CHAPTER 13

The Binding Fragments of Midrash Tanhuma (Buber) from the Municipal Library of Trier

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1 Introduction

Midrash Tanhuma, a rabbinic commentary to the Torah, is regarded as a rather late composition in comparison to the classical works of Midrash, such as the Halachic Midrashim and the Rabbot Midrashim. The manuscript used by Solomon Buber for his edition is no longer assumed to represent the earliest version of Midrash Tanhuma (“Tanhuma ha-qadum we-ha-yashan”). Although this recension seems to preserve early traditions—even from the era of the Second Temple—it is most likely that the main body of this recension has been compiled by Ashkenazic Jews (in Byzantine Italy?) in the Middle Ages.¹ As has correctly been summarized by John T. Townsend, whose translations of Midrash Tanhuma are a cornerstone for every scholar interested in this particular field of Jewish literature, the exact place of compilation of the work remains obscure.² In recent years, however, more and more new textual witnesses have come to light, mainly fragments from the Tanhuma Buber recension that were persevered in book bindings of Christian books and manuscripts from Western and Southern Europe, that have later been opened. All these discoveries support the suggestion that the manuscripts that were used by Buber represent a later Ashkenazic version of that commentary to the Torah and can no longer be treated as early witnesses of a Midrash Tanhuma-Yelamdenu.³

In two previous articles I have published fragments of Midrash Tanchma (Buber) preserved in other German libraries as binding fragments in Christian books. These manuscript fragments have been written in an Ashkenazic handwriting, and they all transmit a recension very similar to the complete manuscripts used by Buber. In light of the fact that they have been reused for book binding in the Middle Ages in Germany, it is most likely that they all reflect Ashkenazic recensions of this widespread rabbinic commentary to the Torah.

Fragments from different manuscripts of this Midrash are known since the 19th century. Jacob Bassfreund (1850–1919) was perhaps the first to describe a fragment of this Midrash identified in a book binding from the Municipal Library (Stadtbibliothek) Trier. This fragment however was not studied in light of the more recent evidence. Another piece from a different manuscript in Wolfenbüttel was published by Kurt Wilhelm. In addition, a leaf of a different Yelamdenu Midrash discovered in the Heidelberg University library has been published by Ephraim E. Urbach. Another fragment of Midrash Tanhuma came to light quite recently in the Russian State Library in Moscow. Additional fragments with Tanhuma or Yelamdenu Midrashim, mainly fragments from the Cairo Genizah, were gathered in photocopies and described by Marc Bregman in his doctoral dissertation. Only recently a new and complete edition of the so-called ‘Tanhuma Mann’ has been published and completes the picture of the wide range of Tanhuma materials from the Cairo Genizah. The oldest European manuscript fragment of this

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10 Cf. G. Vachman (ed.), *Midrash Hadash al Hatorah also known as Tanhuma Mann Based on JTS Rab. 1671 with an Introduction, References, and Notes* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute, 2013).