

Article

The Pronunciation of the Words “*mor*” and “*yabolet*” in a Cairo Genizah Fragment of Bavli Eruvin 102b–104a

Uri Zur 

Department of Moreshet Israel, Ariel University, Kiryay ha-Mada, Ariel 40700, Israel; uriz@ariel.ac.il

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Abstract: This article refers to a Cairo Genizah fragment related to Bavli, Tractate Eruvin 102b–104a, identified as Cambridge, UL T-S F2 (2) 23. FGP No. C 98948. In the fragment, there are two words, “*mor*” and “*yabolet*”, which were written as vocalized by the scribe or copyist. Their pronunciation differs from that customary today, i.e., “*mar*” and “*yabelet*”. The purpose of this paper is to explain how this pronunciation was generated, the evolvement and development of this pronunciation as it appears in the fragment, and to examine whether there are additional words in other sources that were pronounced similarly. This paper begins with a description of the Genizah fragment and continues with a reproduction of the fragment itself.

Keywords: Eruvin; Genizah; sugya; pronunciation; Hebrew word

1. Introduction

The fragment is a segment from the Cairo Genizah, and it relates to Tractate Eruvin of the Babylonian Talmud (102b), identified as Cambridge U-L T-S F2 (2) 23 (Figure 1). Here, we shall refer to one folio of the fragment, whose number in the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society is C98948, selected at random.

The fragment is a parchment that was damaged on the (left) outer-bottom corner. It is faded and illegible on the outer edge. The number of lines in the fragment is 44, of which 15 full lines survived at the top of the fragment. The page is perforated.

The measurements of the fragment are 26.5 × 32.3 cm; the measurements of the written area are 20.5 × 24.5 cm.

Paleographically, the formative features of the letters have a greater similarity to letter specimens written in 995 AD (unknown place) and to letter specimens written in Cairo, Egypt, in 1003/4 (Beit-Arié 1987, p. 15).

The legible part of the fragment, which parallels that of the printed version, begins with the words “חטאת” (102b) and ends with the words “במדינה לא ורמינה חצר” (104a).

2. The Text of the Printed Version (bEruvin 102b–103b)

Our Rabbis taught: A plaster that was detached from a wound may be replaced on the Sabbath. R. Judah ruled: Only if it slipped downwards may it be pushed back upwards or if it slipped upwards it may be pushed back downwards. One may also uncover a part of the plaster and wipe the opening of the wound and then another part of the plaster may be uncovered and the opening of the wound be wiped but the plaster itself may not be wiped off since such wiping is tantamount to spreading the salve; and if one did spread the salve the obligation of a sin-offering is incurred.

Rab Judah citing Samuel ruled: The *halachah* is in agreement with R. Judah. This, R. H̄isda observed, was learnt only where it slipped off on to an object, but if it slipped off on to the ground all agree that it is forbidden to replace it on the wound.

Mar son of R. Ashi stated: I was once standing in the presence of my father when his plaster slipped off on to his pillow and he replace it. ‘Does not the Master accept’, I asked him, ‘the statement of R. H̄isda that they differed only where it slipped off on to an object but that if it slipped off on to the ground all agree that replacement is forbidden.

... [103a] Mishnah. A wen may be removed in the Temple but not in the country. If [the operation, however, must be performed] with an instrument it is forbidden everywhere.

Gemara. Is not this inconsistent with the following: Carrying it, bringing it from without the permitted Sabbath limit and removing its wen do not supersede the Sabbath ...

... [103b] What is the proof? Since it was taught: If a wen appeared on [the body of] a priest his fellow may bite it off for him with his teeth. Thus only 'with his teeth' but not with an instrument; only 'his fellow' but not he himself. Now whose view could this be? If it be suggested: That of the Rabbis, and [the permissibility is because it is in connection] with the Temple, the objection would arise: Since the Rabbis have elsewhere forbidden [such acts] only as a *shebuth*, what matters it here whether he or his fellow does the biting? Consequently it must represent, must it not, the view of R. Eliezer who ruled elsewhere that [for such acts] a sin-offering is incurred but here, though the preliminary requirements of a precept supersede the Sabbath, a change must be made as far as this is possible?—No, it may in fact represent the view of the Rabbis, and if the wen had grown on his belly the law would indeed have been so, but here we are dealing with one, for instance, that grew on his back or his elbows where he himself cannot remove it. If this, however represents the view of the Rabbis, why should he not be allowed to remove it with his hand, and thus you might easily derive the statement made by R. Eleazar, for R. Eleazar stated: They only differ in the case of removal with the hand but if it is done with an instrument all agree that guilt is incurred?—And according to your line of reasoning why should he not be permitted even in accordance with the view of R. Eliezer to remove it with his hand?—What an argument is this! If you grant that it represents the view of R. Eliezer one can easily see why removal with the hand was forbidden as a preventive measure against the use of an instrument, but if you maintain that it represents the view of the Rabbis, why should he not be allowed to remove it with his hand? And nothing more need be said about the matter. (Epstein 1935, pp. 712–15, 718–21).

3. Clarification of the Word “mor” (“מור”)

The word “מור” (lines 2–3) bears a *kamatz* “מֶר” (Kafih 1987, p. 51) in the pointed edition of the sugya (Amar 1980, p. 102b), and in the Jewish Yemenite tradition, the *kamatz* is pronounced as a *holam* (Qafih 1989, p. 931) (o) (Morag 1963, p. 100). Indeed, this word “מֶר” (mar) was that encountered by the fragment’s scribe, but he wrote it as he pronounced it phonetically or as he heard it audiographically—i.e., “מור” (*mor*). This phenomenon, of the pronunciation revealed in the fragment or manifested in the vocalization as well, is also familiar with regard to other words among some Yemenite Jews (Morag 2001, p. 46). This word is used in the fragment because it is the main part of the sage’s name “מר בר רב אשי” (Sokoloff 2002, p. 707).

4. Clarifying the Word “yabolet” (“יבולת”)

The fragment’s version preserves the word “יבולת” (wen) (lines 11, 26), unlike the other versions above, “בילת”. Some of the printed versions and commentators’ versions¹ also preserve the word “יבולת”, and some see this as the correct version (Rabbinovicz 1960, p. 203). Rashi too may have had before him the word “יבולת”, but he and other commentators distinguished between the word “יבלת” that appears in the Pentateuch (Lev. 22:22) and the same word here in the Mishna Eruvin. The word “יבלת” in the Pentateuch notes the type of defect (adjective) but does not state the name of the defect. In contrast, this word in the Mishna is considered one that notes the name of the defect (noun) (Yitzhaki 1961, p. 103a).

5. Formation Process of the Word “yabolet” (“יבולת”)

Regarding the formation process of the word “יבולת”, some of the researchers see it as another tradition preserved among Yemenite Jews (Kara 1980, p. 35); however, others admit that they have found no explanation for the formation of this word. However, they raised the possibility that the form “יבולת” may have appeared

¹ Rambam, Hilkhot Shabbat 9: 8, Kapach edition; Commentary of R. Hanan’el b. Shemuel on the Code of R. Isaac Alfasi on Tractate ‘Eruvin 103a, p. 604, n. 23, Klein edition, Jerusalem-Cleveland: Ofef Institute 1996; Perush R. Ishma’el ben Hakhmon ‘al Hilkhot ha-Rif, Eruvin 103a, Steinberg edition, Bnei Brak: Mishkan ha-Torah 1974; Rosh Mashbir, Eruvin 103a.

“under the influence of the preceding *bet* (ב) and the subsequent *lamed* (ל), although the usual phonetic conditions for this transformation do not exist here” (Breuer 2002, pp. 151, 268). This suggests a possible phonetic explanation for the formation of the word “יבולת”, as follows. When the letters *bet* (ב), *vav* (ו), *mem* (מ), and *feh* (פ) (whose pronunciation begins from the lips) bear a *dagesh*, an emphasizing diacritic, and are pointed with a *segol* (ֿ) and the next letter is also pointed with a *segol* (ֿ) (pronounced like a *patah* (ֿ) by Yemenite Jews), some may pronounce them as though pointed with a *holam* (ֹ) rather than with a *segol* (ֿ) (as with *patah*). This is also how their pronunciation will be heard by listeners, as here the word “yabelet” will be pronounced and heard “yabolat” (another example that illustrates a different pronunciation among some Yemenite Jews who pronounce the *holam* like a *tzereh* (ֿ)). Therefore, it is not inevitable that the disease “עֵרְרָה”—“aweret” (blindness) will also be pronounced and heard “aworat”, following the pattern of “yabolat” (and other words pronounced similarly are also possible, for example the word “ניתורח”) (Ginzberg 1969, p. 93).



Figure 1. Cambridge U-L T-S F2 (2) 23.

6. The Various Interpretations of the Word “yabolet” (“יבולת”)

The word “יבלת” (Ben Yechiel 1955, pp. 106–107) or “יבולת” (Zuckermann 1963, p. 620)² (and in the plural form “היבולות” (Weiss 1862, pp. 60b, 98b)) is mentioned in other places³ (Epstein 1982, p. 98b (Epstein 1982, pp. 96, 103) (Yeivin 1985, p. 971) and has received varied interpretations. Suggested interpretations of the word are “loose lump of flesh” (Epstein 1982, p. 96), “defect (Epstein 1982, p. 103) that is permanent” (Yitzhaki 1961, p. 103a), “excess [flesh] on his flesh” (Ben Yechiel 1955, p. 107), “a type of mole (Epstein 1957, p. 321) that protrudes” (Ginzberg 1929, p. 476), “a growth that one wishes to remove” (Safrai and Safrai 2009, p. 349), and “a wart on the skin” (Jastrow 1967, p. 561). Some liken the wart to “a nail’s head on the human body” (Kafah 1963, p. 156).

² Nega'im 2: 12.

7. The Usage of the Word “yabolet” (“יבולת”) in the Baraitot

The first baraita after the Mishna “הרכיבו והבאתו מחוץ לתחום והתיכת יבלתו” (line 12) has a parallel in the Mishna in Tractate Pesahim.⁴ There are slight differences between the versions of the fragment and the citation from Tractate Pesahim, “הרכבתו והבאתו מחוץ לתחום והתיכת יבלתו” (Epstein 1964, pp. 309 n. 2, 310).⁵ Some see the quotation of R. Eliezer’s words in the sugya in Eruvin as redundant (Rabbinovicz 1960, p. 203 n. 40).

The second baraita begins with the term “דתנן” (line 26) in the fragment is used for quotations of a Mishna (Epstein 1964, p. 814), but it is followed in the fragment by words from a Baraita “כהן שעלתה בו יבולת” (line 26) with a few changes in the version compared to the Tosefta’s version.⁶ The appropriate term for quoting a Baraita is “דתניא” (Epstein 1964, p. 814), as appears in the printed version and in MS Oxford 366 above. This Baraita is not recorded as a Baraita quoted with alternate terminology using the term “תנן” (Epstein 1964, p. 845). Therefore, the term “דתנן” in the fragment is not the appropriate term for quoting a Baraita; rather, it should have been “דתניא” (Rabbinovicz 1960, p. 204 n. 400).

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⁴ Pesachim 6: 1.

⁵ Pesachim 65b; Siphre zutta, Horovitz edition, Beha'alotekha 9: 2, p. 257.

⁶ Tesefta, Eruvin 8 (11): 20, Lieberman edition.

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