A summary of the history of the development of the TaRYaG mitzvoth [The number is known by a Hebrew mnemonic TaRYaG, T= 400, R=200, Y= 10, G= 3] , that the written torah contains 613 mitzvot, has a long evolution. The development of the enumeration of the 613 mitzvot spans from the Amoraic, Saboraic, Geonic, Rishonim, and Ahronim periods. Three main divisions of law around which the 613 mitzvot classify are (1) Deoraitha- laws from the Pentateuch, (2) Divrei Soferim, laws deduced by means of the 13 hermeneutical rules of Rabbi Ishmael, and (3) Derabbanan, laws of rabbinic origin. In Makkot 23 b Rabbi Simlai, a 3rd century Amora, explained (Darash) 613 precepts were revealed unto Moses at Sinai, 365 prohibitive precepts, like the number of days of the solar year (CF. Tanchuma, ed. Buber, sec. Thetze, para. 2), and 48 positive precepts corresponding to the number of limbs in the human body.

Midrash BaMidbar Rabbah (ch. 18) points out that 620 letters in the Decalogue refer to TaRYaG mitzvoth, the remaining seven ascribed to the 7 Noachide laws. Lists of the mitzvoth circulated in the Amoraic period known as Azharot meaning warnings [of negative commandments] poems read on Shavuot enumerating the commandments, which Elbogen (Encyclopedia Eshkol) suggests that the term was used for a type of Piyut (poem prayer) because the numerical equivalent of Azharat is TaRYaG [Alef=1, Zayyin=7, Heh=5, Resh=200] . However the earliest well known list of the 613 commandments was made in the Geonic era known as the Halakhot Gedolot. Other lists in the Geonic period included the Sheiltot by R. Acha of Shabcha (680-752) , Chefez B. Tazliach, Shmuel b. Chofni. The Halakhot Gedolot included Rabbinic laws (derabbanan) among the 613 commandments. Zunz (Literatur Geschichte der Synagogalen Poesie (Berlin 1865, 4, 21) notes that before Saadya the Azharat Reshit is found in Pumpedita, and older than Azhara “Atta Hinchahta” of Sura placing them in the period of the Saboraim.

The equation of TaRYaG with the Decalogue gave rise to the literature of the Azharot , or halakhic piyyutim , types of poems that recapulate the TARYA, often read on Shavuot. Several types of piyyutim although have no connection with the TARYA Azharot, are also called Azharot. The piyyut genre is at least as old as the tannaitic period and the 3rd century contemporary of R. Judah the Prince, R. Eliezer b. R. Shimon is an early recorded Payyatan. However the flowering of Piyutim was probably that of the 7th century in Palestine by Yose ben Yose and Yannai. The Geonim who fixed the order of prayer, sometimes fought against the inclusion of additions of piyyutim from their order of tefillah. The Avudraham notes the battle against inclusion of additional piyyutim was to prevent people from leaving the synagogues if they could not follow the piyyutim. The pre-Geonic dating of the Azharot tradition is documented by the following texts: A responsum by R. Natronai Gaon (850-860) the predecessor fo the Behag deals with the laxity evinced by some communities in recitation of the Azharot. Secondly, an automatic acceptance of the recital fo Azharot even in the middle of the Mussaf Tefillah on the part of R. Amram Gaon argues strongly for the antiquity of the Azharot, since some time must certainly have elapsed between the emergence of the Azharah and its acceptance into the actual prayer. Rav Saadya Gaon composed 2 Azharot. Saadya writes is due to the failing in his eyes of the customary Azharot “Atta Hinchahta” that he sees fit to replace it with something else. Saadya’s opinion quoted by Ibn Ezra to the effect that the law engraved upon the stones was in reality TARYA in the form of an Azharah confirms that to Saadya the Azharot were of remote origin. Saadya’s Azharot contain the new
approach to group the TARYAG under the ten headings of the Decalogue. Other famous Azharot such as Elijah HaZaken’s Emeth Yehege Chikki and R. Issac Algerbeloni’s Ayzeh Mekkom Binah” follow independent arrangements. Some later TARYAG lists such as that of R. David Vital’s Keter Torah take each letter of the Decalogue to represent a member of the Taryag and then construct a 613 line poem, each containing one mitzvah and each line commencing with the letters of the Decalogue as they appear in the text. The Ba’al Halachot Gedolot is not the originator of the TARYAG lists but was preceded by he Azharot which were widespread at the time of the BEHAG. The BEHAG used the widespread Azharot tradition for his own purposes.

Maimonides composed a work known as the Sefer Hamitzvot where he put down a list of his classification of the 613 commandments, stemming from 14 roots upon which the enumeration of the commandments should be based upon in essence criticizing the Halkot Gedolot for including Rabbinic precepts among the 613 commandments and ascribing lists of Azharot to “poets” representing a beautifully rendered popularization of the Rabbinic quest to systematize the laws. In Maimonides view later Azharot found in Spain postdate the Halachot Gedolot and their errors are due to fidelity to the Behag’s classification. Rav Saadya Gaon (882-942) who found the custom of reciting Atta Hinchalta entrenched in his time and who is cited by Ibn Ezra, predates the Azharot tradition to before the BeHaG, and Luzzatto (preface to Machzor Italina, p. 8,10,26) concludes that the Azharah tradition (Atta Hinchalta) antedates the Halachot Gedolot. Rambam was worried that focus on just 10 commandments would cause neglect to learning from all 613 commandments. The 10 cannot be understood outside the context of 613. The wise will understand

Saadya also authored an Azharot in his Siddur, Anochi Esh Ochela” (I am a consuming fire) which group the TaRYaG under ten headings of the Decalogue and other famous Azharot such as Elijah Hazaken’s “Emeth Yehege Chikki” and R. Isaac Algerbeloni’s “Ayzeh Mekkom Binah” follow their own ordering principle. Numerous Azharot have been composed with TaRYaG as their theme including ones following Maimonides enumeration such as that by Isaac Kimchi of Provence, Joshua Benveniste, and Rabbi David Vital’s Ketter Torah dividing the precepts in 18 groups. Maimonides asserts that the mitzvot serve four purposes (1) Deot (correct notions), (2) Peulot (actions), (3) Middot (ethical characteristics), and (4) Dibbur (correct speech). Maimonides also provides a list of the TaRYaG in the Guide for the Perplexed (Pt. III, ch. 35-49). Solomon ibn Gabirol (1361-1444) is the author of the most well known Azharot titled Sh’mor Libi Ma’aneh. Ibn Gabirol states, “And He will forgive the guilt (of popularizing the mitzvoth in poetic form), and He will increase the strength. And He will bestow the wisdom to make mortals understand, which is understood by Duran and R. Menachem of Troyes [Machzor Bologna, pirush on Azharah] to reflect the poets well intentioned searchings in attempting to popularly enumerate the precepts, while relaying on the BeHaG

Nonetheless the Sefer-HaMitzvot of Maimonides represents the turning point and culmination of the study of the TaRYaG with the exception of the Sepher Yeraim by R. Eliezer of Metz, no TaRYaG work written after the 12th century fails to take cognizance of Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot. The Tosafists R. Moses of Coucy, pupil of R. Judah Sir Leon, and author a Sefer HaMitzvot Gadol, and R. Isaac of Corbeil, pupil of the MaHaRam of Rothenburg, and author of Sefer Mitzvot Kattan, originally titled Shiv’a Amudei Olam. While the 13th century Spain was dominated by the enumeration of R. Moses of Coucy the later
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Solomon ibn Gabirol (1361-1444) is the author of the most well known Azharot titled Sh’mor Libi Ma’aneh, based on the BeHaG [which S.Y. Agnon built on his experience while reading this Azharot designed for recitation of the first night of Shavuot]. Ibn Gabirol states, “And He will forgive the guilt (of popularizing the mitzvoth in poetic form), and He will increase the strength. And He will bestow the wisdom to make mortals understand, which is understood by Duran and R. Menachem of Troyes [Machzor Bologna, pirush on Azharah] to reflect the poets well intentioned searchings in attempting to popularly enumerate the precepts, while relying on the BeHaG. Nonetheless the Sefer-HaMitzvot of Maimonides represents the turning point and culmination of the study of the TaRYaG with the exception of the Sepher Yeraim by R. Eliezer of Metz, no TaRYaG work written after the 12th century fails to take cognizance of Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot. The Tosafists R. Moses of Coucy, pupil of R. Judah Sir Leon, and author a Sefer HaMitzvot Gadol, and R. Isaac of Corbeil, pupil of the MaHaRam of Rothenburg, and author of Sefer Mitzvot Kattan, originally titled Shiv’a Amudei Olam. While the 13th century Spain was dominated by the enumeration of R. Moses of Coucy the later centuries were much influenced by the TaRYaG of R. Aaron of Barcelona HaLevy [ReAH (Rabbi Aaron HaLevi) ] author of Sefer Hachinuch. Zohar Rakiah by Rabbi Shimon ben Zemach Duran is noteworthy in four ways. Firstly it is written in the form of a commentary to the Azharah “Shemor Libbi Ma’aneh of ibn Gabirol so that “people who tremble for the word of the L-rd should study it [on Shavut] once a year.” Rabbi Duran (Tashbaz) criticizes previous commentaries to this Azharah for their having mistakenly interpreted it according to Maimonides TaRYaG list. Since Gabirol followed the BeHaG Duran remains faithful to this fact, while still acknowledging the unquestionable authority of Rambam. Secondly while Duran employs Aramaisms throughout his Responsa, the Hebrew style of the Zohar HaRakia is simple and flows smoothly avoiding difficult forms of expression. Thirdly Duran’s work’s uniqueness is in the actual treatment of the precepts. Maimonides and Nachmanides opinions are treated briefly and the essential proofs and objections to each are given. Throughout clarity prevails, and Duran’s own respectful proofs or objections to Rambam and Ramban abound so that if Rambam is the thesis, Ramban the anti-thesis, Duran’s work is the Aufhebung. In a halakhic sense Duran is the Machria (Decisor) between Rambam and Ramban synthesizing his 2 great predecessors views, but rejecting both their opinions when he feels necessary so that the result is the most penetrating treatment of the TaRYaG. Thus Duran is forced to include 24 positive precepts and 18 prohibitions that appear in neither Rambam nor Ramban’s lists. Among these are the precepts “to accept proselytes”, “to keep far from falsehood”, and to “repay a creditor.” In a number of instances Duran put forth his own views of what should be counted as a commandment and what is not to be counted as a precept with regards to the predecessors Rambam and Ramban i.e. adds precepts to Rambam #32 & #157, & #216, has taharat hamet in place of no. 107 of Rambam, and replaces ten precepts of Rambam #237 with one: to judge righteously etc. Duran also includes #9 of Rambam in #8 of Rambam, has an additional prohibition on Rambam #72, , includes #104 and #105 the prohibitions in #102 and #103, has two prohibitions for Rambam #184, etc. The fourth distinguishing feature of Duran’s work is its hidden mystical esoteric quality although it is fundamentally a halakhic work.

A distinguishing feature of the Zohar HaRakiah by Duran is its allusion to Daniel 12:3 that some will shine
like the “brightness of the firmament” (Zohar harakiah) noting, “when a wise man lies down with his fathers, he leaves behind him a treasured and organized blessing: books that enlighten like the brilliance of the firmament and that extend peace like a river (Isa. 66:12). Thus the 4th aspect of the work is the mystical veiled language of its introduction, from a halakhist of the greatest reknown. Moses de Leon in Or Zarua (ms. Oxford, Uri 318, Sefer Harimon, ms. David Oppenheier, no. 731) was an “open” mystic who also wrote on the TaRYaG. Other mikubalim who wrote on TARYAG include such as Ezra Hamekkubal followed by R. Menachem Rekanti, and Isaac Luria [Taamei HaMitzvot LeHa’Ari forming part 3 of Nof Etz Chayyim (Salonika 1852), Moses Cordovero [Taamei HaMitzvot, see Shem Hagedolim, pt. 11, no. 94 Metzudath David of Radbaz (Zalkowa, 5622). Indeed an entire section of the Zohar, the Reyah Mehmna (Faithful Shepherd) is devoted to enumeration of the TaRYaG offering a mystical interpretation of the precepts extending the concept underlying the gemarah that all 613 mitzvot stem from the decalogue but adding that Torat HaSefirot (the law of divine grades) of 10 divinely emanated sefirot, attributes of G-d from His distant gardens/PaRDeS. All of the TaRYaG fit into one of the sefirot, a mystical ladder both from G-d to man and from man to G-d, linked to the Decalogue, whereby the performance of mitzvoth [gathering the sparks] and contemplation of them effect theurgically the cosmos, causing chain reactions throughout the hexagramatic achetectonic of the sefirot representing G-d’s pleroma. Each mitzvah can be traced back via the root of the mitzvah in the Decalogue, in the spiritual ascent of the particular sefira. Duran’s introduction is cognizant of the Kabbalistic mystery that the performance of a single mitzvah is linked with theTaRYaG mitzvoth, whereby the sefirot are dependent on each other. Ultimately Duran not only synthesized the classification of Rambam and Ramban, but reconciled the mystery between the exoteric (legal open meaning) and esoteric (hidden secrets). Zohar HaRakiah is very technical and needs footnotes to make this fusion clear. For example a mystical section reads, “There is another allusion to this due the masters of Kabbalah, based on the 32 paths of wisdom, which Abraham, our patriarch, mentioned in his well-known book, Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation). When you multiply this by ten [the number of utterances] in the Decalogue, which also corresponds to the 10 sefirot [of the mystical theory], you have 230. Multiply this number by two, one corresponding to the quality of love and the other to that of awe, and it also corresponds to the commandment of “remember” (Ex. 20:8) and observe (Deut. 5:12) and also to the two qualities of divine justice. This makes 640. Now subtract that from 27 letters of the Hebrew alphabet [the 22 regular letters] plus [the final forms of] mem, nun, tzade, pe, kaph, there remains 613. For this reason the Torah begins with the letter bet and ends with the lamed [numerical values 2 and 30, respectively] to correspond with the 32 paths of wisdom. The flowering of Lurianic Kabbalah in Safed gives birth to the the TaRYaG of R. Isaiah Horowitz, ordained by Yaakov Berab, who lists the precepts in the order they appear in the Torah divided into three parts: (1) Ner Mitzvah, (2) Torah Or, (3) Derekh Chayyim Tochachath Mussar, thereby mingling positive and negative precepts, who was followed by Shabbattai Cohen in the latter’s Poel Tzdeek. Another work stemming from the mystical environment of Safed is the work titled, Charedim, by R. Eliezer Azkari (published in Venice in 1959). Moses de Leon in Or Zarua (ms. Oxford, Uri 318, Sefer Harimon, ms. David Oppenheier, no. 731) was an “open” mystics who also wrote on the TaRYaG such as Ezra Hamekkubal followed by R. Menachem Rekanti, and Isaac Luria [Taamei HaMitzvot LeHa’Ari forming part 3 of Nof Etz Chayyim (Salonika 1852), Moses Cordovero [Taamei HaMitzvot, see Shem Hagedolim, pt. 11, no. 94 Metzudath David of Radbaz (Zalkowa, 5622). Indeed an entire section of the Zohar, the Reyah Mehmna (Faithful Shepherd) is devoted to enumeration of the TaRYaG offering a mystical interpretation of the
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