

'למזרח הלויים' OR 'למזרח ליום':  
THE TALMUDIC EVIDENCE FOR 1 CHRONICLES 26:17

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1 Chr 26:17 details the order of the daily levitical watch. The text, according to the MT, reads: למזרח הלויים ששה לצפונה ליום ארבעה לנגבה ליום ארבעה 'At the east—Six Levites; at the north—four daily; at the south—four daily' (NJPS).<sup>1</sup> The Peshitta has a reading similar to that of the MT, but containing an apparent error: למדנחא לויא למדנחא לוימא ארבעא למזרח.<sup>2</sup> This error is probably the result of translating מזרח twice.

However, the LXX preserves a different version of the beginning of this verse: Πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ἕξ τῆν ἡμέραν, which reflects a Hebrew text that reads למזרח ליום ששה. This variant creates symmetry between the different clauses of the verse: למזרח ליום ... לצפונה ליום ... לנגבה ליום. Several scholars have preferred the LXX reading, and this retroversion has been accepted in several recent commentaries and translations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The biblical manuscripts mentioned in the Kennicott collection contain no variant readings within the Masoretic texts.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Old Testament in Syriac* (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 1998) 64. The Mosul edition displays an attempt to correct this error, by repeating the translations of both למזרח and לצפונה: למדנחא לויא שחא למדנחא לגרביא לוימא ארבעא: למדנחא לוימא ארבעא. On the many textual errors in the Syriac version of Chronicles, see M. P. Weitzmann, "The Qaddish Prayer and the Peshitta of Chronicles," in *Hebrew and Arabic Studies in Honor of Joshua Blau* (ed. H. Ben-Shammai; Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 1993) 261–290 (Hebrew). The secondary nature of this section of the translation of Chronicles is discussed there on p. 264, n. 4

<sup>3</sup> See, for example S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (OTL; London, 1993) 450; W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (HAT; Tübingen, 1955) 172; J. C. McConville, *I & II Chronicles* (Philadelphia, 1984) 87, translates 'On the east there were six each day,' without noting the divergence from MT. Scribal errors of this kind, namely matathesis (ליום-לויים) and different division of

Support for this suggestion may be found in a textual tradition preserved in rabbinic literature.<sup>4</sup> In *b. Tamid* 27a,<sup>5</sup> we read, according to the Vilna edition:

מנא הני מילי? אמר רב יהודה מסורא, ואמרי לה במתניתא תנא, דכתיב "למזרח הלויים ששה לצפונה לויים ארבעה לנגבה לויים ארבעה ולאסופים שנים שנים".

On what Scriptural text was this practice based?—Rab Judah from Sura replied—according to others, it is taught in a Baraitha: Because it is written: *Eastward were six Levites, northward were four Levites, southward were four Levites, and for the Storehouse [asuppim] two and two.*<sup>6</sup>

However, the text of the Vilna edition here is without basis, and is certainly corrupt. Indeed, in the *editio princeps* of the Talmud (Venice 1523), which is the basis for all subsequent printings, the text of the quoted verse matches that of the LXX: למזרחה ליום ששה.<sup>7</sup> This is also the case in two manuscripts of the Talmud, MS

words (למזרחה-למזרח ה), are found in all of the textual witnesses of the Bible. See E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Assen-Maastricht, 1992) 209, 250–253.

<sup>4</sup> Much has been written about the biblical text as reflected in rabbinic literature. Of the recent studies, see D. Rosenthal, "The Sages' Methodical Approach to Textual Variants within the Hebrew Bible," in *Isac Leo Seeligmann Volume* (ed. Y. Zakovitch and A. Rofé; Jerusalem, 1983) 395–417 (Hebrew); M. Kahana, "The Text of the Bible As Reflected in Manuscript Vatican 32 of the Sifre on Numbers and Deuteronomy," *Mehqerei Talmud* I (Jerusalem, 1990) 1–10 (Hebrew); Y. Maori, "Rabbinic Midrash As Evidence for Textual Variants in the Hebrew Bible: History and Practice," in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah—Contributions and Limitations* (ed. S. Carmy; Northvale, N.J., 1996) 102–129.

<sup>5</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this is the only place in which this verse is cited in rabbinic literature.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from the Soncino translation of *b. Tamid* (London, 1960) 5, except for the verse from Chronicles that has been corrected in this edition according to the reading of the MT.

<sup>7</sup> In the Vilna edition (1886), one detects a correction of ששה ליום למזרחה לויים to ששה למזרח הלויים, apparently under the influence of the MT reading. The continuation of the verse was then "corrected" twice according to this pattern, from לויים to ליום, thereby creating symmetry between the various elements of the verse. The resulting text, the invention of late printers, differs from all extant textual witnesses.

S. Rosenfeld, *Mishpechat Soferim* (Vilna, 1883) 241, prefers the Talmudic tradition as represented in the later (and erroneous) printed editions over that found in the MT (and similarly in the Targum to Chronicles). This approach is characteristic of the author who consistently favors the textual variants found in rabbinic literature over the readings of the Masoretic Text.

Florence<sup>8</sup> and MS Vatican 120, as well as in quotations in early medieval literature of the 11th century, such as the commentary attributed to R. Gershom<sup>9</sup> and an anonymous early Ashkenazi commentary.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, in MS Paris 1408 of *b. Tamid* the text of the verse matches the MT: למזרח הלויים ששה. This was also the reading of the anonymous commentary printed alongside *b. Tamid*,<sup>11</sup> the commentary of R. Asher (13th–14th cent.),<sup>12</sup> the commentary ascribed to R. Abraham b. Daud (13th cent.),<sup>13</sup> and an additional early anonymous commentary (app. 13th cent.).<sup>14</sup> The verse was corrected accordingly in R. Bezalel Ashkenazi's *marginalia*, which altered the text of the *editio princeps* to agree with the MT.<sup>15</sup> The text of the verse in MS Munich 95, למזרח הלויים, can be seen as a conflation of למזרח הלויים from one group of textual witnesses and למזרח הלויים from the other.

<sup>8</sup> Florence National Library II 17–19 (facsimile edition; Jerusalem, 1972) 301.

<sup>9</sup> See Y. Goldstoff (ed.), *Perushei Ha-Rishonim z"l le-Masechet Tamid* (Jerusalem, 1989) (Hebrew): "הא האי קרא למזרח הלויים".

<sup>10</sup> See U. Fuchs, "Shnei Perushim Hadashim 'al Masechet Tamid," *Kobez Al Yad* 15 (in press) (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> According to the Venice edition: קרא במשכן כתיב בימי דוד. הכי קאמר למזרח הלויים ששה וכו'. למזרח לויים צריך ששה וכו'.

<sup>12</sup> Goldstoff, *Perushei Ha-Rishonim*, 153.

<sup>13</sup> Goldstoff, *Perushei Ha-Rishonim*, 27. The verse is not quoted there, but from the commentary itself it is clear that it read למזרח הלויים: "נראה דהאי לויים היינו דאיכא יום שלם ויהי: למזרח הלויים", from which one can see that he did not read לויים in relation to the east.

<sup>14</sup> See: S. Hasida (ed.), "Shitta le-Masechet Tamid le-Rabenu Shmuel b. R. Yitshak z"l," in *Sefer Zikaron La-Rav Zolty* (Jerusalem, 1977) 188: "למזרח הלויים".

<sup>15</sup> See Y. D. Ilan, *Shitta Mekubetsset 'al Masechet Tamid* (Bnei Brak, 1982) 23: "דכתי למזרח הלויים כצ"ל". This is the work of R. Shlomo 'Adani, who collected the writings of R. Bezalel Ashkenazi. On this work see E. Schochetman, "'Binyan-Shlomo Lehokhmat-Bezalel' by R. Shlomo Adani," *Alei Sefer* 3 (1976) 63–93 (Hebrew); M. Benayhu, "The Glosses of Rabbi Bezalel Ashkenazi and Rabbi Yehosef Ashkenazi and Their Source Document," *Asufot* 1 (1987) 47–104 (Hebrew).

It would seem that the original textual tradition of the verse in *b. Tamid* is למזרחה ליום, as in the Septuagint.<sup>16</sup> The reading למזרח הליום would appear to be a correction towards the MT. Such 'corrections' are a well-known phenomenon. The Talmudic tradition of the verse, corresponding to the LXX, was preserved through the 16<sup>th</sup> century, even though it was at odds with the text of the MT. By contrast, the MT influenced medieval commentators and scribes, who corrected the Talmud's text to conform with the text of the verse as known to them. This correction was only partially successful. Even the contemporary editions of the Talmud do not fully reflect this emendation. The verse as it appears in them agrees neither with the MT nor with the original Talmudic reading.

<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, the evidence would be even stronger if the reading מזרחה ליום actually formed the basis of the Talmudic proof. Nevertheless, the large number of textual witnesses that preserved this reading and its accordance with the version of the LXX would appear to indicate its reliability. On the distinction between evidence of textual variants derived from citations, and evidence derived from exegetical discussion see, for example, D. Rosenthal, "The Sages' Methodical Approach"; M. Kahana, "The Text of the Bible" (*supra*, n. 4).