

Research in manuscript studies

A Diplomatic Edition of Mishna-Codex Kaufmann (A50)

Michael Rand, University of Cambridge

Hebrew philology is built on two fundamental pillars: the study of Biblical Hebrew (BH) and that of Rabbinic Hebrew (RH). In terms of the material basis for their study, these two fields have had and continue to have quite different trajectories. BH is set on a firm textual, lexicographical and grammatical basis, with an agreed-upon, expertly edited textual tradition on which depend several authoritative lexicographical works and grammars. This is not so with the foundational RH text, the Mishna, which lacks all three: 1) a complete critical text that is the object of scholarly consensus, 2) a scientific, all-encompassing lexicographical treatment, and 3) an authoritative, complete grammatical description. Instead, research in the field is conducted on a piecemeal basis—critical editions of individual tractates, and specialized lexicographical and grammatical studies (to replace/supplement studies that are founded on an inferior textual basis). This situation is the background for a new research project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), which will be undertaken over the course of the academic years 2016–2019 at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Cambridge. The aim of the project is to produce a full diplomatic edition of the single most important textual witness to the Mishna—ms. Kaufmann A50. The edition will attempt to establish a Mishna text that will provide a holistic description of (an important branch of) the RH language tradition, in a way that will in turn serve as a basis both for a sound grammatical/lexicographical description, as well as for comparison to related traditions of Hebrew (and Aramaic). The project team are: Dr Michael Rand (Principal Investigator), Dr Aaron Hornkohl (Co-Investigator), and Dr Shai Heijmans (Researcher). The team will be advised by Prof. Geoffrey Khan, and in its second and third years we also expect to be joined by an additional researcher.

The wellspring of the desiderata described above is the lack of a firm textual foundation—there exists no critical text of the Mishna on which an authoritative, holistic analysis may be based. There are a number of specific causes for this state of affairs. Within the Jewish tradition itself, there exists no single, uniquely authoritative recension of the Mishna text. Rather, the textual tradition may be divided into three main categories, each of them (at least potentially) equally valid: 1) a ‘Palestinian’ tradition of manuscripts containing

the free-standing text of the Mishna, 2) a ‘Babylonian’ textual tradition in which the Mishna has been copied as part of the Babylonian Talmud, and 3) the branch of the early printed editions, representing an attempt to bring the Palestinian textual tradition into closer conformity with that of the prestigious Babylonian Talmud, and associated with the name of Maimonides. Furthermore, with regard to the first two branches, it has not yet been firmly established which has the best claim to absolute historical priority—

i.e., which one more closely represents the ‘original’ text of the Mishna. This lack of clear-cut priority holds in the textual as well the linguistic spheres, since the Babylonian branch sometimes preserves authentic and ancient RH forms. It is, in any case, *a priori* clear that both recensions/branches are ultimately rooted in Palestine, the cradle of Rabbinic culture. This already-entangled textual/linguistic picture is further complicated by the existence of a fairly large number of Genizah fragments (G. Birnbaum analyses 51 fragments in his *The Language of the Mishna in the Cairo Genizah*), which are potentially of great importance due to their age and eastern provenance. However, their contribution is seriously limited by their fragmentary state, as a result of which not only is the amount of Mishna text attested in them restricted, but it is also difficult to sort them with regard to the Palestinian-Babylonian divide in the textual tradition.

In the wake of the pioneering philological research on RH conducted by E.Y. Kutscher in the second half of the previous century, it has become common practice to attempt to circumvent, or at least ‘contain’ this meth-



Fig. 1. MS Kaufman A50, f. 1v, *Mishna Berakhot* 1:1–5.

odological problem by means of establishing, in the case of a given Rabbinic work, an exemplary text (Kutscher's Hebrew term is *av-tekst*) that preserves to as great a degree as possible the pristine language of the original. Using his newly-developed methodology, Kutscher was able to establish ms. Kaufmann A50 of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—which represents the 'Palestinian' branch of the Mishna tradition—as the foremost exemplary text of the Mishna, and a prime witness to the western branch of RH. It is important to note that Kutscher's orientation was philological, and the linguistic authority claimed for this codex need not automatically be understood as implying superior authority in terms of the Mishna text, which must be established independently. Notwithstanding, it remains the case that, because of its comprehensiveness together with its (relative) antiquity, ms. Kaufmann is also an outstanding representative of the 'Palestinian' recension.

This codex, which contains an almost-complete Mishna text, was produced in Italy in the eleventh or twelfth century (fig. 1). A facsimile edition of the codex was published in 1929, and the monumental research of J.N. Epstein, Kutscher and others has established it as a source of nonpareil significance in the study of the Mishna, both textual as well as philological, with a plethora of editions and studies being dependent on its text. And yet, no complete critical edition of the text contained in this manuscript has yet been produced. This is the lacuna that our project seeks to fill.

The most basic aim of the project is therefore to produce a standard and comprehensive edition of ms. Kaufmann, on which all studies employing this source might be based and to which they might refer. One might argue that such an edition is unnecessary, as the manuscript is available not only in facsimile, but also on-line, in the form of high-quality digital scans (<<http://kaufmann.mtak.hu/en/ms50/ms50-coll1.htm>>), and a consonantal transcription produced by the Historical Hebrew Dictionary of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (<<http://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx>>). However, from the palaeographical perspective this is a highly complex manuscript, which comprises two separate traditions—the consonantal and the vocalic—and moreover contains a plethora of erasures, marginal corrections, additions, etc. The purpose of the diplomatic edition, therefore, is not simply to represent the textual data in typeface, but to interpret them palaeographically and philologically with the help of a critical apparatus.

As indicated above, ms. Kaufmann lies at the heart of much research on the Mishna and its language—it is frequently used as a base text in editions of individual tractates, and its linguistic data are employed in an extensive array of specialized lexicographical, phonological, morphological and syntactic studies. A diplomatic edition of this codex will therefore furnish a common, easily accessible basis for all such work in the future. Furthermore, the pal-

aeographic analysis of the text will represent an interpretation of the linguistic information that it contains, which scholars will be in a position either to verify or to falsify, such activity facilitating the emergence of a consensus regarding the palaeographic interpretation of the codex, which cannot be taken for granted. In particular, our edition will be the first to fully and systematically grapple with the vocalization of the codex, which constitutes a fundamental aspect of its contribution to the study of RH.

We intend for our edition, which will be prepared by Dr Heijmans, to be published as a printed edition, as well as to be made available in Open Access format as a fully-searchable PDF document. Finally, we will cooperate with two other, related projects that focus on the Mishna text: the CT-Mishna (<<http://mishna.huma-num.fr>>) and the Digital Mishna (<<http://www.digital-mishnah.umd.edu>>). As a long-term goal, both projects aim at comprehensive digital presentations of the manuscript witnesses to the Mishna, which will of course include ms. Kaufmann. Our work, which we will share with these two projects on an on-going basis, will help them to present a text of ms. Kaufmann that is maximally accurate from the palaeographical point of view, the greatest benefit coming from our work with the vocalization of the codex.