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INTRODUCTION

Michael Higger, in his pioneering studies of The Minor Tractates, treated the Derech Erez literature in its various treatises in a number of different publications. In 1929 he published his *Massechtot Ze'ivot* (Bloch Publishing Co., New York), in which he included versions of the tractates: *Yir'at Het*, *Derech Erez Ze'ira*, *'Arayot*, *Ma'asim* and *Gadol ha-Shalom*. He subsequently published additional notes to this volume in a slim pamphlet which appeared in Jerusalem in 1935 (14 pp.). In that same year he published his *Massechtot Derech Erez* (The Treatises Derek Erez), which consists of critical editions of "Masseket Derek Erez, Pirke Ben Azzai, (and) Tosefta Derek Erez." This volume included an English translation (which I have not followed). In the following year he published a critical edition of *Massechet Kallah* and *Kallah Rabbati* (which is a sort of Talmud-like commentary to certain chapters of *Derech Erez*).

Already in his earliest publication of 1929, on the basis of an Oxford manuscript (896, Poc. 262), he printed a section of *Derech Erez Zuta* (hereafter DEZ) comprising chapters five to eight. This appeared in that manuscript, and others, as a distinct literary unit, entitled "*Derech Erez Ze'ira*." (See the text *ibid.*, pp. 81-91, and his notes on pp. 139-142.) In the 1935 pamphlet he listed variant readings (pp. 12-14). In his introduction to *Massechtot Derech Erez* (1935) he presented a scheme for dividing the manuscript evidence of the *Derech Erez* "complex" into four main groups, representing "four distinct versions." The first of these, which he labelled Class A, had in his view the characteristics of a "Geonic version," which included *Massechet Yir'at Het* (DEZ, chapters 1-4 and 9), and "a later treatise" under the name of "*Derek Erez Ze'ira*..." (which) included chapters 5-8 of the original versions of *Derek Erez Zuta*." (See English introduction, pp. 20-21, Hebrew introduction, pp. 11-12, 15, 24-25. And see my 1982 edition [below], pp. 9, 178.) Our text appears on pages 112-134 of that edition (his chapters 4.1-7.12). Each of his subsequent publications included additional material, such as further

variant readings, more references to related material, added bibliographic information, etc. Higger, however, never attempted to consolidate and order all the rich corpus of data that he had collected, and he did not draw from it final and definitive conclusions. Furthermore, in all his editions he limited himself to brief comments, mainly of a textual nature, with cross-references of various kinds. He never wrote a real commentary to any of these texts.

In 1950 Rabbi Asher Prizker published a small popular vocalized edition of Massechtot Derech Erez (Tel Aviv, Bitan ha-Sefer publishing), based on Higger's edition and subdivided accordingly, with the very briefest of explanatory notes. His text begins with Derech Erez Zuta, which, however, included only Derech Erez Ze'ira (chapters 1-4, pp. 1-12). In 1979 I also published a small, pocket-size, popular edition of Derech Erez Zuta (72 pp.), with short explanatory comments. In 1982 a second edition appeared, with an additional 112 pages of scholarly references and comments, a bibliography, several excursus, etc. (pp. 73-184). The (vocalized) text was based on Higger's reading, but was organized according to the standard order of the Vilna Talmud edition, with the exception of chapter 11, which was excluded. This I had already published in a sumptuous edition entitled Great is Peace — Gadol ha-Shalom (Jerusalem 1974), which was presented by Prime Minister Menachem Begin to President Sadat at the signing of the Camp David Accord. However, none of these editions had real, detailed commentaries, which would discuss literary questions, the evolution of the texts and the significance of their variants, compare them with similar views throughout the whole of Rabbinic literature of the talmudic, geonic and mediaeval period, refer to practices of etiquette in the ancient world, realia, folklore and linguistic aspects of the texts, and the like.

It was to fill this serious lacuna that I embarked upon the project of a translation (as far as possible literal) and, more important, a detailed commentary to DEZ. The text I have followed is that of Higger, Massechtot Derech Erez, and the order is that of the Vilna edition. I have included a vocalized text, with a selection of major variants culled from Higger's edition. The first volume to appear will cover DEZ chapters 5-8 (= Derech Erez Ze'ira). Two additional volumes (Volume 1, chapters 1-4, Volume 3, chapter 9 to the end) will complete the work, which will also contain a detailed analytical introduction, bibliographies, indices, etc. The complete set will form part of what I hope will eventually form a series of volumes treating the whole "Library of Rabbinic Wisdom Literature."

This volume is directed not only at students of Rabbinic literature,

but also classicists, and to a lesser extent mediaevalists. All of them will, I trust, find interesting information on matters pertinent to their own fields of expertise. Our material also opens up new avenues of study, posing a number of interesting questions, such as the relationship between Rabbinic wisdom literature and that of the Ancient Near East in general, and more specifically of the biblical and "intertestamental" periods, Rabbinic etiquette and the customs of the Qumran community, the transition from the wisdom genre to mediaeval ethical-Musar and the later derush genres. It is to be hoped that this presentation of the DEZ material will engender a new interest in a largely neglected, and highly complex, interdisciplinary area of research.

Note

We have given the Hebrew text as it appears in Higger's *Massechtot Derech Erez*. We have added vocalization and punctuation and also given a selection of major variant readings found in the standard printed edition as it appears in the *Vilna Talmud*, Higger's text as published in *Massechtot Ze'ivot* and among the variants he lists in his *Massechtot Derech Erez*. The English translation of the text is wholly our own, and bears no debt to that of Higger.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature
AJS Review	Association for Jewish Studies Review
Al-Nakawa, Menorat ha-Ma'or	Menorat ha-Ma'or, by R. Israel Ibn Al-Nakawa, edited by H.G. Enelow, 4 vols., New York 1929-1932
Aruch	Aruch Completum, ed. A. Kohut, Vienna 1878-92
Ben Yehuda	E. Ben Yehuda, <i>Millon ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit ha-Yeshanah ve-ha-Ḥadashah</i> , Tel Aviv 1948 ²
DER	Derech Erez Rabbah
DEZ	Derech Erez Zuta