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PROGRAM OF THE WORKSHOP: “THE INTERPLAY OF MIEVIAL JEWISH POETRY AND BIBLE EXEGESIS”

20-21 AUGUST 2014

VENUE: SEMINAR FÜR JUDAISTIK
GOETHE UNIVERSITY FRANKFURT
SENCKENBERGANLAGE 31
JURIDICUM, 4TH FLOOR, ROOM 463

ORGANISATION: DR. JOACHIM YESHAYA, WITH THE SUPPORT OF
PROF. ELISABETH HOLLENDER AND FRIEDERIKE SCHÖPF

A small group of experts of medieval Jewish poetry and Bible exegesis will work on a corpus of poetical and exegetical texts by Abraham ibn Ezra, Aaron ben Joseph, and other Karaite and Rabbanite poets / exegetes. The workshop is organized within the framework of a post-doctoral project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG): *The Introduction of Liturgical Poetry into the Karaite Prayer Book: From Moses Darī to Aaron ben Joseph*.

Initial research has revealed how the Byzantine Karaite poet Aaron ben Joseph (1250-1320) seems to address in some of his poems on the *parashot* or “weekly Torah readings” the same exegetical issues as in his Torah commentary. This point of view introduces a new approach to study and reassess Aaron ben Joseph’s poems in the light of the non-liturgical, exegetical materials, both Karaite and Rabbanite, they contain and refer to. In addition to relating his poetical compositions to his own Torah commentary *Sefer ha-Mivhar* “Book of the Precious”, the link to Rabbinic source texts, particularly the Torah commentary by Abraham ibn Ezra *Sefer ha-Yashar* “Book of the Straight”, needs to be scrutinized. Being both an exegete and a poet, Aaron ben Joseph might be compared to his more famous Spanish Rabbanite predecessor Abraham ibn Ezra—some of whose poems Aaron actually included into the Karaite prayer book—and to some of his later Karaite heirs, including the early Ottoman Karaite poet Judah ben Elijah Gibbor (b. 1460).

To approach the topic: “The Interplay of Medieval Jewish Poetry and Bible Exegesis” several questions need to be addressed: how did Rabbanite and Karaite poets and exegetes like Abraham ibn Ezra and Aaron ben Joseph approach the Hebrew Bible? Can we find signs of poetical creativity in their exegetical works, or—the other way around—signs of their exegetical mind in their poetical compositions? How do their poetical compositions relate to their exegetical works? Were not all medieval Jewish poets—including those who are not known to have written major exegetical works—in some way or another Bible exegetes (e.g., by alluding to and quoting from the biblical text or by using words and phrases which are interpretive, reflecting how they understood the biblical text)? In sum, should the medieval Jewish poets be seen as active participants in the production and transmission of exegetical traditions?

Wednesday, August 20th, 2014

12 h Welcome Lunch

13:15 h Opening Remarks by Joachim Yeshaya (Frankfurt)

13:30 h Debate – after an introduction by the chair, Wout van Bekkum (Groningen), the four panellists: Tova Beeri (Tel Aviv), Haviva Ishay (Beer Sheva), Daniel Lasker (Beer Sheva) and Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv), will give an outline of the workshop topic (“The Interplay of Medieval Jewish Poetry and Bible Exegesis”), and use that as a starting point for a round-table discussion

15 h Coffee Break

15:30 h Session with Focus on Karaite Judaism

Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv), “Thoughts on Karaism and the Rise of Literacy in the Jewish-Islamic Milieu”

Stefan Schreiner (Tübingen), “Karaite Bible Exegesis as reflected in Yehudah al-Harizi's Sefer Tahkemoni, maqama XVII”

Daniel Lasker (Beer Sheva), “The Interplay of Poetry and Exegesis in Judah Hadassi's *Eshkol ha-kofer*”

Riikka Tuori (Frankfurt/Helsinki), “Medieval Exegetics in Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemirot*”

18 h Dinner

Thursday, August 21st, 2014

9 h Text Reading — Joachim Yeshaya (Frankfurt), “The Ten Commandments in Karaite-Jewish poetry and Bible exegesis”, with input by Elisabeth Hollender (Frankfurt) on *Piyyut* Commentary; after a brief introduction to the subject, the chair will invite participants to a reading of poetical and exegetical texts (with a particular focus on Aaron ben Joseph) and an open discussion; the texts will be circulated before the workshop in order to facilitate the discussion

10.30 h Coffee Break

11 h Session with Focus on Rabbanite Judaism

Wout van Bekkum (Groningen), “Between Convention and Innovation: an Unknown Seder for *Wayyosha* (Exodus 14:30)”

Haviva Ishay (Beer Sheva), “The Exegesis of Abraham Ibn Ezra as a Tool for Solving his Secular Poetry”

Saskia Doenitz (Frankfurt/Berlin), “Shemarya ha-Ikriti – Exegete and Poet?”

Tova Beeri (Tel Aviv), “The manifold uses of biblical verses in Israel Najara’s Poems”

13 h Conclusion and Farewell Lunch