CHAPTER 9

The History of Exile and Redemption According to Astrology

9.1 Subject and Structure of the Chapter

The structure of the fifth chapter of Megillat ha-Megalleh can be summarized as follows:

MM5a  Introduction (MM 111:1–119:9)
MM5a.1  Reasons for using astrology in Megillat ha-Megalleh (MM 111:1–14)
MM5a.2  Justification for the use of astrology in general (MM 111:15–115:29)
MM5a.3  Description of the astrological method in Megillat ha-Megalleh (MM 116:1–119:9)
MM5b  Astrological history (MM 119:11–145:29)
MM5b.1  From the Exodus to the First Exile (MM 119:11–133:11)
MM5b.2  Between the two exiles (MM 133:12–136:25)
MM5b.3  Time of the new religions (MM 136:27–144:27)
MM5b.4  Conclusions concerning the newer religions (MM 144:27–145:29)
MM5c  Speculation about the future using astrology (MM 145:30–154:20)
MM5d  Conclusion of the chapter (MM 154:21–155:4)

The introductory part (MM5a) begins in the style that is typical for Bar Hyya in Megillat ha-Megalleh. First, he explains his move to the use of astrology (MM5a.1) and then continues with a derasha-like passage in which he further justifies the legitimacy of astrology on a talmudic and biblical basis (MM5a.2). This is structurally roughly similar to the beginning of the second chapter, where he first announces his move to investigate the question of the duration of the world from the Scriptures, and then embarks on a derasha-like passage that carries the discourse further. Here, when Bar Hyya moves to describe his astrological method (MM5a.3), the style resembles more that of his scientific books, but the element of darshanut is present, too.

For the introductory part, a full translation will be given here in ch. 9.2 together with comments. The part on astrological method will be complemented with a deeper analysis and commentary in 9.3, in particular on those aspects that form the basis of the structuring and periodization of history on an astrological basis.
The astrological history (MM5b) has its own structure and form. It is arranged according to the astrological cycles: the character of each cycle is interpreted based on a horoscope for its beginning. For each horoscope, the presentation moves from very technical details towards conclusions concerning the historical events of the period under interpretation. There are also excursions that are not directly related to the horoscopes, and the part on astrological history concludes with Bar Hiyya’s affirmation of the supremacy of the Jewish religion.

For the astrological history part, an almost full translation will be given together with explanatory comments in chapters 9.4 (on the history until the Second Temple) and 9.5 (on the history after the Second Temple, where the emphasis turns to the nations and their new religions). The main rhetorical content of the fifth chapter of Megillat ha-Megalleh is here, despite being intermingled with extremely technical details. It is here that Bar Hiyya explains the course of history and continues his argument concerning the special status of the Jews and the Jewish religion. This argument culminates in MM5b.4 where Bar Hiyya claims to have proved that the newer religions are all false.

For the part that contains speculation on the future (MM5c), the contents will be summarized, and only some passages given in translation, in ch. 9.6. The conclusion of the chapter (MM5d) is again translated, in 9.6, as it is a short passage which, at the same time, concludes the speculation on the future, the whole chapter and the whole book.

For the present study, the most essential part of the chapter is the astrological history. Generally, a study of an astrological history may concentrate either on the astronomical, astrological or the historical contents of the text. An astronomically oriented study, as exemplified by many of the studies of David Pingree, concentrates on the astronomical details of the horoscopes, trying to reconstruct the calculations, determine which parameter values have been used in the calculations and point out possible errors in the text. An astrologi-