AN ARABIC VERSION OF “THE SWORD OF MOSES”

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In a recent article, I dealt with an Arabic version of Sefer ha-Razim, the manuscript of which I discovered in Egypt in 1973. As I have shown, this Christian Arabic manuscript which bears the title Sifr Ādam “The Book of Adam”) actually contained the translation of three different Jewish magical works. One of these proved to be a version of Sefer ha-Razim disclosing striking similarities with the work reconstructed by Margalioth. This offered the general framework for the whole treatise which included two other magical works. One of these was a version of Ḥarba de Moshe (“The Sword of Moses”) which, however, did not even mention Moses as the recipient of the Ḥarba. The other piece contained many astro-magical elements and revealed a definite relationship to the Sefer ha-Yashar (“The Book of Righteousness”). A Jewish manuscript from Yemen which comprises versions of both Sefer ha-Razim and Sefer ha-Yashar was particularly illuminative in identifying the original source for the astro-magical section in the Arabic text. This Arabic Sifr Ādam in its ultimate form might have been the result of the redactional activity of a Coptic priest. In addition to the Christianization of the work, some Islamic influence can also be detected in the text.

Recently, scholarly interest in Ḥarba de Moshe has manifestly grown. After a long period of silence, Gaster’s pioneering edition was followed by the publication of another version of the Ḥarba by Schäfer together with other pieces of the Hekhalot literature. In his edition of the Hekhalot texts, §§ 640–650 are related to what he calls Gaster’s Recension A, while §§ 598–622 can be connected to Gaster’s Recension B. Yuval Harari’s new edition of the treatise with a comprehensive study on the whole subject may give a new impetus to research

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1 See Fodor 2006.
2 See Margalioth 1966.
3 MS New York 40. I am grateful to Reimund Leicht for this reference. For the edition of the Sefer ha-Yashar, see Wandrey 2004.
4 Gaster 1925–28a (transl.), and Gaster 1925–28b (text).
5 SHL (text), ÜdHL IV. (transl.), 1–17, 42–50.
on the subject.6 Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker’s article on deciphering an intelligible Greek text hidden behind a group of seemingly unintelligible nomina barbara or voces magicae in the Harba must also be mentioned in this connection.7 Although not related directly to the Harba, several of Gideon Bohak’s articles have relevance for this subject because they deal with the interpretation of the voces magicae in the Hekhalot literature.8 Finally, Klaus Herrmann’s paper9 on the Tefillat Rav Hammuna Sava can be cited, because this magical prayer and its background help to understand better the Arabic “Sword” and its supposed Jewish source.

In the following, I wish to examine this newly discovered Arabic version of the Harba de Moshe which could shed light on the birth of the Arabic translation, on the work which might have served as a basis for the Arabic version and on the milieu of their composition. As a matter of fact, the questions raised by the study of the Ḥarba are closely related to one of the main concerns of research on the relationship between Jewish liturgy, Hekhalot literature and magical ritual,10 so it will also be of relevance to show whether the Arabic text offers any clue for the elucidation of some problems in this respect. Since I do not wish to deal with the manuscript tradition of the Harba in detail and since the occasional deficiencies of Gaster’s edition do not affect my way of research or conclusions, I usually refer to the latter when I quote the Harba.

Sefer ha-Razim in Margalioth’s reconstruction described the seven firmaments with their ministering angels and recorded their names together with the magical recipes which were selected on the basis of the competences of each angelic group. Assessing the importance of the magical element in Sefer ha-Razim, it is worthwhile to quote Joseph Dan’s opinion literally:11

In spite of the fact that this is one of the most methodical and extreme magical works in the history of Jewish literature, it is clear that the

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6 Harari 1997.
7 Rohrbacher-Sticker 1996.
8 See e.g. Bohak 1995 and Bohak 2001.
9 Herrmann 2005.
10 For the state of research on this subject, see e.g. Naveh and Shaked 1993. 17–31; Shaked 1995, MTKG II, 1–25; Herrmann 2005. 177–179.
11 Dan 1993, 19.