition not appearing in the mss.

¹¹³ For more details see: Noam, 'Miracle'.

The explanations of the dates of the Scroll adduced in the Bavli clearly resemble more closely the explanations of Scholion P than those of Scholion O. But despite the similarity, Scholion P is not dependent upon our Talmud, for two thirds of it do not appear in the Talmud at all, including authentic, reliable sections. Moreover, Scholion P does not reflect two certain explanations appended to two dates of the Scroll in the Talmud. For these dates Scholion P has other explanations. Scholion O lacks four explanations appearing in the Talmud; in three of these cases, Scholion O bears different and even contradictory explanations. In six other cases, where the contents of Scholion O generally resemble those of the Talmud, they appear in a different version. Thus, neither of the two Scholion redactions available to us is the one that served the Babylonian Talmud, while, on the other hand, neither Scholion O nor Scholion P was familiar with the Talmud's explanations, nor did they make use of them. My study has brought me to the conclusion that the versions O and P are independent parallels – one more similar and the other less so – of the version adduced in the Talmud.

In most cases, the Bavli cites the contents of the Scroll using introductory phrases used for a baraita: תניא, תנו רבנן, תניא, 'We learned', 'Our rabbis taught', 'It is taught', and so on. However, in a number of extraordinary instances, the Scroll is quoted *without subsequent explanation* after the introductory phrase כתיב, 'It is written', normally employed when citing biblical verses. This reflects the distinction the redactors of the Bavli made between quotations from the 'written and deposited' Scroll itself, and quotations followed by a commentary. In the first case, expressions of reading a written (usually biblical!) text are used. In the second case, the commentary accompanied to the Scroll passage appears to have been recited orally, and thus required an introductory phrase characteristic of Tannaitic quotations.

In the Yerushalmi, only the dates of the Scroll are adduced, without any commentary.¹¹⁴ Contrary to the introductory formula כתיב, 'It is written', used for biblical quotations by the Tannaim and to some extent by the Bavli as well, the Talmud Yerushalmi always makes use of phrases introducing Tannaic tradition: תני, תנינן, 'We learn', 'It is taught', etc.

Ten *sugyot* in the Bavli deal with MegTa'an from various angles and for different purposes; two do so more extensively,¹¹⁵ the others only briefly.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Only with regard to Nicanor day (yTa'an 2:13, 66a – yMeg 1:6, 70c) does the Yerushalmi adduce the event involving Nicanor. However, this story does not appear together with the wording of the festive day cited from the Megilla, but rather as a responsum to a separate question: what is Nicanor day? Thus we have no evidence that the Yerushalmi was ever familiar with a continuous scholion.

¹¹⁵ bRH 18b-19b; bTa'an 17b-18b.

¹¹⁶ See bShab 21b; bEr 62b; bYom 69a; bMeg 5b, 6a; bTa'an 12a; bBB 115b-116a; bSan 91a; bMen 65a-b; yTa'an 3:10, 66d; yNed 8:1, 40d.

There is also a single, broad discussion in the Yerushalmi (with the addition of two short fragments).¹¹⁷

Though the halakhic validity of the Scroll was debated in the Amoraic era (see below), its importance and reputation were in no way diminished. The Amoraic discussions concerned the halakhic status of the Scroll and that of the days preceding and following the dates therein.¹¹⁸ Both in the Land of Israel and in Babylonia attention was paid to the text of the Scroll as well: R. Hiyya and R. Shimon be-Rabbi debated matters pertaining to its spelling and interpretation.¹¹⁹ Explanations were also given in both Talmuds for what seemed to be an excess of Scroll dates where the prohibition of fasting might have been derived from some other source.¹²⁰

The central position of the Scroll in the awareness of those generations appears especially from discussions which mention it casually. In bEr 62b, R. Yaakov bar Abba challenges Abaye: '[A halakhic question] such as [halakhic matters concerning] Megillat Taanit, which is written and deposited, may [a disciple] render a legal decision in the vicinity of his teacher?' From this one may deduce that in the generation of Abaye the Scroll was a single written book, and that in addition it was commonplace and of a compulsory nature.¹²¹ The language of the Scroll and even that of its explanatory commentary served as halakhic evidence even in remote matters.¹²² Thus, for example, the Talmud in Tractate Yoma used the commentary of one of the Scrolls dates in a peculiar way. This commentary cites the legend of the meeting between the High Priest and Alexander the Great in Antipatris. It is adduced in the Talmud only in order to prove that it is permitted to go out of Jerusalem with priestly garments.¹²³ A fourth generation Palestinian sage voiced his opinion of the aim of the Scroll: not merely to prohibit fasting and eulogizing, but rather to count the days on which miracles had been performed for Israel.¹²⁴ Indeed, there are cases where the talmudic discourses show an interest in the historical nature of the events and try to explain their significance. The aforementioned citation of the Scroll paragraph and its commentary in Tractate Shabbat is quoted there in order to explain, 'What is Hanukka?' In similar fashion the *sugya* in Tractate Taanit asks, prior to the citation of the Scroll with its scholion: 'What is Nicanor?' and, 'What is Trajan?'¹²⁵

Calls for the halakhic invalidation of MegTaan started to be heard, both in Palestine and in Babylonia, during the first generations of the talmudic sages.

¹¹⁷ yTaan 2:13 and the parallel discussions.

¹¹⁸ See bTaan 17b-18b; bMeg 5b; yTaan (previous note).

¹¹⁹ bTaan 12a.

¹²⁰ Supra, n103f.

¹²¹ See Rashi bTaan 12a s.v. מהו לאורויי תלמיד במקום רבו.

¹²² See e.g. bTaan 12a.

¹²³ bYom 69a.

¹²⁴ yTaan 2:13, 66a [= yMeg 1:6, 70c].

¹²⁵ bTaan 18b.

For the entire talmudic period, the halakhic validity of the Scroll was open to debate in both centres.¹²⁶ It was only decided, apparently, in the post-Amoraic period to invalidate it entirely, except for Hanukka and Purim. From Tractate Sofrim we learn that in Palestine the Fast of Esther was postponed until after Purim, ‘because of Nicanor and his colleagues’.¹²⁷ This may indicate that Nicanor’s Day, and perhaps additional dates, were still observed in Palestine in the Gaonic Period.

Editions

MegTaan and its Scholion were first printed in Mantua in 1514, and many published editions appeared afterwards based on this edition.¹²⁸ Scholars relied at first on the printed text only, which was actually the misleading Hybrid Version. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was reported that manuscripts of the Scroll and of the Scholion had been found, but these were not made public, except in the form of lists of occasional textual variants.¹²⁹ In 1895 Adolf Neubauer published a first try at a critical edition of the Scroll and the Scholion,¹³⁰ but this first venture was of minimal value.¹³¹

The texts of the mss of the Scroll and the Scholion were first published in full in the critical edition of Scroll and Scholion by Hans Lichtenstein in 1932. He displayed the text in two separate sections, one of the Scroll and the other of the Scholion, in the format of an eclectic inner text with a critical apparatus, together with a list of talmudic parallel sources and a list of medieval quotations of the text. He also listed the numerous printed editions, added an historical introduction for each date, and reviewed the research literature that had been published until his day. However, this edition, which was intended to supplant the earlier printed versions, provided scholars with a ‘reconstructed’ eclectic text, no less misleading than its printed predecessors. In his inner text,

¹²⁶ See bRH18b-19b; yTaan 2:13, 66a and its parallels; yNed 8:1, 40d. For a discussion see: Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 355-359; Tabory, ‘When was the Scroll of Fasts Abrogated?’, Schremer, ‘Concluding passage’.

¹²⁷ Sofrim 17, 3.

¹²⁸ A list of the printed editions up until the beginning of the twentieth century appears in: Lichtenstein, ‘Fastenrolle’, 260-263.

¹²⁹ In 1864 N. Coronel, *Commentarios quinque*, v-viii reported of a manuscript containing a large collection of works, including MegTaan. The ms, eventually known as ms Vienna, was transferred to S.Z. Halberstamm and afterwards to Avraham Epstein, and was described in detail by Marx, ‘Sammelhandschrift’. In 1875 Joel Müller offered a list of differences between the text of the ms and that of the first Mantua printed edition: Müller, ‘Der Text der Fastenrolle’. In 1897 Moshe Schwab mentioned the existence of additional mss in the libraries of Parma and Oxford, without reviewing their texts: Schwab, ‘Meghillath Taanith’. Three years later Schwab published comments in the name of Alexander Marx, in which he listed also a few textual variants between the mss: Schwab (A. Marx), ‘Quelques notes’.

¹³⁰ See Neubauer, *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles*, 2-25.

¹³¹ The inner text is an inconsistent combination, whose continuity and sources are sometimes difficult to identify. The textual variants are defective.

Lichtenstein mixed the two fundamentally different basic versions – O and P – and to this he added the Hybrid Version which he considered a Scholion representation of equal value. His critical apparatus is also defective and does not facilitate the separate reconstruction of each manuscript.¹³² The damage caused by the new patchy composition which had come into being in Lichtenstein's edition was greater than the damage caused by its printed predecessors, since it enjoyed the authority of a critical edition and was therefore accepted by scholars who based their historical research upon it, without any re-examination of its component parts.

A new edition of the Scroll and its Scholion was published by the present writer in 2003.¹³³ The Scroll is edited on the basis of ms Parma, with a critical apparatus that includes the variants in ms Oxford and in the mss of the Hybrid version, together with the variants found in the quotations of the Scroll in the two Talmuds and the variants stemming from medieval quotations. The edition of the Scholion presents synoptically the texts of both Scholia, according to mss Oxford and Parma respectively. Alongside them, one manuscript of the Hybrid Version is displayed, noting in the critical apparatus the textual variants occurring in other mss of this hybrid text. A study of the historical background of the events indicated in the Scroll and in the Scholion is also included, as well as the history of the formulation and transmission of these compositions.

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¹³² For details see Noam, 'Scholion', 92 and n155.

¹³³ Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*.