

## *Review Essay*

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# *A Job Well Done*

*Sefer Iyyov Be-Veit Midrasho Shel Rashi*  
(The Book of Job in the School of Rashi)  
ed. AVRAHAM SHOSHANA. Jerusalem: Makhon Ofeq, 2000.

*Peirush Rabbi Shmuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) Le-Sefer Iyyov*  
(The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir [Rashbam] on the Book of Job)  
ed. Sara Japhet. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000.

A man once approached Rabbi Joshua Isaac Shapira, known as “Eizel Harif” on account of his keen intellect and acerbic wit, and asked him for an approbation for a Bible commentary he had written. After examining the work, R. Eizel allowed that he could only approve of the commentary to Job. When the man asked why, R. Eizel replied: “Job had so many *tzoros* that your commentary will do him no additional harm.” Fate was unkind to Job and, as a result, it had been unkind to northern French commentaries on Job as well.

The enigmatic nature of the Book of Job in both form and content has always invited commentary, and nary a principal *parshan* of the Middle Ages declined that invitation, including: Saadyah Gaon;<sup>1</sup> all three Kimḥis, Isaiah of Trani and Zerahyah of Barcelona;<sup>2</sup> Berekhayah Ha-

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Nakdan;<sup>3</sup> and Ramban.<sup>4</sup> Along with traces of the lost commentary of Eliezer of Beaugency published by Poznanski<sup>5</sup> and the commentary of Yosef Kara published by Moshe Ahrend,<sup>6</sup> the publication of the two new editions reviewed here offer a substantial contribution to this field by disseminating the texts of no fewer than four full Northern French commentaries to Job: Rashi, Rashbam, Rabbenu Tam, and an anonymous student of Rashi.

While the commentary of Rashi has long been a ubiquitous feature of Jewish Bible study, the critical edition of his commentaries is a comparatively sparse phenomenon complicated, paradoxically, by a surfeit of manuscript evidence. The integrity of Rashi texts is indispensable for practitioners of *Torah u-Madda* in particular. Without the anchor Rashi provides us in tradition, we would be engulfed in an exegetical whirlpool. Without correct texts of his commentaries, however, we chase a will-o'-the-wisp.

One telling illustration will suffice. A standard, even endearing feature of Rashi is that he frequently offers alternative interpretations to the same verse. In some texts, however, the latter interpretation, designated R"Y or *Rashi Yashan* (Older Rashi) and introduced with the phrase *ve-omer ani* ("while I say"), explicitly contradicts the former. Earlier supercommentaries (and some contemporaries) spin their hermeneutical wheels in vain searches for a resolution to the "*setirah*" in Rashi. Abraham Berliner, however, discovered that many of these same contradictory interpretations are attributed in later Northern French exegesis to R. Yosef Kara. Berliner deduced from the evidence he gathered that *ve-omer ani* originally constituted a dissenting exegetical note that R. Yosef added in the margin of his own Rashi text and signed with his initials. Later copyists inadvertently interpolated the marginal comment into the body of the text, where even later copyists (or printers), in consternation over the explicit contradiction, erroneously identified R"Y as *Rashi Yashan*, implying that it was an older interpretation that had been superseded.

The Rashi commentary on Job comprises the bulk of both Shoshana's book and its introduction. The editor set two goals: to establish the tradition of Rashi's commentary and to cull its most reliable text from among a possible 50 (of a total of 332) manuscripts listed by D.S. Blondheim.<sup>7</sup> With respect to the first goal, two main traditions presented themselves, one brief and the other prolix. The latter contains numerous passages explicitly labeled in many other manuscripts as "additions" (*tosafot*); the former omits them. The editor's conclusions,

in which I heartily concur, are that the brief tradition is the original one. Most of the *tosafot* are interpolations, yet some, notably those that have acquired an independent exegetical existence, may be rooted in the original commentary of Rashi or another member of his school. This expanded tradition is the one that has appeared uniformly—though not identically—in the standard *Mikra'ot Gedolot* editions.

Once these conclusions were reached, a more “mechanical” process made possible the identification of schools of manuscripts and, eventually, the isolation of one manuscript strand as the most reliable text of that tradition. In this case, that strand consists, primarily, of ms. Vienna Hebr. 3 (14–15<sup>th</sup> century Ashkenaz) with corrections and additions provided on the basis of ms. Rostock Or. 32 (which bears the date 1211).

The commentary of the anonymous student was drawn from a unique manuscript in the State Library of Moscow (*Guenzburg* 520) and is attributed to a student on account of the deferential way in which he refers to Rashi. A portion of the same commentary was discovered by Binyamin Richler in the binding of a document kept in the state archive of Pesaro, Italy, and a companion fragment there (containing a portion of the R. Tam commentary) refers to the author of this commentary as “Rabbi Sh,” whom the editor tentatively identifies as R. Shemayah, Rashi’s copyist and one of his foremost disciples.

A Job commentary by Rabbenu Tam, R. Yaakov ben Meir, the grandson of Rashi, had been presumed since the earlier publication of the anonymous Northern French commentaries by Wright and Sulzbach (Frankfort, 1911). It was only in 1993, however, that Binyamin Richler identified ms. Rostock Cod. Or. 33 (mistakenly cited in the English Introduction to *Shoshana* as Or. 24) as the text of that commentary, which Richler subsequently identified in a second fragment of the Pesaro archive as well. Finally, Menahem Cohen identified another portion of the commentary in ms. Oxford Opp. Add. Fol. 22.<sup>8</sup>

While *Shoshana*’s editing and arrangement of these three commentaries are commendable and instructive, the same cannot easily be said of the commentaries themselves. To have one Northern French commentary, that of Rashi, which pays scant attention to the question of theodicy that undergirds the Book of Job is expectable (of Rashi) and therefore acceptable. To have three such kindred commentaries is disappointing. Even more disappointing is their tiresome uniformity.

In three chapters (3, 32, 38) selected more or less arbitrarily, a comparison between the three commentaries showed a perplexingly overwhelming redundancy. While there do exist several notable differences

of opinion among them, their repetitiveness bespeaks reformulation rather than reconsideration and begs the question: Why did Rabbenu Tam and the anonymous student feel compelled to initiate whole new commentaries rather than just record their few strictures on one another?

The consideration of that question may well provide a significant insight into what Bible commentary meant in Northern France. Before we tackle that considerable question, however, we would do well to visit the second volume under review here.

Sara Japhet is no newcomer to either Northern French Biblical exegesis or the controversies that surround their authorship and redaction. She is the editor (along with Robert B. Salters) of *The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qoheleth*<sup>9</sup> and participated in what appeared, at times, to be an endless polemic with Avraham Grossman<sup>10</sup> over the relative merits of manuscript identifications and attributions.

In a review I published of that book,<sup>11</sup> I cited and commended a comment by the editors in their introduction: “The principal value of this commentary is not to be assessed by its authorship. It is an important composition in its own right, adding dimension to the work of the great exegetical school in medieval northern France.” It is in light of that observation, and in light of the commentary attributed to Rashbam reviewed here, that I would like to attempt to answer the question I posed just above regarding the repetitiveness of the Rashi-related commentaries.

As a fulcrum with which to pry open this question, let us take the matter of the concluding portion of Rashi’s commentary on Job. Most texts of the commentary, manuscript and print alike, stop short of the end of the book, with the notation that Rashi was not responsible for its completion. Most simply report the facts (“heretofore, the commentary is Rashi’s; henceforth it is not Rashi’s”); one manuscript, however, ms. Parma, De Rossi 181 (13-14 century), attributes the sudden termination of Rashi’s commentary following Job 40:25 to his untimely death:

Just as a grower of figs gathers his fruit in a timely fashion, so did the Holy One know the time to gather the soul of our master Shelomoh and enter him in the academy on high. “He was no more, for God had taken him.”

Some versions of the commentary end there abruptly; others provide a conclusion. One concluding commentary is attributed to Rabbi Yaakov Nazir, a Provencal mystic of the 12th-13th century. An alternative conclusion is attributed to Rabbi Yosef Kara. A third is attributed to Rashbam. A modern scholar, L. Donath, describing a manuscript of Rashi on Job in the library of the University of Rostock in 1874, put it this way:

Either the great master did not place the final and improved touches on this work—as death must have prevented him—or we possess only the written notes of his students whose copies deviated, essentially, one from another.

Rashi appears to have stimulated two distinct “schools.” On the one hand, we have a school—represented by R. Tam and the Student—that is in basic agreement with him nearly all the time and concentrated on clarifying and expounding upon his essential, but characteristically brief commentary. The second school—represented by Kara and Rashbam—on the other hand, took Rashi’s commentary as a thesis to which it provided both a philological and literary antithesis in an attempt to produce a synthesis between Rashi’s native and intuitive grasp of the text and their more sophisticated and methodical approach.

Kara, who relocated from Provence to northern France, introduced Rashi to the philological method of the *Poterim* personified in his illustrious uncle, Menahem bar Hēlbo. Kara appears to have been the first among these exegetes to codify rules of Biblical style and syntax. His interpretations, based upon these insights—to which he refers as *leshon ha-katuv*—impressed Rashi, who is cited in early manuscripts of the Job commentary as declaring: “So did R. Yosef interpret and it pleases me.”

While these insights came too late in Rashi’s life to affect his exegetical oeuvres, they had a profound influence on Rashbam, whose commentaries diverge from those of Rashi precisely and profoundly in the areas pioneered by Kara. The acknowledgment that Rashbam wrested from Rashi (and cited in his commentary on Genesis 37:1), “if I but had the time I would have to fashion new interpretations according to the textual insights (*peshatot*) that reveal themselves (*ha-mithaddeshot*) daily,” was the beneficiary of the groundwork laid by Kara. This acknowledgement also informs us that we do not have the best commentary of which Rashi was capable, just the only commentary for which he had the time.

The very process by which Rashi’s “*peshatot*” became a “*peirush*” is itself illustrative. Rather than a literary composition, Rashi’s Torah thoughts were probably first presented as lectures to his students. (Menahem Banitt, a contemporary authority on Old French who has analyzed Rashi’s syntax, has even suggested that those lectures were conducted in French and later transcribed in Hebrew!) Their transformation from “course notes” into a running commentary may even have been posthumous, given that Rashi turned to Bible relatively late in life, as indicated by the scribal tradition we cited on Job 40:25 regarding his

death during its preparation. The commentaries attributed to R. Tam and the Student may, therefore, be compilations of Rashi's lectures rather than original works whereas Kara and Rashbam were independent commentaries, albeit variations on Rashi themes.

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This pattern of clarification or disagreement in grammatical or philological analysis, even where there is overall exegetical agreement, is utilized by Rashbam to considerable effect. Its most striking use in the Book of Job, however, is on 11:17, *ta'ufah ka-boker tihyeh*.<sup>12</sup>

The standard *Mikra'ot Gedolot* text of Rashi there reads:

תעופה — אפילה שלך כבקר תהיה ע"א (ענין אחר) תעופה לשון עפעפי שחר (איוב ג) שאם  
הוא לשון אופל היה לו לומר תעופה נקוד בשו"א כמו תנופה תקומה תרומה תנומה

After defining *ta'ufah* as darkness (*afelah*), Rashi cites a second, conflicting definition of *ta'ufah* as light (*af'appei shahar*), with the vocalization of *ta* rather than *te* (with a *sheva*) cited as proof. This comment is problematic for two reasons. First of all, the two interpretations contradict each other, and, secondly, what does the vocalization of the letter *tav* have to do with the definition of the word, rather than its part of speech? Had Rashi been in doubt of the actual meaning of the word, he would, presumably, have noted all the reasonable alternatives every time he treated that word (or a form thereof) in his commentary. The appearance of contradictory interpretations in different locations, on the other hand, is more suggestive of an interruption in the transmission of Rashi's understanding of that word.

Presuming that only one of the two contradictory definitions is actually Rashi's, we must establish three things: (1) Which definition is authentically his? (2) Why was it set aside in favor of a later (and erroneous) definition? (3) Where did that second definition originate?

(1) We may determine Rashi's original definition from his citation of our verse as a proof-text in his commentary on the cognate form *efah*, in Amos 4:13:

עיפה—הופך נוגהן של רשעים לחשך אפלה כמו . . . תעופה כבקר תהיה (איוב יא) חשך  
כבקר יהי מאיר

It is apparent that Rashi defined *ta'ufah* as darkness (as it is defined in the *Maḥberet* of Menahem ben Saruk, Rashi's authority on lexicography, as well).

(2) The interpolation of *af'appei shahar*, “glimmerings of dawn,” into Rashi’s commentary derives from a misunderstanding of Rashbam’s criticism, which reads as follows:

תעופה לשון חשך . . . ולשון הקונטרס לא יתכן תעופה הוא שם דבר אופל שאם  
כדבריו היה לו להנקד תייו של תעופה בחטף

Rashbam’s challenge to Rashi’s designation of *ta’ufah* as a noun (*shem davar*)—while he thought it was a verb—was misunderstood as opposition to its very definition (*ofel*), leading to the alternative (and erroneous) suggestion of “glimmerings of dawn.”

(3) That alternative definition of *ta’ufah* first appears, to our knowledge, in the *Kitab al-Usul* (*Sefer ha-Shorashim*) of Ibn Jannaḥ and subsequently appears as a second opinion in the commentary of Moshe Kimḥi (ad. loc.).

Having been led astray by either the text of Rashbam or Kara, the copyists—who left unmistakable traces of their presence elsewhere in this verse in the abbreviation: (ספרים אחרים איננו סא"א) with which the commentary to the verse begins—sought and found in Ibn Jannaḥ or Kimḥi another definition, which they appended to the original grammatical observation of Rashbam.

#### In Conclusion:

- (1) The study of the Bible, including its most enigmatic and challenging portions, was hale and hearty in Northern France during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, even among the circles of “Tosafists,” ordinarily renowned for their Talmudic studies.
- (2) The later commentaries all took their inspiration and cue from Rashi.
- (3) Feelings of filial piety aside, even those who were nearest and dearest to Rashi did not hesitate to challenge him and disagree with his interpretations—where they had solid philological or grammatical grounds on which to do so.

All the rest is commentary.

## Notes

1. Joseph Derenbourg, *Oeuvres Completes de R. Saadia ben Yosef al-Fayyumi* (New York, 1979); Lenn Evan Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job by Saadiah ben Joseph al-Fayyumi* (New Haven, 1988); Yosef Kafah, *Iyyov: im Tirgum u-Perush Saadyah ben Yosef* (Jerusalem, 1972).
2. Israel Schwarz, *Tikvat Enosh* (Berlin, 1862).
3. William Wright, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London, 1905).
4. Charles D. Chavel, *Kitvei Ramban* vol. I (Jerusalem, 1963).
5. Samuel Poznanski, *Mavo al Hakhmei Zarfai Mefarshei ha-Mikra* (Warsaw, 1913), p. 164.
6. Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1988.
7. D.S. Blondheim, "Liste des Manuscrits des Commentaires Bibliques de Raschi," *Revue Des Etudes Juives* 91 (1939): 1-55. "Manuscript tradition" is a *terminus technicus* of textual criticism referring to the larger picture, including such questions as: is the text authentic, how many copies exist overall, into how many "schools" are they divisible, etc.
8. In 1939, Isaac Maarsen, Chief Rabbi of the Hague, published an article in *MGWJ* vol. 83 on Rashi's commentaries to Proverbs and Job from which it is apparent that he was preparing a critical edition of them. The Rostock manuscript was one of several he described and it was on this recommendation that I attempted to secure a copy of it in 1981. Although a "long shot," the library of the University of Rostock—in East Germany—agreed to provide a microfilm in exchange for a stipulated American publication. I subsequently donated a copy to the Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscript Division of the Jewish National Library. Maarsen perished in the Holocaust, his work incomplete and his notes lost. It is a fitting tribute to his memory that the present volume resonates, in part, from the work he began.
9. Magnes Press-E.J. Brill, 1985
10. *Ibid.*, p. 243
11. *Jewish Quarterly Review* 77, 1-3 (1986-87), 251-252.
12. See my "Ta' ufa kabboqer tihyeh: The Vicissitudes of Rashi's Commentary on Job 11:17," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 18(1986): 87-89.



