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# **Narratology, Hermeneutics, and Midrash**

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Late Antiquity through to Modern Times

With one figure

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## Introduction

The forging of a link between narratology and literary and biblical hermeneutics, much like the link suggested in Bo Petterson's article "Narratology and Hermeneutics: Forging the Missing Link", appears to apply to the essays contained in this volume and to the volume as a whole. Pleading for a blend of hermeneutics and narratology at the time of approaching texts, Petterson argues namely that the latter can thereby "outgrow its abidingly structuralist view of the literary text and its unidimensionally contextualized readings."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that instead of viewing interpretation as framework or theory it can be regarded as an art and that it is both on their own skills and on the specific aspects of their objects of interpretation that interpreters should rely for their interpretive work.<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of those written by Gerhard Langer and Paul Mandel, this volume's articles are revised versions of papers presented at the international conference, *Narratology, Hermeneutics, and Midrash*, held in Vienna from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011. For the most part they comprise studies of Jewish texts – biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern – but also of patristic and medieval Christian texts, and, in one case, of a passage of the Muslim text par excellence, the Qur'an, which is read in light of a biblical and Christian narrative. The contributors, scholars in the fields of Jewish Studies, Catholic and Protestant Theology, Islamic Studies, German philology etc., were invited to reflect on texts

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1 Bo Petterson, "Narratology and Hermeneutics: Forging the Missing Link." In: Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (eds.), *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*. De Gruyter: Berlin, 2009, pp. 11 – 34 at 21. Petterson designates his hermeneutical approach "contextual intention inference". On how narratology and hermeneutics can be merged he writes: "contextual intention inference requires the kind of detailed contextual, historically-anchored and interdisciplinary study of the literary work that post-classical narratology and its multi-faceted toolkit is well equipped to provide in the study of fiction. Hence, narratology and hermeneutics can profitably be combined: classical narratology offers the textual tools, post-classical narratology the contextual and cognitive tools, and a hermeneutics based on contextual intention inference provides an account that is able to deal with narratology's interpretive features and approximate interpretive validity." (21 – 22)

2 Ibid.

of their respective disciplines – religious or otherwise, narrative or otherwise – in interpretations that are context-sensitive and take into account the link connecting midrash, hermeneutics, and narrative. This resulted in the contributions focusing on illuminating narratological and/or hermeneutical aspects of the texts in question. Whereas some explicitly made use of the toolkits of classical and post-classical (cultural or contextualist) narratology,<sup>3</sup> applied narratological categories to literary phenomena not usually analysed from this perspective, others concentrated on the midrashic, commentary-like, or hermeneutical aspects of the texts in question. All of them are concerned in some way or another with bridging the gap between the mere description of textual phenomena and the possibility given by these texts to pose and answer questions pertaining to broader cultural and historical contexts.

The first group of essays offers readings of biblical texts. Irmtraud Fischer's contribution focuses on the use of repetition in the form of *Leitwörter* but also of direct quotation and allusions as important mechanisms in the composition of texts of both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. These are seen as crucial aspects of the process of inner-biblical reception or midrashic reading, a process which, according to her argumentation, runs parallel to that of canonization. Her reading operates on the micro-level of words and on the macro-level of narratives, told to interpret legal passages in the Bible.

Biblical narratology can be seen as one of the many subfields of the so-called post-classical narratology which consists of a series of approaches for which the borders of modern literary narrative as a privileged object of study have been transgressed. It is in this promising subfield that Ilse Müllner places herself providing a narratologically informed reading of Exod 12:1 – 13:16 in an attempt to demonstrate how a biblical narratology can shed new light on aspects of ancient texts thus far not discussed. The category of metalepsis, understood as transgression or "contamination between the world of the telling and the world of the told", is used in this context to describe several instances of boundaries that are blurred in this biblical text: namely the boundaries between the narrative's

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3 Ansgar Nünning argues for example that "classical narratology and context-sensitive analysis and interpretations of narrative, despite their contrasting theoretical and methodological assumptions, are not as incompatible as is suggested by their respective practitioners." ("Surveying Contextualist and Cultural Narratologies: Towards an Outline of Approaches, Concepts and Potentials." In: Heinen and Sommer (eds.), *Narratology*, pp. 48 – 70 at 53) For the differences between classical and post-classical narratologies see i. a. Ansgar Nünning, "Towards a Cultural and Historical Narratology. A Survey of Diachronic Approaches, Concepts and Research Projects." In: Bernhard Reitz and Sigrid Rieuwerts (eds.), *Anglistentag 1999 Mainz. Proceedings*. Trier: WVT, 2000, pp. 345 – 373 and idem, "Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term." In: Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (eds.), *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers regarding the Status of a Theory*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003, pp. 239 – 275.



world and the narration's world, more specifically between the characters of the narrative and its implied readers, between the generation of the present of the narrative and the future generations that are to commemorate the events of the narrative, and between the legal and the narrative genres, between narration and liturgy.

At the crossroads between hermeneutics and narratology, Agnethe Siquans' essay discusses the similarities and differences between Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions during the first centuries of the Common Era. After discussing the general distinguishing characteristics of midrash and patristic exegesis as discussed in recent relevant contributions to both subjects, as well as the contrast between midrash and allegorical interpretation (among other forms of Christian exegesis), she offers as a case in point a reading of the Jewish tradition on the Hebrew midwives in Egypt as transmitted in the late midrash Exodus Rabba (11<sup>th</sup> cent.?) comparing it with the Christian patristic exegesis of Origenes' Homilia II (3<sup>rd</sup> cent.). Such an analysis makes it possible to show what text parts and contents are relevant for the Jewish and Christian traditions considered, which hermeneutical preliminary decisions can be identified, and which methodology is followed. A fundamental difference she is able to delineate is that of collective vs. single authorship that separates the rabbinic from the patristic traditions.

The next section, which deals primarily with rabbinic texts, evidences what Carol Bakhos in the opening lines of her article terms a "rehabilitation of midrash", a recent trend characterised by the application of discourses and toolkits of, among others, literary and cultural studies to the study of these texts.<sup>4</sup> Within this context of new currents in the approach of midrash, Bakhos' article analyses two rabbinic narratives as such, i. e. as narrative texts, situating them, as she words it, "within the realm of literary discourse". The texts, which stem from the midrashic corpus, Leviticus Rabbah (5<sup>th</sup> cent.), and tractate Pesahim of the Babylonian Talmud, are read as illustrating the sages' use of irony, e. g. in the way they appear to suggest Jewish difference or in their portrayal David's character.

As Joshua Levinson claims in his essay, although the so-called "literary approach" to the study of rabbinic texts has indeed been influenced by structuralist narratology, the application of post-classical narratological models and methodologies "attentive to text and context" is still very rare. Such a study of rabbinic texts, which Levinson calls "cultural poetics", would enable interpreters to view this literature as a "realm among many for the negotiation and production of social meaning, of historical subjects, and of the systems of power that at once

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4 For a general view on this transformation see the contributions in Carol Bakhos (ed.), *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006 and Bakhos' survey of recent approaches to midrash in the first section of her article in this volume.

enable and constrain those subjects.” His essay, the keynote lecture at the conference from which the present volume emerged, discusses rabbinic texts from the perspective of what can be termed an anthropological narratology: after analysing short excerpts from the Mishnah, i. e. legal texts, Levinson turns to longer narrative passages of imaginative discourse, from the exegetical midrash Genesis Rabbah (5<sup>th</sup> cent.) and from the late midrash Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer (8<sup>th</sup> cent.), which are read in terms of narratives of identity.<sup>5</sup> All of these texts are interpreted as depicting the emergence of a specific rabbinic subject and sense of self modelled both by rabbinic legal and imaginative or fictional discourses. The distinction between these discourses is itself questioned by Levinson who argues that both are the cultural manifestations of the same rabbinic anthropology.

In his essay, Paul Mandel deals with the changing poetics that a comparative reading of several versions of the same rabbinic tale can yield. For this purpose, he analyses the changing motifs and narratives in several stages of the development of the talmudic “Tale of Kidor” (bYoma 83b) as transmitted in the first printed edition and in the manuscript tradition of the Babylonian Talmud as well as in the early and late Palestinian parallels such as the midrash Genesis Rabbah and Tanḥuma. Mandel emphasizes the widely attested phenomenon in aggadic literature consisting in the “integration of legal insights in narrative settings”, but also considers in his reading other probable narrative intertexts which contribute to a more fruitful interpretation of the Tale of Kidor.

Anonymous characters whom the Bible apports no life narrative of their own can lose their anonymity in the sages’ recreation of their lives. Although the rabbis did not cultivate biography as a literary genre of its own right<sup>6</sup>, fragments

5 On the subject of narrative and identity, see Michael Bamberg, “Identity and Narration”. In: Peter Huhn et al (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2009 (Narratologia 19), pp. 132 – 143 as well as the literature mentioned Bamberg mentions.

6 Maren R. Niehoff, “Biographical Sketches in Genesis Rabbah.” In: Ra’anan Boustan et al. (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism. Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, Vol. 1, pp. 265 – 286, comments: “It is well known that rabbinic exegetes in the Land of Israel were not as open as Diaspora Jews to experiment with the literary genres of Hellenistic culture. Unlike the Alexandrian-Jewish tragedian Ezekiel, they did not produce theatre plays. Unlike Josephus they did not cast biblical narratives in historiographical form and unlike Philo they did not write biographies of biblical heroes. Some scholars have concluded that there is an unbridgeable gap between Jewish culture in the Hellenistic Diaspora and that in the Land of Israel. According to this view, rabbinic exegesis emerges as sui generis and inwardly oriented, with few, if any contacts to the surrounding world.” (p. 264) Nevertheless, in her essay she deals with the question of the rabbinic biography, introducing her considerations on the biographical sketches that can be identified in Genesis Rabbah as follows: “Given the popularity and cultural importance of biographical writing in the Hellenistic period, it is time to ask whether this genre altogether passed by the rabbis. Did they remain unaware of the intellectual and educational potential of the biography? A close reading of GR show that while the rabbis did not write complete biographies, they were eager to insert biographical sketches of biblical heroes, thus making their stories livelier and

of “rabbinic” biographies of biblical characters can, however, be reconstructed by collecting dispersed passages in the rabbinic corpus. Such a task Lorena Miralles Maciá undertakes in her contribution on “Bityah, Pharaoh’s Daughter, Moses’ Mother”. Miralles Maciá shows that the starting point of a Judaizing and rationalizing biography of the Egyptian princess who saved Moses in Exod 2 is the sages’ identification of the princess with the proper name of Bityah in 1 Chr 4:18. Before turning to her main sources in aggadic midrashim and Babylonian Talmud and to the several aspects of Bityah’s life covered therein (her relation to Moses, the saving of Moses, her Jewishness, her primogeniture i.a.), Miralles Maciá presents some of the possible precedents of this rabbinic scattered judaizing narrative in the recreations of Hellenistic literature. Her analysis of this biblical character in post-biblical light shows once more how rabbinic models and values were retro-projected “onto key characters in the history of Israel.”

For readers acquainted with rabbinic literature, rabbinic interpretation might appear to be everything but evident or logical. Susanne Plietzsch’s article is concerned precisely with the puzzling character of the specifics of rabbinic hermeneutics, such as the juxtaposition of verses in the literary form of the *petiḥah* that at first sight have absolutely nothing in common. Her reading of the opening passage of *Genesis Rabbah* provides a “glimpse behind the scenes of rabbinic work”, in order to elucidate the rabbinic interpretation of Gen 1:1 in light of Prov 8:30.

Gerhard Langer provides close readings of two midrashic texts in an attempt to integrate rhetorical, narratological, and historical-critical questions. The structural and hermeneutical complexity of the rabbinic texts which seek to elucidate the first two words of the biblical narrative of Abraham’s departure from Haran according to Gen 12 is illustrated in this multi-faceted analysis, which sets off with a translation of the texts, followed by a description of the hermeneutical and rhetorical devices put to use by the sages in *Genesis Rabbah* and *Tanḥuma* and continues with a narratological analysis. The latter focuses on the depiction of time and space, on characters of main and related narratives, the representation of speech and actions as well as the dominant ideological perspective. This is indeed a form a post-classical narratological perspective can take when applied to implicit or incomplete narratives that make up much of the textual material in exegetical midrashim. Each reading concludes with considerations pertaining to the cultural context in which the rabbinic texts emerged. Both readings are followed by a comparative analysis of both texts.

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more accessible to the reader. Indeed, this Midrash enthusiastically participates in the biographical discourse and engages in a creative reconstruction of the childhood as well as the inner lives of biblical figures.” (p. 269)

The last contribution of this section focuses on two late rabbinic texts of the Geonic period. After discussing the extent to which Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer and Seder Eliyahu (9<sup>th</sup> cent.) can be regarded as pseudepigraphic works, Constanza Cordoni focuses on the narratological categories of the author-image and narrator in these midrashic-like works, suggesting that they can be seen, in contrast to classical rabbinic documents, as works of single authorship, and therefore as representative of a transitional literature, between that collectively and anonymously authored in Tannaitic and Amoraic times and that individually authored by named writers from the Geonic times onwards. For this purpose, she revises several hypotheses for the description of the works' macro-structure and sets of recurring stylistic features or literary forms.

Angelika Neuwirth's illuminating essay is concerned with the appropriation and transformation by the Qur'an of the sacrifice narrative of Isaac's binding of Gen 22, which differs fundamentally from that attested in the Christian passion narrative. Unlike the latter and the Christian culture of martyrdom that followed in its wake, emotion plays an insignificant role in the sacrifice narrative of Sura 37, a fact which might have been influenced, according to Neuwirth, by a rabbinic retelling of the Akedah that mitigates the atrocious notion of a father sacrificing his own son by having the son be an active agent in the events. Furthermore, Neuwirth argues that in its Medinan context, the Qur'an's sacrifice narrative acquired a new profile, providing the foundation for an "upgrading" of sacrifice as a central rite in Islam.

Revelation testimonies, especially modern ones, Andreas Mauz argues, are texts that, due to their alleged "co-authorship", cause ambivalent reactions. Seldom, however, is the revealed scripture itself discussed. In his contribution Mauz focuses on a Christian medieval revelation text, Hildegard von Bingen's Liber Scivias. To be precise, he analyses the revelation narrative contained in the framing introduction, the *Protestificatio veracium visionum a Deo fluentium*, which sets Hildegard's "actual text" in its place, as well as in an illumination transmitted in the work's most important manuscript. From a poetological perspective, which Mauz designates as "narrative grammar of revelation", he first presents the text in terms of revealer, revealed content, revelation recipient, medium of revelation and effect of revelation and then discusses the agents involved in the revelation both in text and illumination.

The last two contributions to this collection deal with modern literature. Armin Eidherr analyses midrash in modern yiddish literature or rather, what he defines at the outset as "midrashic epic" from a perspective that could be described as belonging to historical narratology: his analysis, clearly diachronically oriented, begins with the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac (Gen 22:1 – 19), which he traces in retellings in the form of Yiddish midrashic epics in diverse

epochs, such as the elaboration of the subject in Akeydes-poems by Itzik Manger during the interwar period and by Hirsh Osherovitch in post-war times.

The volume closes with an essay by Dorothee Gelhard whose interpretation of selected passages of Walter Benjamin's articles on the philosophy of culture is itself a modern midrash that reveals a hidden multi-faceted lemma just alluded to by the philosopher: *maqom* (understood as "commentary", as "place", and as "name"). Gelhard argues that Benjamin's writings operate in the context of a secularization of Judaism and that they can be described in terms of a profanation.

The dialogue that ensued from the contributions' presentation at the conference proved to be rich and full of potential for further research in the direction proposed by the Series *Poetics, Exegesis and Narrative. Studies in Jewish literature and art* published by Vienna University Press. This second volume of the series can be seen as a sort of programmatic opening to a series which sets out with publishing monographs and volumes of collected articles on Jewish literature and art from Antiquity to the present, irrespective of the text's language or genre or the medium in which the work of art is produced. One of the series' most important targets is already achieved with this volume, namely the presentation and study of texts within a broad literary discourse in order to enable access to the cultural and historical contexts from which they emerged.



## **Reception of Biblical texts within the Bible: A starting point of midrash?**

During the last decades, Old Testament exegesis has undergone an important shift concerning the concept of using texts in other literary contexts of the collection, which is hereafter called “Bible”.<sup>1</sup> After a short consideration of recent discussion on the topic, this article deals with several examples of inner-biblical reception of texts, a phenomenon which may be viewed as one of the starting points of the genre which would later be called midrash.

### **The art of (late?) biblical narrative as skillful artistic construct of text references**

The reception of texts on a larger scale obviously begins in post-exilic times. This may be due to the fact that – in my opinion – the greater part of text production in Ancient Israel does not belong to the pre-exilic era, but also served to join the two epochs to produce a continuum in the history of Israel/Judah, thus making valid all the traditions of the age of the kingdom for later generations.

### **Preliminary remark on defining position and interests**

As a bible-scholar teaching Old Testament at a catholic faculty of a state university, I do not write from the perspective of a Jewish studies’ scholar, but from theological disciplines. Holding a chair for “Old Testament and women’s studies” at Bonn University in Germany for seven years, I am familiar with inter-

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<sup>1</sup> It is problematic to speak of “biblical texts” at a point in time, when all these texts, later collected within a collection, held not only as holy, but also as canonical, were still in *statu nascendi*. But it is obvious, that the process of building the OT canon took several centuries and began with the canonization of the *Torah* in Persian times, followed by the closing of *Nebiim* (evidenced by Ben Sira 48:22 – 25; 49:7 – 10 and the fact that Daniel is not part of the prophets, it surely took place before 200 B.C.E.) and finally, about two hundred years later, the third part, *Ketubim*.

disciplinary research, especially in the field of gender studies. I published a commentary to the book of Ruth<sup>2</sup> in 2000, where I develop the understanding of this book as a feminist commentary to the Torah as well as filling narrative gaps in the *neviim rischoniim*, particularly concerning the genealogy of King David. Now I am preparing a commentary to the book of Jonah,<sup>3</sup> evidently like Ruth, a relatively late narrative masterpiece of the Hebrew Bible, which I also would like to interpret as a commentary to texts about Israelite prophecy, especially on the problem of successful communication between God and His people as well as that of the salvation of the *gojjim*.

Since 2006 I have been working as initiator and one of the general editors of the 20-volume series “The Bible and Women”,<sup>4</sup> a reception history on biblical texts about women and female readings of the Bible throughout the centuries, which has been published in four languages.

With this background, I am aware of modern concepts of intertextuality including all the problems created for biblical hermeneutics by applying it to biblical texts<sup>5</sup> as well as with historical concepts of Jewish exegesis, without being an expert in this field.

## Different interpretations of text-links in different methodologies

The so called historical-critical method (“Historisch-kritische Methode”) treated such interwoven texts as “parallels”, noting the fact, but generally not using it as very relevant for the sense of a passage. The first groundbreaking publication, well cited in German research contexts, was the article on midrash-exegesis by Isaac Leo Seeligmann.<sup>6</sup> The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls especially initiated a development of research concerning the phenomenon of the “rewritten Bible”,<sup>7</sup> about texts that, using older texts to a broad extent, retell stories by using their gaps and filling them with new ideas.

2 Irmtraud Fischer, *Rut. Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament*. Freiburg: Herder, 2005.

3 The commentary will be published in the new bilingual series “International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament” by Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, presumably in 2014.

4 See more under [www.bibleandwomen.org](http://www.bibleandwomen.org).

5 In an early stage of the discussion, Thomas R. Hatina, “Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship?” *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999), pp. 28 – 43 formulated several serious objections.

6 Isaac Leo Seeligmann, “Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese.” In: International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (ed.), *Congress volume Copenhagen*. Leiden: Brill, 1953 (*Vetus Testamentum Supplementum* 1), pp. 150 – 181.

7 This term was coined by Geza Vermes in 1961 (see Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 21973 (*Studia Post-Biblica* 4)).



In the last three decades a lot of research was done also by using intertextuality as methodological concept, although most of the biblical scholars undertook the original concept of Julia Kristeva<sup>8</sup> with greater or lesser modifications.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, discussions on pretexts and hypertexts in contemporary exegesis are omnipresent. Biblical scholars also learned much from ancient Jewish exegesis, which held the links between texts as very important, while disregarding the date of origin.<sup>10</sup>

The impact of this shift, caused by the use of manifold concepts and methodologies,<sup>11</sup> on OT exegesis nowadays is evident: “parallels” are no longer held as mere fact. Although the current German-speaking scientific community is still partly afraid of canonical exegesis, accusing it of losing the historical dimension and becoming a-historical, it is accepted that texts are interwoven with others and that this is relevant for the understanding of texts. This approach often is called “innerbiblische Schriftauslegung”, inner-biblical exegesis.<sup>12</sup>

Another revolution took place by introducing reader-oriented concepts in exegesis, thus no longer speaking of Wirkungsgeschichte but of reception history. The

8 Julia Kristeva, “Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman.” In: *Critique* 239 (1967), pp. 438 – 456.

9 E.g. Georg Steins, *Die “Bindung Isaaks” im Kanon (Gen 22). Grundlagen und Programm einer kanonisch-intertextuellen Lektüre*. Freiburg: Herder, 1999 (Herders Biblische Studien 20), who defines the canon as only a collection of reference, or Claudia Rakel, *Judith – über Schönheit, Macht und Widerstand im Krieg. Eine feministisch-intertextuelle Lektüre*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 334), whose hermeneutics, despite the recent French discussion, nonetheless tries to evaluate the intertextual results also for historical questions. See also publications of the “Amsterdam school” (e.g. Klara Butting, *Die Buchstaben werden sich noch wundern. Innerbiblische Kritik als Wegweisung feministischer Hermeneutik*. Berlin: Alektor, 1993 (Alektor Hochschulschriften), esp. pp. 14 – 17).

10 This axiom, that there is no backwards and afterwards in the Torah is expressed in Qoh Rab-bah 1:12; cf. Christoph Dohmen and Günter Stemberger, *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996 (Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie 1.2), p. 101.

11 Especially in the last decades narratological studies have gained ground. See esp. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 1985; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 70/Bible and Literature Series 17); David M. Gunn/ Danna N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 (Oxford Bible Series); Mieke Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. In the German-speaking context Ilse Müllner, *Gewalt im Hause Davids. Die Erzählung von Tamar und Amnon (2 Sam 13,1 – 22)*. Freiburg: Herder, 1997 (Herders Biblische Studien 13), applied Bal’s sophisticated narratological concepts to biblical texts; see also Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese. Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28*, Tübingen: Mohr, 2010 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/285), although on New Testament texts.

12 A very informative overview on the various approaches is given by Konrad Schmid, “Innerbiblische Schriftauslegung. Aspekte der Forschungsgeschichte.” In: Reinhard G. Kratz, Thomas Krüger, and Konrad Schmid (eds.), *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift. Festschrift für Odil Hannes Steck zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 300), pp. 1 – 22.

focus of such a concept is not on the text itself and its effects on later generations, but on the text's cultural context, where it picks up texts, motifs and narratives.

As a contemporary researcher with a composite identity, involved in research projects with multi-facetted approaches, I suggest that most of the links between texts are relevant, some of them really important, and in late texts, links are generally intended. Therefore the question of literary-history is not to be ignored by OT-scholars.

## Hermeneutical premise

This publication has a lot to say regarding defining midrash, and midrash is defined by various articles in manifold ways. In this article I am not working with midrash in a classical sense but trying to trace a blank, a prototype of what would later on develop into midrash. The precondition of such an understanding of midrash is a canonical text, which means, that you shall not add anything to or take away from the text (cf. already Deut 4:2; 13:1). At first sight, therefore, midrash is not an appropriate concept for biblical exegesis, since it deals with the growth of text in progress, as "Bible" means having only a fixed canon. But if we take into consideration that the formation of the "canon" is a long-lasting process, we may presume that "mid-rashing" starts with this process. Therefore, the starting point of midrash is not the closed canon of TeNaK, but rather the decision that special texts express an important message of God and therefore are worthy to preserve for later generations. As canonized texts are no longer open for commentary or updating to address the significance for changed situations, the re-writing of texts or the composing of stories by using figures, motifs, topics etc. along the lines of well-known literature may not take place within "biblical" texts, but by creating new ones, which themselves afterwards became canonical texts. Such a process always intends to actualize texts and never merely to interpret texts in their presumed historical contexts. There is no retelling or rewriting without acquiring, and the creation of tradition alongside a canonical text is always appropriation. In this sense, biblical texts may be the starting point of a process that later leads to the literary genre of midrash.

## The Bible as "story" tells "history" by using "patterns": some examples

The last decades have seen an intensive effort to identify connections between texts. To honor the Viennese research on the Hebrew Bible, it must be said that in German-speaking OT-exegesis one of the first scholars who dealt with meth-

odological issues concerning such relationships was the Viennese Georg Braulik.<sup>13</sup> Since then there has been a vivid discussion from various methodological and hermeneutical points of view. I would like to offer now some examples of texts that pick up other existing (later biblical) texts and which cannot be decoded if the quoted text is not taken into consideration.

#### Quotations of “Leitwörter” relevant for exegesis of the later text

At the level of words, intertextuality is normally difficult to trace – with the exception of two phenomenons: so called “Leitwörter” and the use of extremely rare words or those of uncommon grammatical forms. Normally these indicate intertextuality if there are also other signals connecting the two texts.

As a good example for a relevant “Leitwort”, connecting two texts of the Bible is the word לָקַט glean, in Exod 16 (V.4.5.16.17.18.21.22.26.27) and Ruth 2 (V.2.3.7.8.15[2x].16.17[2x].18.19.23).<sup>14</sup> All told, the word occurs only in these two texts: nine times in Exod 16 and twelve times in Ruth 2. Both texts are dealing with hunger and desire for bread. In both texts one has to work to obtain bread that God provides in order to save people from starving. Therefore, the two texts speak not solely of the common theme that God takes care of the hungry, since in Ruth 2 a Moabitess is starving with her mother-in-law, not God’s people. The use of the same “Leitwort” in such an extensive way means that the later book of Ruth is widening God’s grace also for Moabites, which is particularly significant for those people who are to be excluded by law (Deut 23:4 ff.), because they didn’t offer bread and water when Israel passed by on the way to the promised land. Now, as is told in the book of Ruth, the Moabites not only collect grain for bread in the fields of Moab (1:1.2.6.22 שָׂדֵה) for the starving refugees coming from Judah, but also in the fields of Bethlehem (שָׂדֵה is “Leitwort” of Ruth 2).

Another example would be the allusion of Song 7:11 to Gen 3:16 by use of the very rare word תְּשׁוּקָה (the only other incidence: Gen 4:7). In both texts, the paradise-story and the Songs of Songs are set in beautiful garden-landscape, and in both the relationship of man and woman is in question, this suggests that the schir-haschirim with its famous love-songs is presenting a counter-utopia to the broken gender-relationship of Gen 2 – 3.<sup>15</sup> The female desire is no longer re-

13 See Georg Braulik’s monographic-like article, “Das Deuteronomium und die Bücher Ijob, Sprichwörter, Rut.” In: Erich Zenger (ed.), *Die Tora als Kanon für Juden und Christen*. Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1996 (Herders Biblische Studien 10), pp. 61 – 138.

14 Cf. Braulik, *Deuteronomium*, p. 118.

15 This has already been seen by Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978 (Dt.: *Gott und Sexualität im Alten Testament*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993 (Gütersloher Taschenbücher 539), p. 186) and Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of*

sponded to by male domination (3:16), but now it is the man who desires his eligible woman, and she responds to him adequately with love.

#### Occurrence of a phrase in only one other similar context

Also the next example, in which a phrase connects only two texts of the Bible, shows that this phenomenon has an important impact on exegesis. The nameless wife of Job, in biblical exegesis and also in reception history, normally is blamed for being a bad spouse, because she advises her husband to curse God and to die. It has been commonly discussed that in the first two chapters of the book of Job, the word בֵּרַךְ is used for both blessing and cursing. In the speech of Job's wife it has almost always been translated as "to curse". As Christl Maier and Silvia Schroer<sup>16</sup> have shown, there is no need to do so. On the contrary, it is not even convenient, because in her advice to Job (2:9: you still persist in your integrity בְּתַמְצִיךָ בְּתַמְצִיךָ) she is quoting the speech of God (2:3: he still persists in his integrity בְּתַמְצִיךָ בְּתַמְצִיךָ). If Satan prophesies to God that Job will curse you to your face (1:11; 2:5: אֲלֵ-פָנֶיךָ יִכְרַסְךָ) she advises him bless God and die! (2:9: בְּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת). As she does not speak about cursing/blessing in God's face (בְּרַךְ אֵל־פָּנֶיךָ), as is typical of Satan's argumentation (1:11; 2:7), בֵּרַךְ in 2:9 should not be translated as "curse" but as "bless". But what causes the woman to believe that his only destiny would be death?

Here the technique of picking up unique phrases can help:<sup>17</sup> Job 2:7 states that the Satan afflicted (נָכָה) a severe inflammation on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (בְּשָׁחִין רַע מִכַּף רַגְלֹו עַד קֶדְקֶדוֹ). A first look at this sickness would suggest a severe skin-disease, but having a closer look at the phrase, it occurs only one other time in the Bible, in Deut 28:35. In the context of the great covenant-curse it is announced that the people would suffer if they do not obey the commandments. It is stated that God will afflict (נָכָה) you with a severe inflammation ... from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head (בְּשָׁחִין רַע מִכַּף רַגְלֹךָ עַד קֶדְקֶדְךָ). Taking this into consideration, the wife of Job takes his suffering as sign, particularly because all his other afflictions (loss of all children and wealth) affected her too. But the disease strikes only her husband, not her.

*Paradise. Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983 (Bible and Literature Series), pp. 251 – 252.

16 Cf. Christl Maier and Silvia Schroer, "Das Buch Ijob." In: Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 21998, pp. 192 – 207, esp. 202, now available also in English: "Job: Questioning the Book of the Righteous Sufferer." In: Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Biblical Interpretation. A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, pp. 221 – 239, esp. 232 – 235.

17 For argumentation see Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteslehrerinnen. Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006, pp. 97 – 109.

Although she holds him blameless, she detects the uniqueness of his illness as the expression of a curse leading to death. Deut 28:35 therefore is indispensable for understanding the harsh reaction of the distressed woman.

### Modelling figures after exemplary characters

Especially in late biblical narrative literature we may notice that figures are very often depicted along the features or special deeds of biblical characters. It is evident, for example, that the figure of Ruth is designed along the matriarchs. Rachel and Leah, as well as Tamar, are mentioned explicitly in Ruth 4:11 – 12, but Ruth 2 shows the Moabite protagonist also as a “new Rebecca”, when she – like Rebecca and Abraham, her father in law, did – leaves her own country to live in the promised land (Ruth 2:11; cf. Gen 12:1 – 4 and 24:4 – 7.58).<sup>18</sup>

Esther, as a “new Joseph”, saves her people at the court of a foreign king, evidencing that sometimes integration and assimilation are more successful than the resistance Mordecai has chosen to exemplify.<sup>19</sup> Likewise the deuterocanonical Judith, who decapitates Holofernes, is not only designed as a “new David”, who also strokes the head of his enemy with his own sword, and as a “new Yael”, killing the crown of the army in the tent by striking his head, but, because of their victory-songs in Exod 15 and Judg 16, also as a “new Moses”, “new Miriam” and “new Deborah”.<sup>20</sup>

This phenomenon of shaping figures shows that gender does not matter. On the contrary, it looks like late story telling/writing prefers cross-gender identification. Nonetheless it is worth noting that this functions only in one direction: only female figures are shaped along male lines, never the other way round.

### Telling stories for interpreting legal texts

As a forerunner of the later halakhic midrash we may detect those narrative texts, which evidently deal with legal texts and try to modify their usual application. I would like to explicate this with the help of two examples dating most probably from the 4th cent. B.C.E., which obviously have the intention of opening the Israelite religion to the gentiles.

In my commentary on the book of Ruth, I demonstrated that the whole book may be seen within this genre, trying to abrogate the so called Moabite-Paragraph (Deut 23:2 – 9), which excludes Moabite people from becoming members of the post-exilic

18 Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, pp. 176 – 177.

19 For connections between Joseph and Esther see Butting, *Buchstaben*, pp. 49 – 86.

20 Rakel, *Judit*, pp. 228 – 272.

community while at the same time adapting the androcentric law in favor of female subjects.<sup>21</sup> As Jürgen Ebach<sup>22</sup> noticed just years before, the book of Ruth tells its story by annihilating the justification for the exclusion: because they didn't supply Israel with food while in their own land. Once the Moabite woman provides bread for Naomi even in Bethlehem, it is no longer arguable to exclude Moabites.

The book of Ruth shows herein a similar universalistic theology like the book of Jonah. The law concerning prophecy in the Torah, Deut 18:9 – 22,<sup>23</sup> on the one hand takes for granted that prophecy is an office for guaranteeing the communication (exclusively) between the God of Israel and his people. It does not foresee that a prophet could be sent to the nations. On the other hand, a prophet is called by YHWH and gifted with the only legitimate means of communication, the word. Driven by God's word (1:1; 3:1), Jonah has to prophesy the decline not to his people, but to the capital of his greatest enemy and strongest imperial power of the narrated time, the Assyrian metropolis Nineveh. The book is strongly influenced by a universalistic theology that tries to open the Israelite religion for the gentiles.<sup>24</sup> Israelite prophets repeatedly faced the experience that the people do not hear the word and do not fear God. But Jonah, by fleeing his mission, meets God-fearing people already on the ship (Jon 1:5 – 16). Finally, when he does his job and prophesies against Nineveh, the inhabitants likewise immediately hear the word of Jonah's God, and do penitence for their sins. So like the Moabitess Ruth, the Ninevites are more disposed to hear the word and to act on what is asked of them. The success of the message, which Jonah does not appreciate, suggests that the word of God should be communicated also to the gentiles, even if they are the most feared enemies.

The reception of this overall important law concerning prophecy within this part of the canon is evident of the process of narrative filling in the gaps of this law, as the story Jonah does, or that of Jeremiah and Hananiah, by illustrating an aspect of the law, not given by God, but only presumed (Jer 28; Deut 18:20 – 22). Likewise we are able to trace it in the story of the woman of En-Dor, who uses

21 A short version of my understanding of the book is published in English: Irmtraud Fischer, "The Book of Ruth – a 'Feminist' Commentary to the Torah." In: Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Ruth and Esther. A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* 3. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, pp. 24 – 49.

22 Jürgen Ebach, "Fremde in Moab – Fremde aus Moab. Das Buch Ruth als politische Literatur." In: Jürgen Ebach and Richard Faber (eds.), *Bibel und Literatur*. München: Fink, 1985, pp. 277 – 304.

23 For such an understanding of prophecy as conceived by a legal text of the Torah see Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen. Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung des Phänomens der Prophetie und der Prophetinnen in der Hebräischen Bibel*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002, pp. 32 – 62.

24 The interconnectedness of biblical texts with the book of Jonah and the consequences for Jewish exegesis is shown by Uriel Simon, *Jona. Ein jüdischer Kommentar*. Stuttgart: Verlag Kath. Bibelwerk, 1994 (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 157); he does not pay much attention to the law of prophecy.

false practices for prophesying the future, described in Deut 18:9 – 14, to counsel the king. As she lets Saul swear by YHWH, it is apparent that she fulfils her prophetic gift to summon the dead prophet Samuel in order to ask him in the name of Israel's God about the future fate of Saul's military fortune. Therefore she should be called "prophetess of En-Dor" and not the "witch".<sup>25</sup>

This story functions exactly like what later would be called a halakhic midrash, because it shows that false practices are futile for they do not bring a new message: the defunct Samuel announces nothing other than what he had said when he was still alive. The engagement with the question, how can prophecy succeed, continuously led to creating new stories regarding Deut 18:14 – 22. This phenomenon creates within the extensive part of the Hebrew Bible called Prophets macro-structures as shown below.

### Modelling parts of the canon along texts

The last phenomenon presented here deals with the reception of biblical texts and concepts in a larger scale than a single text. It concerns the macro-structures, visible in books, within collections of books, or even in parts of the canon.

One of the best examples, already much described,<sup>26</sup> is the alignment of the closing of the books of Genesis and of Deuteronomy: The first biblical book that narrates the story of the chosen family ends with the death of Jacob/Israel, the main character of the book (Gen 50), who blesses his sons before he dies (Gen 49). The last book of the Torah ends with the death of the central figure since the book of Exodus; before dying, Moses blesses the Twelve Tribes, which have grown out of the sons of Jacob (Deut 33).

We are able to show the same parallelism for the opening and closing of the Christian Bible that begins in Gen 1 – 2 with the creation stories about heaven and earth and ends in Rev 21 – 22 with the new creation, by using not only the typical collocation "heaven and earth" from Gen 1:1 – 2:4a, but also the motif of the tree of life, typical for the Eden-narrative (Gen 2:9; 3:22.24; Rev 22:2.14.19).<sup>27</sup> The idea of

25 See for detailed argumentation Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen*, pp. 131 – 157.

26 For example Matthias Millard, *Die Genesis als Eröffnung der Tora. Kompositions- und auslegungsgeschichtliche Annäherungen an das erste Buch Mose*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001 (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 90), pp. 43 – 91.

27 In the Hebrew Bible a similar closing is to be seen in Isa 65 – 66. For all elements resumed from Gen 1 – 3 at the end of the book of Isaiah see Odil H. Steck, "Der neue Himmel und die neue Erde. Beobachtungen zur Rezeption von Gen 1 – 3 in Jes 65,16b – 25." In: Jacques van Ruiten and Marc Vervenne (eds.), *Studies in the Book of Isaiah. Festschrift Willem A. M. Beuken*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997 (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 132), pp. 349 – 365.



returning to creation as it was conceived by God and to paradise with the prospect of eternal life functions as literary inclusion for the whole Bible. The last book here tells about a new beginning, without negating all the history which led to salvation.

These features, correlating the ends of the first and the last book of the Torah in the Hebrew Bible and those of the beginning of the first and the end of last book of the Christian Bible, may well be a case of composition or also redaction and therefore treated from the perspective of composition- or redaction-history. But is this the only significance of this literary fact? This phenomenon of rewriting biblical texts obviously is not only a literary strategy for producing fine literature, but has immense theological significance in its adaptation of the message to new situations, contexts and times.

## Consequences for biblical exegesis today

In considering the comprehensive phenomena of “retelling” and “rewriting” “biblical” stories, we should be aware that “midrash” is a process that goes along with the processes of canonization.

Such a process of picking up quite famous and literary full written texts to make new stories is already detectable in the adaptation of extra-biblical myths (e. g. the flood narrative in Gen 6 – 9) within the Bible. Although the concepts of narratology as well as intertextuality do not ask historical questions, in particular not those concerning the problem of the growing of texts, it is not impossible to make this questioning also fruitful for historical-critical exegesis – if it is conceived not only as an engagement for questioning the development of a text up to its canonization, but also as a dedication to the afterlife of patterned words, phrases, motifs, topics, texts, books and collections of books. As such, this kind of inner-biblical exegesis<sup>28</sup> may be held as one of the starting points of midrash.

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28 Cf. the essay Michael Fishbane, “Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel.” In: idem, *The Garments of Torah. Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989 (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature), pp. 3 – 18, esp. 16: “Exegesis arises out of a practical crisis of some sort – the incomprehensibility of a word or a rule, or the failure of a covenantal tradition to engage its audience.”



## Celebration and Narration. Metaleptic features in Ex 12:1 – 13,16<sup>1</sup>

### Metalepsis

When I first came across Genette's notion of metalepsis, it made me think of Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* or Peter Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung*. Others may be reminded of Italo Calvino's novel *Wenn ein Reisender in einer Winternacht* (*Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*). Metalepsis, the dramatic transgression of narrative boundaries that reveals the fictionality of a piece of art, might appear to be a modern construct. But the subtitle of Genette's monograph negates this limitation to contemporary literature: "From Homer to Woody Allen" suggests that there are examples of transgressing narrative boundaries in Antiquity as well.<sup>2</sup>

In its narratological sense, metalepsis, first identified by Genette, is a paradoxical contamination between the world of the telling and the world of the told: "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...]" Narrative metalepsis as a concept results from the convergence of rhetoric (placing it alongside metaphor and metonymy as tropes of transformation, substitution, and succession) and the principle of narrative levels.<sup>3</sup>

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1 See for an extended version of this paper Ilse Müllner, "Pessach als Ereignis und Ritual. Die narrative Einbindung kommender Generationen in Ex 12,1 – 13,16." In: Ute Eisen and Peter von Möllendorf (eds.), *Metalepse in antiken Diskursen*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2013 (*Narratologia*) (forthcoming).

2 Gérard Genette, *Métalepse, de la figure à la fiction*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2003 (Poétique). Before that Genette adopted the term *metalepsis* from ancient rhetoric in his *Narrative Discourse* (1972) and gave it a narratological use. Irene de Jong, "Metalepsis in Ancient Greek Literature." In: Jonas Grethlein and Antonios Rengakos (eds.), *Narratology and Interpretation. The content of narrative form in ancient literature*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2009, pp. 87 – 115.

3 John Pier, "Metalepsis." In: Peter Hühn et al. (eds.), *The living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press. url: [hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=Metalepsis&oldid=2056](http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=Metalepsis&oldid=2056) [view date: 01 May 2013], 2. Pier is here referring to Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, ([1972] 1980), pp. 234 – 235.

In the majority of cases the term *metalepsis* is used in reference to contemporary literature and film.<sup>4</sup> Irene de Jong, a former student of Mieke Bal and now professor of Old Greek in Amsterdam, is currently focusing on narratology and ancient literature.<sup>5</sup> She suggests using the term *metalepsis* as a heuristic tool for analyzing ancient texts. On the one hand, this implies that it can be useful for detecting and describing features of ancient texts unknown thus far. On the other hand, a term like *metalepsis* changes when it is applied to ancient texts.<sup>6</sup> Concerning ancient Greek literature, de Jong distinguishes four forms of *metalepsis* (and binds together a few other examples under the term “*varia*”):<sup>7</sup>

1. apostrophe in narrative texts
2. characters announce the text in the text
3. blending of narrative voices
4. fade-out

In contemporary literature, *metalepsis* is considered to be something extraordinary, but it may be rather common in biblical and other ancient literatures. It is conceivable that *metaleptic* storytelling – transgressing the boundaries between the worlds of the narration and the narrated world – may have something to do with the authoritative status of literature.

The Torah must bind together narration and law, as Goethe’s famous statement on his experience of reading the Torah reveals:

Ab der Mitte des Buchs Exodus sehen wir “den Gang der Geschichte überall gehemmt durch eingeschaltete zahllose Gesetze, von deren größtem Teil man die eigentliche Ursache und Absicht nicht einsehen kann, wenigstens nicht, warum sie in dem Augenblick gegeben worden, oder, wenn sie späteren Ursprungs sind, warum sie hier angeführt und eingeschaltet werden. Man sieht nicht ein, warum bei einem so ungeheuren Feldzuge, dem ohnehin so viel im Wege stand, man sich recht absichtlich und kleinlich bemüht, das religiöse Zeremonien-Gepäck zu vervielfältigen, wodurch jedes Vorwärtskommen unendlich erschwert werden muss.”<sup>8</sup>

What Goethe describes here is one of the classical observations that have led historical critics to claim that the Pentateuch was not written by a single person.

4 Karin Kukkonen and Sonja Klimek (eds.), *Metalepsis in Popular Culture*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2011 (Narratologia 28).

5 See for instance Irene de Jong and René Nünlist (eds.), *Time in Ancient Greek Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 2007 (Mnemosyne Supplementa 291); Irene de Jong, René Nünlist, and Angus M. Bowie (eds.), *Narrators, narratees, and narratives in ancient Greek literature. Studies in ancient Greek narrative*. Boston: Brill, 2004.

6 See the various contributions in Eisen and von Möllendorf, *Metalepsis*.

7 De Jong, “Metalepsis”, pp. 93 – 115.

8 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in den Noten und Abhandlungen zum West-Östlichen Diwan, quoted after Erich Zenger and Christian Frevel (eds.), *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012 (Kohlhammer-Studienbücher Theologie 1,1), p. 100.

Narrative and legal passages are intertwined and must be clearly separated to obtain readable texts. Traditional Jewish and Christian scholars who were not bound to historical critical approaches have continuously developed ways of precisely understanding this intertwining of narrative and legal texts.

Today, narratology seems to once again provide tools for understanding narratives and their biblical counterparts. Lately, narratology has been moving from a rather narrow structuralist-driven analysis of narratives to a set of different narratologies that combine French, Russian, transmedial, feminist, and postcolonial approaches. This poststructuralist approach to narratology implies the transgressing of the borders of narration as privileged object of research itself – which has been heatedly discussed in the field of literature.<sup>9</sup> In this context, with respect to biblical narratology, I would point out Assnat Bartor's work on a narrative analysis of legal texts in the Torah.<sup>10</sup> There are also narratological works on Schir Haschirim,<sup>11</sup> as well as on letters in the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> In the following I will show:

1. The narratological category of the metalepsis helps to describe phenomena of separation, which traditionally have been diachronously resolved in a historical-critical manner, synchronously. "For narrative metalepsis in an ontological perspective, paradox is central, as it involves the logically inconsistent passage between two separate domains through suspension of the excluded middle."<sup>13</sup>
2. Forms of the metalepsis selectively extend the circle of intended readers of narratives and open them for receptions for descendants forever, לבניך עד-עולם.

Those who delve into narratology cannot avoid the question of the levels of narrative. The distinction between narrator and author, as well as text-immanent addressee and the actual reader, is fundamental to narratology. One discussion point in narratology is the meaningfulness of an intermediary – author entity<sup>14</sup>,

9 Tom Kindt, "Narratological Expansionism and Its Discontents." In: Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (eds.), *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2009 (Narratologia 20), pp. 35 – 47.

10 Assnat Bartor, *Reading law as narrative. A study in the casuistic laws of the Pentateuch*. Leiden: Brill, 2010 (Ancient Israel and its literature 5).

11 Stefan Fischer, *Das Hohelied Salomos zwischen Poesie und Erzählung. Erzähltextanalyse eines poetischen Textes*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 72); Yvonne Sophie Thöne, *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld. Raum und Geschlecht im Hohelied*. Berlin, Münster: LIT, 2012 (Exegese in unserer Zeit 22).

12 Timo Glaser, "Erzählung im Fragment. Ein narratologischer Ansatz zur Auslegung pseudepigrapher Briefbücher." In: Jörg Frey, Jens Herzer, Martina Janßen, and Clare K. Rothschild (eds.), *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen. Pseudepigraphy and author fiction in early Christian letters*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, pp. 267 – 294.

13 Pier, "Metalepsis", p. 22.

14 Silke Lahn and Jan Christoph Meister, *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008, p. 14.

author function,<sup>15</sup> and implied author<sup>16</sup>. I cannot go into this discussion here, but in my opinion, it makes sense to use such an entity as a category of analysis for understanding canonical texts. The boundaries between the narrative levels seemingly guarantee support of the fictionality.<sup>17</sup> Metalepses, however, exceed narrative levels; they disturb the as-if agreement between the reader and the fictional text by exposing the fictionality – as is the case in modern literature. In ancient literature, though, the fictionality seems to be strengthened by blurring the boundaries between the individual characters and the implied reader (the function of the narrative Psalm headings comes to mind here).

The biblical text Ex 12 – 13, which I will address in the following section, blurs the boundary between the characters of the narrative, the addressees, and the implied reader, between the narration's world and the world of the narrative. The metalepsis is not dramatic here the way it often is in modern literature, but rather fluid – a characteristic not only of biblical literature, but also that of ancient Greek literature.<sup>18</sup>

## Historical narrative and feast instructions in Ex 12:1 – 13:16<sup>19</sup>

Ex 12:1 – 13:16 leads into a smooth process between the narrated world and the world of narration. It deals with the introduction of a ritual – Passover. Or perhaps not; it deals with the narrative of the departure of the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Is this the introduction of a ritual or a narrative? Ex 12 – 13 is both at the same time.

The unification of the Passover and the feast of the Unleavened Bread creates ambiguity at a number of points in the story, indicating that the desire to es-

15 Barbara Schmitz, *Prophetie und Königtum. Eine narratologisch-historische Methodologie entwickelt an den Königsbüchern*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 60), pp. 58 – 108.

16 Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, "Der 'implizite Autor'. Zur Explikation und Verwendung eines umstrittenen Begriffs." In: Fotis Jannidis, Gerhard Lauer, Matias Martínez, and Simone Winko (eds.), *Rückkehr des Autors. Zur Erneuerung eines umstrittenen Begriffs*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999 (Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur 71), pp. 273 – 287.

17 Ilse Müllner, Art. "Fiktion." In: WiBiLex 2008 (<http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/Stichwort/Fiktion/>) [view date: 01 May 2013].

18 See the articles in Eisen and von Möllendorf, *Metalepsis*.

19 Concerning the delineation cf. Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus*. Stuttgart: Calwer Verl., 1997; Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, *Das Buch Exodus*. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009 (NSKAT), pp. 129 – 130; Christoph Berner, *Die Exoduserzählung. Das literarische Werden einer Ursprungslegende Israels*. Göttingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, pp. 267 – 342.

establish the etiological setting of the festival takes precedence over the narrative logic of the story.<sup>20</sup>

*The literary context:* Ex 12:1 – 13:16 belongs to the larger section Ex 1:1 – 18:28, in which the Israelites' becoming a people results in the oppression by the Egyptians and the departure from Egypt. The description of the departure is embedded in the narrative of the plagues (nine plagues in Ex 7 – 11) and the narrative of the passage through the Red Sea (Ex 13:17 – 15:21), which is followed by the journey to Mount Sinai (Ex 15:22 – 18). Following the narrative of the nine Egyptian plagues is the narrative of the departure of Israel from Egypt. One would assume this to be the case. A closer look at the text in the Book of Exodus starting in Chapter 12, however, reveals that the departure scenario is not simply being *narrated*, but rather instructions are being given for a ritual that is to be celebrated in commemoration of an event that has not yet taken place. The text also includes songs that also integrate different communicative situations into the broader narrative.<sup>21</sup> Narrative and feast instructions are thus inseparably connected to each other from the outset. The imperative that the Passover evening should be celebrated as if the people themselves had been present in Egypt is in accordance with the departure narrative's offer of literary identification, which exceeds the normal textual pragmatism. Ex 12 – 13 does not offer a narration followed by a ritual implementation, but rather narrates with an eye on the ritual celebration of the event in all the following generations into eternity (לך ולבניך עד-עולם 12:24).

In der Gottes- und Moserede tritt der Autor teilweise aus der Erzählsituation heraus. Er bespricht zwar weiterhin, was die Israeliten damals in Ägypten taten und erlitten, wendet sich aber gleichzeitig an seine Hörer und Hörerinnen und verknüpft die Vergangenheit mit der Gegenwart, indem er Assoziationen an ihre eigene liturgische Erfahrung hervorruft. Wie jede Ätiologie beschreibt Ex 12 den Sinn der Gegenwart als Erzählung der Vergangenheit.<sup>22</sup>

This entanglement or even identification between the acting community of Israel in Exodus and the respective reading and acting community of Israel in the ritual belongs, in my opinion, in the field of metalepsis. The narrative describes a highly complex relationship between the historical event and the commemorative feast, of an isolated act and iteration, of narrative and instruction. In this entanglement,

20 Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmann 2009 (The Eerdmans critical commentary), p. 270.

21 Georg Steins, “‘Ein Gedenken für seine Wundertaten hat er gewirkt’. Exodus 12,1 – 15,21 als kulturelles Skript.” In: Ilse Müllner, Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger and Ruth Scoralick (eds.), *Gottes Name(n). Zum Gedenken an Erich Zenger*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012, pp. 85 – 103.

22 Clemens Leonhard, “Die Erzählung Ex 12 als Festlegende für das Pesachfest am Jerusalemer Tempel.” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 18 (2003), pp. 233 – 260, at 253. In narratological perspective, Leonhard talks about the narrator, not the author.

1. a repeatability is intended, namely from generation to generation, from year to year and into eternity (עד-עולם 13:10), and
2. there is an identification of the characters represented in the text with the readers and listeners.

The following literary traits contribute to the cross-fading of the first Exodus and subsequent feasts, of the acting community and listening community, of the Exodus generation and all following generations:

1. The breaching of the course of the narrative in the macro context (see above), and the complex communication structure,
2. an appropriate temporal structure that finds its expression in the verbal syntax and temporal markers (from year to year 13:10; an eternal law for future generations 12:14),
3. a spatial structure that transcends the location of the narrated action – Egypt – and looks toward the location of the future action (the land that YHWH gives to you as he promised 12:25),
4. semantic fields that create a connection between the active characters in the text and the listening entities (generation, children, people of Israel עדה, elders of Israel, people ...),
5. discussion of the very narration of the event (that represents a special form of the metalepsis, *mise en abyme*) in 13:8,
6. on the level of the story, an interference of unique action and repeatable ritual.

### The communication structure

The basic rhythm of the text is thus not that of memory and hope but of memory and liturgical responsibility.

Terence Fretheim<sup>23</sup>

The speech of Moses to Israel – or the speech that God commanded to Moses for Israel – has relevance for the Exodus generation being addressed as well as the respective future generations that renew the text in reading and reciting processes, thus for active entities in the narrated world and in the world of narrating.

In the communicative structure of the text, the voice of Moses plays an important role. This central role corresponds naturally to the unsurpassability of Moses as a prophet (cf. Deut 34:10), i. e. as mediator between God and the people. The prophetic role is primarily communicative and not to be determined from its

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<sup>23</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991 (Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching), p. 147.

content (future) or from religious forms (vision, etc.). Therefore, I will begin with the communication structure in the text of Exodus 12:1 – 13:16<sup>24</sup>:

12:1 – 20		<i>Instructions for Passover and Matzot (YHWH ► Moses and Aaron ► Community of Israel)</i>
12:1	L1	Introduction to speech
12:2 – 20b	L2	YHWH ► Moses and Aaron
12:3a	L2	Introduction to speech
12:3b – 20	L3	YHWH ► Moses and Aaron ► whole community (עדה) Israel
12:21 – 27d		<i>Instructions for Passover (Moses ► Elders)</i>
12:21a.b	L1	Introduction to speech
12:21c – 27	L2	Moses ► all elders of Israel
12:26b	L2	Introduction to speech
12:26c	L3	“your sons” ► “to you”
12:27a	L2	Introduction to speech
12:27b – 27d	L3	“you” ► (your sons)
12:27e – 42		<i>Departure from Egypt (unleavened bread, but no lamb)</i>
12:27e – 31b	L1	Execution of that which had been commanded by Moses and Aaron, Striking of the firstborn
12:31a.b	L1	Introduction to speech
12:31c – 32d	L2	Pharaoh ► Moses and Aaron
12:33a	L1	Actions of the Egyptians
12:33b	L1	Introduction to speech
12:33c	L2	Egyptians
12:34 – 42	L1	Departure from Egypt, Matzot (no Passover), taking the utensils
12:43 – 51		<i>Instructions for partaking of Passover meal (YHWH ► Moses and Aaron); Note of execution</i>
12:43a	L1	Introduction to speech
12:43b – 49	L2	YHWH ► Moses and Aaron
12:50 – 51	L1	Execution of that which has been commanded by Moses and Aaron
13:1 – 16		<i>Instructions for the redeeming of the firstborn and for Matzot (YHWH ► Moses; Moses ► עבד)</i>
13:1	L1	Introduction to speech
13:2	L2	YHWH ► Moses
13:3a	L1	Introduction to speech
13:3b – 16	L2	Moses ► people
13:8a	L2	Introduction to speech
13:8b	L3	“you” ► “your child”

24 Level One (L1) is the level of the narrated events; L2 signifies the level of narrated speech; L3 stands for embedded speech, i. e. speech that is reported itself in reported speech.

(Continued)

13:14b	L2	Introduction to speech
13:14c	L3	“your child” ▶ “you”
13:14d	L2	Introduction to speech
13:14e – 16	L3	“you” ▶ “your child”

As you can see, from a quantitative standpoint, the level of narrated action (L1) takes up only a small portion of the whole. Apart from the introductions to speech and a short note of completion in 12:50 f, it is predominantly *the passage* 12:27 – 42, in which the actual departure of the Israelites from Egypt is described: the striking of the firstborn, the quick departure with unleavened bread, the taking of utensils, a local and temporal setting of the departure situation, and finally a summarizing qualification of this night.

Everything that is said about Passover and Matzot is communicated through speech acts by the narrative characters and partially in multiple steps. The entire first section, vv. 1 – 20, is subject to such a double gradation: YHWH speaks to Moses and Aaron (a short instruction regarding the monthly payment directed only to them), then v. 3 instructs “tell the entire community of Israel.” What is said afterwards about Passover (vv. 4 – 13) and Matzot (vv. 14 – 20) underlies the doubled introduction to the speech where YHWH speaks to Moses and Aaron and tells them what they should say to the Israelites.

The second section, vv. 21 – 27d, is represented as Moses’ speech to the elders, which with respect to communication, therefore, is an implementation of the command in v. 3 (tell the entire community of Israel). However, only Moses speaks, and he does this before the elders. Furthermore, the rendition of the speech does not match the instructions from YHWH. The emphasis is on the blood ritual; Matzot are completely missing. As such, this section has a much stronger content-based connection to the following narrated action of striking the firstborn (blood ritual as protection) than to the speech, commanded by YHWH, to the community with its evolvment of Passover and Matzot, where the blood ritual takes up only a small portion (12:7, 13).

Vv. 43 – 49 follow the narrative of the departure with a divine speech to Moses and Aaron in which rules for the participation of foreigners in the Passover meal are created. Circumcision is a prerequisite; the Passover is therefore a question of belonging.

A note of completion (vv. 50.51) and a temporal setting end the section.

Finally, before the narrative of the Red Sea, more ritual instructions are given (13:1 – 16). The main emphasis is now on redeeming the firstborn. The communicative level is virtually a headline for a divine speech to Moses (13:1 [in-



roduction to speech].2), and detailed regulations follow in a speech by Moses to the people.

### Binding of subsequent generations

Tradition lässt sich als ein Sonderfall von Kommunikation auffassen, bei dem Nachrichten nicht wechselseitig und horizontal ausgetauscht, sondern vertikal entlang einer Generationslinie weitergegeben werden.

Aleida Assmann<sup>25</sup>

The last observation on the communication structure (I am already at point 4) deals with the integration of subsequent *generations*. The discussion of the generations – which occurs multiple times in this text – plays a special role in the connection between the narrated world and the world of narration.

In the context of the communication structure, the *proleptic didactic dialogues* become noticeable. These children's questions are still formative of the structure of the Passover Seder even today. They open a further communicative level inside Moses' speech to the elders (12:21 – 27) and inside Moses' speech to the people (13:3 – 16). Vv. 25b – 27 suggest a future picture of the Passover ritual in the Promised Land. ושמרתם את־העבודה הזאת This tradition is to be held firmly and comes before the question of "your children" (בניכם) מִהֵנָּה הָעֲבוּדָה הַזֹּאת. The question refers back terminologically to the discussion of celebrating immediately preceding it.

13:8 introduces the speech with the children as a narration: לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר. Similar to 12:26 f, in 13:14ff the narrating of the rescue event precedes a question of the child: מִהֵנָּה זֹאת. It can't get any shorter. The answer starting at 13:14ff is difficult to delimit. Once again, it deals with the redeeming of the firstborn, this time already in strongly ritualized form. I consider the section through v. 16 as a part of the speech to the child. This is supported by:

- a) The framing by the Exodus formula בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצֵאנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם (vv. 14b, 16b), and
- b) The understanding of the entire section as a short narrative, introduced by וַיְהִי. This is unusual, because the typical verbal syntax for narrating (*wa-yiqtol*) only occurs here with the exception of the level of the narrated action:

וַיְהִי v. 15a, and

וַיַּהַרְגֵם v. 15c: And YHWH killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.

25 Aleida Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition. Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer*. Köln, Wien: Böhlau, 1999 (Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur 15), p. 64.

- c) Following the short narrative is a causal-connected description of the ritual of redemption.
- d) V. 16a goes to the meta level and again determines the semantization of this action: The (the redemption) shall be a sign on your hand and jewelry on your forehead ▶ (cf. Deut 6).

In three passages (12:26 f; 13:8, 14 – 16), therefore, an instruction is simulated that is intended to secure the handing down of the main content to coming generations. This instruction discusses the narrating of that which is currently taking place, whereby the narrating itself in turn belongs to the narrated ritual: *mise en abyme*.

The generations are also considered in the further instructions. In principle, the succession of generations is thought of as endless: *You shall celebrate this day as a day of remembrance. Celebrate it as a feast in honor of the Lord! For all generations this celebration shall be made into an ordinance!* (Ex 12,14).

The notion of the generations (12:14, 17, 42) implies two things:

- A. It represents a line of relations that always has an identificational function in the sense of a constellative anthropology, as it can be established for Hebrew thinking (subsequent to Bernd Janowski<sup>26</sup>),
- B. The generation term has a temporal dimension and refers to an uncertain and unfinished future.

### Feast and memory terminology

Alle Riten haben diesen Doppelaspekt der Wiederholung und der Vergegenwärtigung. Je strenger sie einer festgelegten Ordnung folgen, desto mehr überwiegt der Aspekt der Wiederholung. Je größere Freiheit sie der einzelnen Begehung einräumen, desto mehr steht der Aspekt der Vergegenwärtigung im Vordergrund.

Jan Assmann<sup>27</sup>

This reference to the generations occurs not only in the instruction, but in a narrow sense also in the narrative section, which flows into the memory of the generations (12:27b – 42). 12:42 identifies the night as one of departure and of its own remembrance. In the process, many translations create a temporal disambiguation (in the past “was a night of vigil ...”), where the Hebrew has an

26 Bernd Janowski, “Konstellative Anthropologie. Zum Begriff der Person im Alten Testament.” In: Christian Frevel (ed.): *Biblische Anthropologie. Neue Einsichten aus dem Alten Testament*. Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2010 (Quaestiones disputatae 237), pp. 64 – 87.

27 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München: Beck, 1992, p. 17.

openness, namely through the temporally ambiguous nominal sentence. Even the verb used here is ambiguous: לִיל שְׁמֵרִים is mostly translated as a night of vigil, but even in the Luther Bible of 1912, the meaning of the verb *schamar* was present as a remembrance term:

Therefore this night shall be kept for the LORD, that he led them out of Egypt; and the children of Israel shall keep it unto the LORD, they and their descendants. (Darum wird diese Nacht dem HERRN gehalten, daß er sie aus Ägyptenland geführt hat; und die Kinder Israel sollen sie dem HERRN halten, sie und ihre Nachkommen)

שָׁמַר means watch (over), preserve, hold, and in the sense of preservation and holding of a ritual, the verb also occurs in 12:17 (2x), 24, 25; 13:10. What should be held is the Matzot feast (12:17), the word (דָּבָר 12:24), the service (הַעֲבוּדָה 12:25), the ordinance (הַחֻקָּה 13:10).

The term שָׁמַר is semantically near remembering זָכַר. In 13:3, the imperative of remembrance connects the people spoken to by Moses with the events to be remembered. Stronger than the ambiguous שָׁמַר, the זָכֹר in 13:3 proleptically breaks through the narrative logic.

### Spatial and temporal prolepses

So it is with memory: it is a complex and deceptive experience. It appears to be pre-eminently a matter of the past, yet it is as much an affair of the present. It appears to be pre-eminently a matter of time, yet it is as much an affair of space.

Jonathan Z. Smith<sup>28</sup>

The זָכֹר from 13:3 refers back to 12:14 – the day shall be לְזִכְרֶיךָ to you, in remembrance. But of what? Of an event that at the level of the story has not yet occurred. In turn, the temporal gradation of the events proves to be strange, the narratological differentiation of the story and discourse decidedly practical.

Not every memorial culture is metaleptic. But it must be kept in mind here that in 12:14, where all subsequent generations are commanded to commemorate, on the level of the story, we are still prior to the event of the departure, and that, therefore, a commemoration command is being given for an event that has yet to be completed. In doing so, both are proleptically anticipated: the situation of remembering and the situation that is to be remembered. The metaleptic aspect is that those who are to remember are not those who are just preparing to leave Egypt; they are not the ones to whom Moses is speaking. The departure gen-

28 Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place. Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 25.

eration receives instructions for a life it will never lead. The departure generation receives feast instructions that are actually intended for the implied readers.

Also with regard to content, this jump from the departure generation to the Israelites who will live in the land is clear. The life in the land is assumed in 12:25 in the situation of the first instructions, and it is imagined in 12:43ff when it deals with the behavior towards foreigners who will live “near you.” As such, the identification is doubled:

- a. The departure generation is identified with the subsequent generations by being presented as the addressee for ritual instructions, which the subsequent generations will have to complete, and
- b. The subsequent generations are already present in the text as future addressees for the instructions as well as present in the instructions.

## Functions of the metalepsis in biblical narratives

How can this interaction, the permeability of the narrated world for the world of narration, in Ex 12 – 13 be interpreted? In a narrow sense, there is an intertwining between narration and liturgy. “One is invited, indeed compelled, to read the story through a liturgical lens.”<sup>29</sup>

I would like to suggest here that we speak of a canonical metalepsis. The blurring of the boundary between narrated characters and implied readers does not serve to produce an effect of estrangement or to expose fictionality. On the contrary: This blurring of the boundaries has the effect that the respective readers – as long as they accept the text’s offer – are more strongly pulled into the world of the narrated than they would be with simple identificational reading. As members of the דורית and the בניים, they are present in the text, already being accounted for in the original foundational situation as narrated characters. It is important to the canonical – or to put it more carefully, *binding* – text that the readers identify with it in a number of ways. The interweaving of unique, remembered actions repeated in the feast contribute to this, just as the generational connection of the actors at the point of origin עד-עולם. The text makes use of its own reader-response situation by discussing the act of narrating (the children’s questions).

Die für einen bestimmten Anlass formulierten Texte werden transformiert, indem sie dekontextualisiert und literarisch (vielschichtig) rekontextualisiert und erst dadurch zur Heiligen Schrift für nachfolgende Generationen werden. Bildlich gesprochen wird die Bindung an den Ursprung gelockert, damit der Text weiterhin sprechen kann. [...] Heilige Schrift gewinnt den Charakter des Rituals, gewissermaßen der ‘gepflegten’ Er-

29 Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 133.

innerung, das die Teilnehmenden, statt sie in die Vergangenheit zurückzuführen ('so war das damals') in die Gegenwärtigkeit des Ursprungs stellt ("Ein Gedächtnis seiner Wunder ...") [...] Der Kanon selbst überspringt diesen "Graben", indem er die Geschichte der Gotteserfahrungen des Gottesvolkes "auf das Gedenken" hin transformiert.<sup>30</sup>

The Torah as a binding text, as a text that spans across generations, as well as a link between narrative and instruction is structurally established here through the narrating.

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<sup>30</sup> Georg Steins, "Kanonisch lesen." In: Helmut Utzschneider and Erhard Blum (eds.), *Lesarten der Bibel. Untersuchungen zu einer Theorie der Exegese des Alten Testaments*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006, pp. 45 – 64, at 50 – 52.



## Midrasch und Kirchenväter: Parallelen und Differenzen in Hermeneutik und Methodologie

Christliche und jüdische Bibelauslegung stehen sich besonders in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten in unterschiedlicher Weise nahe: Einerseits ist ein Streit um die richtige Interpretation der Heiligen Schriften zu beobachten, die von allen beteiligten jüdischen und christlichen Gruppen gleichermaßen für die eigene Lehre und Praxis beansprucht werden. Andererseits greift die frühe christliche Interpretation auch auf jüdische Auslegungen und deren Methoden zurück.<sup>1</sup> Neben expliziten Bezugnahmen auf jüdische Deutungen bzw. jüdische Gewährsleute, die wir etwa bei Origenes und Hieronymus finden,<sup>2</sup> lassen sich gleiche und ähnliche Techniken der Textauslegung beobachten. Der vorliegende Aufsatz will Midrasch und patristische Exegese nebeneinander stellen, um Ähnlichkeiten sowie Unterschiede auf verschiedenen Ebenen herauszuarbeiten.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Für die Wurzeln christlicher Bibelauslegung vgl. z. B. Charles Kannengiesser (Hg.), *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis. The Bible in Ancient Christianity*. Bd. 1, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004, S. 117 – 163 (Kap. 2 „Judaism and Rhetorical Culture. Two Foundational Contexts for Patristic Exegesis“); William Horbury, „Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers.“ In: Martin Jan Mulder (Hg.), *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*. Assen u. a.: van Gorcum u. a., 1988, S. 727 – 787, bes. 770 – 776; Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church. An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994, S. 2 – 7.
  - 2 Vgl. dazu Nicholas R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews. Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Alfons Fürst, *Hieronymus. Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike*. Freiburg i. B.: Herder, 2003; Moritz Rahmer, *Die hebräischen Traditionen in den Werken des Hieronymus. Teil I: Die „Quaestiones in Genesin“*. Breslau: Schletter, 1861; Moritz Rahmer, *Die hebräischen Traditionen in den Werken des Hieronymus. Teil II, Heft I: Hosea, Joël, Amos*. Berlin: M. Poppelauer's Buchhandlung, 1902; Jörg Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1999 (Patristische Texte und Studien 49).
  - 3 Verbindungen zwischen christlicher und jüdischer Bibelauslegung unter verschiedenen Fragestellungen wurden schon vielfach behandelt. Dazu seien einige wenige beispielhaft genannt: Günter Stemberger, „Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire.“ In: Magne Sæbø (Hg.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation 1,1*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996, S. 569 – 586; Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius. Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of

Dazu sollen zunächst die *Charakteristika des Midrasch* im Verhältnis zur Kirchenväterexegese anhand aktueller Diskussionen in der Midraschforschung diskutiert werden (1). Die Unterschiede zwischen *Midrasch* und *Allegorese* als hermeneutischen Systemen bedürfen eigener Überlegungen (2). Danach sollen an einem konkreten *Textbeispiel* rabbinische und patristische Auslegung eines Bibeltextes miteinander verglichen werden (3). Dabei kann es hier nicht um die Behauptung direkter Abhängigkeiten gehen. Ebenso wird die Datierungsfrage einzelner Texte hintangestellt.<sup>4</sup> Ausgehend vom Textbeispiel werden (4) Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten im *hermeneutischen Zugang* sowie (5) in der Methodologie zusammengefasst. Einige weiterführende Bemerkungen schließen die Untersuchung ab (6).<sup>5</sup>

## Definitionen: Charakteristika des rabbinischen Midrasch und die patristische Bibelauslegung

Midrasch ist Bibelauslegung und zwar jüdische Bibelauslegung. Über diese Grundaussagen hinaus unterscheiden sich verschiedene Definitionen von Midrasch in verschiedenen Punkten voneinander.<sup>6</sup> Daher sollen unterschiedliche

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- New York Press, 1996; William Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998; Edward Kessler, „The Exegetical Encounter between the Greek Church Fathers and the Palestinian Rabbis.“ *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001), S. 395 – 412; Emmanouela Grypheou und Helen Spurling (Hgg.), *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 2009 (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 18).
- 4 Die Endredaktion der Auslegungs- und Homilien-Midraschim als Kompilationen ist *nach* den hier behandelten Kirchenvätern anzusetzen, wobei die verarbeiteten Traditionen durchaus älter sein können. Die Katenen, sogenannte „Kettenkommentare“, die frühere Auslegungen zu Bibeltexten versweise zusammenstellen, sind allerdings gleichzeitig bzw. danach entstanden. Zur Datierung der Midraschim vgl. Günter Stemberger, *Midrasch. Vom Umgang der Rabbinen mit der Bibel. Einführung – Texte – Erläuterungen*. München: Beck, 1989, S. 31 – 53; ders., *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*. München: Beck, 1992, S. 272 – 308.
- 5 Für einen Überblick über den rabbinischen Midrasch bei den Kirchenvätern vgl. Adam Kamesar, „Rabbinic Midrash and Church Fathers.“ In: Jacob Neusner und Alan J. Avery-Peck (Hgg.), *Encyclopaedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism*. Bd. 1, Leiden: Brill, 2005, S. 20 – 40.
- 6 Vgl. dazu etwa Gary G. Porton, „Defining Midrash.“ In: Jacob Neusner (Hg.), *The Study of Ancient Judaism I. Mishnah, Midrash, Siddur*. New York: KTAV Publ. House, 1981, S. 55 – 92, hier S. 59: „On the one hand, there are scholars, such as Wright, who want to limit the definition to rabbinic literature or to literatures which have a close affinity with rabbinic texts. On the other hand, there are scholars, such as Sanders, who want to free the meaning of *midrash* from any dependence on literary products.“ Gary G. Porton, „Definitions of Midrash.“ In: Jacob Neusner und Alan J. Avery-Peck (Hgg.), *Encyclopaedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism*. Bd. 1, Leiden: Brill, 2005, S. 520 – 534; Marianne Grohmann, *Aneignung der Schrift. Wege einer christlichen Rezeption jüdischer Hermeneutik*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000, S. 107 – 125.



Ansätze dargestellt werden, wobei es hier nicht darum geht, diese Definitionen selbst einer eingehenden Kritik zu unterziehen, sondern sie sollen als charakteristisch angesehene Merkmale des Midrasch herausgearbeitet werden, die dann als heuristisches Instrument für den Vergleich mit den patristischen Texten verwendet werden können. Dabei lassen sich vor allem auf der hermeneutischen und strukturellen Ebene wichtige Parallelen zwischen beiden Auslegungstraditionen feststellen.

Laut Gary Porton wird Midrasch von unterschiedlichen Forschern nach verschiedenen Kriterien definiert: nach dem Inhalt, nach dem Prozess der Interpretation oder nach der Funktion.<sup>7</sup> Porton selbst erachtet einen literarischen Zugang („literary aspects“) für den sinnvollsten.<sup>8</sup> Er definiert den rabbinischen Midrasch folgendermaßen:

Rabbinic midrash is an oral or written literature composed by the rabbis that has its starting point in a fixed, canonical biblical text. In midrash, this original text, considered the revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to.<sup>9</sup>

Auch patristische Bibelauslegung geht von einem kanonischen Bibeltext aus, der als göttliche Offenbarung verstanden und in der Auslegung im Normalfall auch zitiert wird.

Während diese Definition *a priori* auf den rabbinischen Midrasch eingeschränkt ist, diskutiert Porton auch andere Formen des Midrasch: innerhalb der Bibel (Chr, Ps), in Targumim, Rewritten Bible und Pescharim. Er listet zuletzt sechs Kennzeichen des rabbinischen Midrasch auf, die diesen teils von den anderen Texten unterscheiden, teils aber allen gemeinsam sind:<sup>10</sup> 1. Die rabbinischen Texte sind Sammlungen unabhängiger Einheiten. 2. Oft findet sich mehr als ein Kommentar zu einer biblischen Einheit. 3. Die Aussagen werden zumeist namentlich bestimmten Rabbinen zugeschrieben. 4. Der rabbinische Kommentar kann direkt mit dem biblischen Text verbunden, aber auch Teil eines Dialogs, einer Erzählung oder eines ausführlichen Monologs sein. 5. Der rabbinische Midrasch atomisiert den Text in höherem Grad als die anderen Formen „midraschischer Aktivität“. 6. Oft wird die spezifische Methode, mit der der Text interpretiert wird, explizit offen gelegt.

In der patristischen Bibelauslegung haben wir es mit Autorenliteratur zu tun, die schon allein aus diesem Grund die ersten drei Kriterien nicht erfüllt. Die Kennzeichen 4 – 6 finden sich allerdings sehr wohl in der Exegese der Kirchenväter. Zahlreiche Homilien und Kommentare zu biblischen Büchern verfolgen das Anliegen,

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7 Vgl. Porton, „Defining“, S. 60 f.

8 Vgl. Porton, „Defining“, S. 61.

9 Porton, „Definitions“, S. 520.

10 Vgl. Porton, „Defining“, S. 79.

den biblischen Text christlichen Hörer/innen verständlich zu machen (4).<sup>11</sup> Dazu werden Bibeltexte Schritt für Schritt, oft Wort für Wort, interpretiert (5). Gerade in spezifisch christlicher oder christologischer Auslegung wird oftmals die allegorische Auslegung (als Methode) ausdrücklich erwähnt, aber auch auf andere Methoden, wie etwa die Deutung von Namen, wird verwiesen (6).

Lieve Teugels<sup>12</sup> entwickelt ihre Definition von Midrasch in Abgrenzung zu anderen Modellen, die sie kurz beschreibt, und zwar Addison G. Wright und Arnold Goldberg.<sup>13</sup> Goldbergs strikt formales Modell und Wrights Verständnis von Midrasch als literarisches Genus<sup>14</sup> definieren diesen in einem breiten Sinn, dem Teugels entschieden widerspricht. Sie definiert Midrasch folgendermaßen: „Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture that bears the lemmatic form.“<sup>15</sup> Damit fallen alle nicht-jüdischen Texte sowie jüdische Texte, die nicht aus der rabbinischen Zeit stammen, aus der Definition heraus.<sup>16</sup> Das Kennzeichen „rabbi-

11 Damit soll nicht gesagt werden, dass es nicht auch andere Formen der Bibelauslegung gibt. So finden sich z. B. Fragen und Antworten, Scholien u. ä., aber Bibelauslegung ist auch in Briefe, theologische oder moralische Traktate integriert. Im Grunde ist die gesamte frühchristliche Theologie von Bibelinterpretation geprägt.

12 Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash. The Story of 'The Wooing of Rebekah' (Gen. 24)*. Leuven: Peeters 2004 (Contributions to Biblical exegesis and theology 35).

13 Vgl. Arnold Goldberg, „Die funktionale Form des Midrasch.“ *Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge* 10 (1982), S. 1 – 45; wieder abgedruckt in Margarete Schlüter und Peter Schäfer (Hgg.), *Arnold Goldberg. Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung. Gesammelte Studien II*. Tübingen: Mohr 1999 (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 73), S. 199 – 229; diskutiert in Teugels, *Bible*, S. 157 – 161. Addison G. Wright, „The Literary Genre Midrash.“ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966), S. 105 – 138. 417 – 457, hier S. 133 – 135; diskutiert in Teugels, *Bible*, 152 – 157. Diese können hier nicht näher vorgestellt werden.

14 Wright, *Genre*, S. 133 u. ö. bezeichnet Midrasch als „a literature about literature“.

15 Teugels, *Bible*, S. 168. Dabei beinhalte das Adjektiv „rabbinisch“ die Vorstellung von der mündlichen Tora, ein Konzept, das typisch für rabbinische, aber nicht für verwandte Literatur sei. Teugels verweist darauf, dass ihre Definition der von Porton, die sie auch wörtlich zitiert, sehr ähnlich ist. Der einzige und für sie wesentliche Unterschied ist das Fehlen des Kennzeichens „rabbinisch“ bei Porton, wobei er aber in seiner überarbeiteten Definition vom rabbinischen Midrasch ausgeht (s. o.). Damit schließt Porton nicht aus, dass es auch andere Formen des Midrasch geben könnte, Teugels jedoch sehr wohl.

16 Das betrifft insbesondere die Frage nach Midrasch schon in der hebräischen Bibel, in Qumran und im NT sowie die Frage nach modernen Midraschim. Teugels Definition ist in gewisser Weise tautologisch, da sie *a priori* davon ausgeht, dass Midrasch rabbinisch sein und dafür ein bestimmtes exklusives Charakteristikum gefunden werden müsse. Charakteristisch dafür auch Teugels, *Bible*, S. 169: „My main reason is that it is better to compare equal, but distinct, entities, than to throw them all on one heap, ending up with nothing to compare. If we consider the interpretation of Scripture within Scripture (inner-biblical exegesis) separately, and the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament separately, and biblical interpretation in Qumran, in the Second Temple literature, in Philo, and so on, all as different kinds of biblical interpretation, then we have something to compare. If we call all these forms of biblical interpretation ‚midrash‘, we obscure matters.“ Wenn Midrasch aufgrund seiner Funktion oder literarischen Form bestimmt wird, kann eine solche Definition nicht aufrechterhalten werden.

nisch“ trifft selbstverständlich auch für die Bibelauslegung der Kirchenväter nicht zu. Die Form von Lemma und Kommentar hingegen findet sich häufig, sowohl in Homilien als auch in Kommentaren. Ähnlichkeiten in der Struktur von Midraschim und patristischen Auslegungen sind also festzustellen.

Daniel Boyarin geht von „literary theory“ aus, um einen neuen Zugang zum Midrash zu entwickeln.<sup>17</sup> Literaturtheorie könne helfen zu verstehen, wie es möglich ist, dass die hebräische Bibel in so vielen unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen interpretiert werden kann, und warum die Bedeutungen sich oftmals als so weit entfernt von einer „einfachen“ (simple) oder „wörtlichen“ (literal) Bedeutung des Textes zeigen.<sup>18</sup> In Kap.1 seines Buches *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* („Toward a New Theory of Midrash“) diskutiert Boyarin zunächst das Modell von Isaak Heinemanns *Darkhe ha-aggadah*,<sup>19</sup> der Midrasch-Aggadah vor allem als Poesie und als kreative Geschichtsschreibung versteht. Boyarin plädiert demgegenüber für ein Verständnis von Midrasch primär als „reading“.<sup>20</sup> Während Joseph Heinemann Midrasch zu sehr an die historischen Umstände binde, entferne sich Isaak Heinemann zu weit davon. Beide sind der Opposition von subjektivem und objektivem Zugang verpflichtet, was Boyarin überwinden möchte:

I wish to discredit the opposition between reading which is value-free and concerned with the difficulties of the biblical text and that which is unconcerned with those difficulties and speaks to the needs of the moment. ... I am asserting that we will not read midrash well and richly unless we understand it first and foremost as *reading*, as hermeneutic, as generated by the interaction of rabbinic readers with a heterogeneous and difficult text, which was for them both normative and divine in origin.<sup>21</sup>

Eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Interpretation spielt für Boyarin die Intertextualität, die er (gegen Neusner) als Teil der Struktur von literarischen Texten als solchen versteht (mit Bachtin)<sup>22</sup> und in dreifacher Weise konkretisiert: 1. Texte beinhalten immer bewusste und unbewusste Zitate früherer Diskurse; 2. Texte können dialogisch sein und die Bibel ist ein herausragendes Beispiel dafür; 3. es gibt kulturelle Codes, die, wiederum bewusst oder unbewusst, die Produktion von Texten ermöglichen bzw. beschränken. Für Boyarin ist also Midrasch eine

17 Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press 1990.

18 Vgl. Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. ix.

19 Vgl. dazu Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 1 – 11.

20 Vgl. Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 11 – 19.

21 Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 5. Das trifft auf christliche Bibelauslegung in gleicher Weise zu. Bei den Kirchenvätertexten handelt es sich um religiöse Texte, die auch einen religiösen Zweck verfolgen. Vgl. dazu Agnethé Siquans, *Die alttestamentlichen Prophetinnen in der patristischen Rezeption. Texte – Kontexte – Hermeneutik*. Freiburg i. B.: Herder, 2011 (HBS 65), S. 566 – 567. Oft wird in diesem Zusammenhang von der „Nützlichkeit“ der Schrift gesprochen, was selbstverständlich den Nutzen für das geistige Leben und die religiöse Praxis meint.

22 Vgl. Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 14.

kontextuelle, kulturell bedingte Form des Lesens der Bibel. „Midrash is a portrayal of the reality which the rabbis perceived in the Bible through their ideologically colored eyeglasses ...“<sup>23</sup> Sie *lesen* die Bibel in ihrer Zeit. Die intertextuelle Lesepraxis des Midrasch versteht Boyarin als eine Entwicklung der Intertextualität, die sich bereits in innerbiblischer Interpretation zeigt. Die rabbinischen Interpreten gehen jeweils von einzelnen Bibelversen aus, die Grenze der Interpretation bildet die Gesamtheit der biblischen Schriften, der Kanon. Damit kann Midrasch verstanden werden als „radical intertextual reading of the canon ... The biblical narrative is gapped and dialogical. The role of the midrash is to fill in the gaps.“<sup>24</sup>

Diese Charakterisierung trifft ebenso auf frühchristliche Bibelinterpretation zu. Auch die christlichen Exegeten betrachten ihre Bibel als einen Kanon heiliger Schriften, innerhalb dessen intertextuelle Beziehungen „gelesen“ und hergestellt werden. Auch hier werden Leerstellen in den Texten aufgegriffen und entsprechend der eigenen Ideologie gefüllt.<sup>25</sup> Auch ihre Interpretationen sind vom kulturellen Kontext bestimmt und gehen gleichfalls von einer Mehrzahl an Bedeutungen des biblischen Textes aus, selbstverständlich im Rahmen einer spezifisch christlichen Hermeneutik.<sup>26</sup>

Auch David Stern wählt für seinen Zugang zum Midrasch die Auseinandersetzung mit Literaturtheorie.<sup>27</sup> Er betont die Kreativität des Midrasch und beschreibt ihn als „a truly rich and complex form of literature to be read in its own right, not merely as a commentary on the Bible ...“<sup>28</sup> Demnach situiert er Midrasch in der Grauzone zwischen Exegese und Literatur. Stern betont die Kreativität als bedeutenden Faktor und rechnet Formen wie Maschal oder Homilie sehr wohl zum Midrasch. Dass er Midrasch als *rabbinisch* versteht, ist aus seinen Ausführungen implizit zu erschließen. Midrasch reflektiere die rabbinische Ideologie und könne daher nicht ausschließlich als literarische Auslegung verstanden werden, sondern weise den Leser/innen einen Weg zur Heiligkeit, habe also eminent religiöse Bedeutung. Vorausgesetzt sind die allumfassende Bedeutung der Bibel, die sich bis in kleinste Details erstreckt, und ihre Einheit-

23 Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 15.

24 Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 16 f.

25 Vgl. z. B. die Vorstellung von der Jungfräulichkeit Mirjams, der Schwester Moses, bei den Kirchenvätern (vgl. Siquans, *Prophetinnen*, S. 91 – 102), oder die Deutung von Jes 8,3 (Geburt eines Kindes durch „die Prophetin“) auf die Geburt Jesu durch Maria und die damit verbundene Deutung Marias als Prophetin (vgl. ebenda, S. 255 – 290).

26 In diesem Bereich besteht der Unterschied aber v. a. darin, dass die Kirchenväterexegese mehrere Bedeutungen auf verschiedenen Ebenen annimmt, Midrasch hingegen verschiedene Auslegungen auf einer Ebene bietet.

27 David Stern, *Midrash and Theory. Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996.

28 Stern, *Midrash*, S. 7.

lichkeit. Die Technik der Atomisierung ist der ersten Annahme geschuldet, die davon ausgeht, dass jedes Wort, jeder Buchstabe seine Bedeutung haben und daher interpretiert werden müssen. Die Annahme der Einheitlichkeit (die sich übrigens genauso in der frühchristlichen Literatur findet) führt dazu, die Bibel als einen einzigen Text zu betrachten, in dem alles gleichzeitig ist. Daraus wird auch eine gewisse Zeitlosigkeit abgeleitet, die typisch für die rabbinische Zugangsweise zur Schrift ist (die Kirchenväter arbeiten stark mit dem Konzept der Heilsgeschichte, was aus ihrer Sicht auch verständlich ist). Die zahlreichen Sinnebenen und Auslegungen, die sich zu einzelnen Versen finden, sind nicht Ausdruck einer Indetermination i. S. einer modernen Literaturtheorie, sondern der als polysem wahrgenommene Text wird in einem begrenzten Rahmen ausgelegt. Letztlich lasse sich eine „kind of underlying, deep structure“ ausmachen, die die unterschiedlichen Interpretationen hervorbringt und leitet.<sup>29</sup> Die Einheit wird durch die Einheit der Offenbarung, durch Gott als eigentlichen Autor der Bibel gewährleistet. In dieser Hinsicht ist Midrasch zweifellos mit frühchristlicher Bibelauslegung vergleichbar. Stern vergleicht diese „underlying, deep structure“ auch mit der christlichen Glaubensregel (*regula fidei*).<sup>30</sup> Er nimmt an, dass die rabbinische community wohl auch eine gewisse institutionelle Kontrolle über die Interpretation ausgeübt habe, wobei schwer zu fassen sei, *wie* diese ausgeübt wurde und *was* konkret diese Grenze überschritten hat. Stern nennt als Beispiel eine Auslegung von Jes 7,14 als Prophetie über die jungfräuliche Geburt Jesu als des Messias.<sup>31</sup>

In formaler Hinsicht betont Stern, dass die überlieferten Midraschim „simple exegetical miscellanies with no significant super-structure“ seien.<sup>32</sup> „Opinions are juxtaposed for no obvious reason; traditions contradict one another; and the same comments are sometimes repeated two or three times on different verses.“<sup>33</sup> Midrasch ist für ihn nicht einfach Exegese, sondern Diskurs von Exegese.<sup>34</sup> An diesem Punkt unterscheidet sich Midrasch natürlich wieder von Kirchenväter-

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29 Stern, *Midrash*, S. 26.

30 Vgl. Stern, *Midrash*, S. 25.

31 Vgl. Stern, *Midrash*, S. 25. Dass das richtig sein dürfte, darauf weisen auch die christlichen Auslegungen dieser Stelle hin, die ganz klar die jüdische Deutung ablehnen. Vgl. dazu Adam Kamesar, „The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14. The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century.“ *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990), S. 62 – 65; Agnethé Siquans, „Übersetzung, Kontextualisierung, Abgrenzung: Ingredienzien einer christologischen Auslegung von Jes 7.“ In: Marianne Grohmann und Ursula Ragacs, (Hgg.), *Religion übersetzen*. Göttingen: Vienna University Press at V&R unipress 2012 (Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society 2), S. 51 – 73.

32 David Stern, *Parables in Midrash. Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, S. 154.

33 Stern, *Parables*, S. 153.

34 Stern, *Parables*, S. 179.

exegese als Autorenliteratur, wobei aber auch hier immer wieder auf frühere Auslegungen positiv oder negativ Bezug genommen wird.

Im christlichen Bereich finden sich allerdings in späterer Zeit auch Sammlungen von Bibelauslegungen, die Katenen, sog. Kettenkommentare, die ab dem Ende der patristischen Ära entstehen.<sup>35</sup> Ihre Eigenart besteht darin, zu einzelnen Bibelversen oder kurzen Abschnitten die Kommentare verschiedener Autoren v. a. des 3. – 6. Jhs. zusammenzustellen. Dabei werden die Namen der Autoren im Normalfall genannt, wobei die Angaben nicht immer zuverlässig sind. Die Textausschnitte werden aneinandergefügt, manchmal auch von den Kompilatoren erläutert. Die Pentateuchkatene beispielsweise reiht einzelne Anmerkungen aneinander, ohne sie wirklich in einen kohärenten Zusammenhang zu bringen. Sie entstammen verschiedenen Autoren und sehr unterschiedlichen Werken.<sup>36</sup> Die Methoden und die Verwendung von anderen Bibeltexten variieren je nach Werk und Autor. Grundsätzlich sind sowohl Auslegung des Literalsinns als auch christologische Auslegung vertreten. Texte aus AT und NT werden zur Deutung herangezogen. Die einzelnen Ausschnitte werden hier kommentarlos aneinander gereiht. Es gibt aber auch Katenen, die Anmerkungen des Kompilators enthalten. Möglicherweise wollte dieser unterschiedliche (orthodoxe) Meinungen zu einzelnen Fragen der Interpretation einem theologisch gebildeten Publikum zur Verfügung stellen.<sup>37</sup> Eine zusammenhängende Auslegung liegt aber nicht vor. Die Pluralität in der Interpretation einer Textstelle bewegt sich in einem recht engen Rahmen. Die Katene bietet rein formal, einmal abgesehen von Hermeneutik und Methoden, eine Parallele zu den Midraschim als Sammlungen von Auslegungstraditionen, mit Nennung der Autoritäten.<sup>38</sup> In gewisser Weise werden auch hier akzeptierte Auslegungen zu Bibeltexten zusammengestellt und der Raum möglicher christlicher Auslegungen abgesteckt.

Stern geht aber auch auf eine typische christliche Interpretationsmethode ein, die ebenfalls mehrfache Interpretationen eines Textes produziert, die Allegorese.<sup>39</sup> Von Beginn an postuliert Allegorese zwei Ebenen von Bedeutung in einem Text: den Literalsinn und einen tieferen/höheren Sinn, wobei letzterer in mehrere Kategorien unterteilt werden kann. Von Beginn an werden diese Sinnebenen in eine Hierarchie gebracht. Sie stehen nicht gleichwertig nebeneinander, sondern der allegorische Sinn wird als der höhere und eigentliche betrachtet (was m. E. fundamental mit der genuin christologischen Ausrichtung dieses Sinnes zusammenhängt). Stern verweist auf die Interpretation von Gen 1,1 durch Au-

35 Vgl. Klaus Wachtel, „Katenen.“ *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 5 (1996), S. 1326 – 1327.

36 Françoise Petit, *La chaîne sur la Genèse. Édition intégrale I, Chapitres 1 à 3*. Leuven: Peeters, 1991 (Traditio exegetica Graeca 1).

37 Vgl. Petit, *Chaîne*, S. XIV.

38 Vgl. dazu den kurzen Hinweis bei Horbury, *Jews*, S. 219.

39 Vgl. dazu Stern, *Midrash*, S. 23 – 25.

gustinus, in dem dieser einer „midrashic polysemy“ nahekomme. Allerdings führt Stern diese multiple Auslegung nicht auf die Annahme von Polysemie des Bibeltextes zurück, sondern betrachtet sie als „result of the biblical author's own obscurity“, die eine eindeutige Auslegung verunmögliche.<sup>40</sup> Daher soll hier ein kurzer Blick auf diesen Text erlaubt sein.

Augustinus legt in seinen *Confessiones* ausführlich Gen 1 aus.<sup>41</sup> Im Rahmen einer Zurückweisung gewisser *contradictores*<sup>42</sup> findet sich ein Metadiskurs über richtige Bibelinterpretation.<sup>43</sup> Aus theologischen und philosophischen Grundeinsichten in die Erschaffung der Welt durch Gott und die Beschaffenheit von formloser Masse und Form leitet Augustinus fünf mögliche Deutungen von Gen 1,1 ab:

Aus all diesen Wahrheiten, an denen die nicht zweifeln, deren innerem Auge du sie offenbartest, und die unerschütterlich glauben, daß Moses, dein Diener, im Geist der Wahrheit geredet hat, aus ihnen allen nimmt der eine sich dies heraus und sagt: Im Uranfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde, das heißt, in seinem gleich ewigen Worte schuf Gott die übersinnliche und sinnliche, oder die geistige und körperliche Kreatur. Etwas anderes sagt ein zweiter, der sagt: Im Uranfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde, das heißt, in seinem gleichewigen Worte schuf Gott die ganze Masse dieser körperlichen Welt mit allen unsern Blicken wahrnehmbaren und bekannten Geschöpfen. Etwas anderes ein dritter, der sagt: Im Uranfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde, das heißt, in seinem gleichewigen Worte schuf er den formlosen Stoff der geistigen und körperlichen Kreatur. Etwas anderes ein vierter, der sagt: Im Uranfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde, das heißt, in seinem gleichewigen Worte schuf Gott den formlosen Stoff der körperlichen Kreatur, in welchem verworren bereits enthalten waren der Himmel und die Erde, die wir jetzt geschieden und geformt in der Masse dieser unserer Welt vor Augen haben. Etwas anderes ein fünfter, der sagt: Im Uranfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde, das heißt, im Anbeginn seines Schaffens und Wirkens schuf Gott den formlosen Stoff, der Himmel und Erde verworren in sich trug, aus dem geformt und hervorgegangen sie jetzt hell und klar mit allem, was in ihnen ist, vor uns stehen.<sup>44</sup>

Augustinus zitiert hier anonym fünf mögliche Deutungen des Verses, die sich aber alle in einem sehr engen Rahmen bewegen. Er bringt zwar seine eigene Deutung, schließt aber andere nicht aus. Augustinus geht von zwei Autorinstanzen im Text aus: Mose und Gott. Primär fragt er danach, was Mose gemeint habe. Allerdings kann es für Augustinus auch andere Deutungen geben, die Gott, der die „wahrheitsliebenden Geister“ inspiriert und der die letzte und höchste Autorität hinter der Bibel ist, ebenfalls als wahr erweist. Gott ist die Autorität, die

40 Stern, *Midrash*, S. 25.

41 Martin Skutella (Hg.), *Aurelius Augustinus. Confessiones* XII, 15. Stuttgart, Leipzig: Teubner, 1996, S. 307,15. Deutsche Übersetzung: Wilhelm Thimme (Hg.), *Aurelius Augustinus, Bekenntnisse*. 5. Aufl. München: dtv, 1988.

42 Augustinus, *Bekenntnisse* XII, 17, Thimme, S. 347.

43 Augustinus, *Bekenntnisse* XII, 18, Thimme, S. 348 – 349.

44 Augustinus, *Bekenntnisse* XII, 20, Thimme, S. 350 – 351.



höher als Mose steht und die auch diesen inspiriert hat.<sup>45</sup> Das heißt aber, dass inspirierte Leser/innen *grundsätzlich* im Text Interpretationen entdecken können, die nicht der Autorintention Moses entsprechen. Aufgrund der hohen Bedeutung der Inspiration des Mose hat Augustinus dennoch Vorbehalte. Er bewegt sich auf einer Grenzlinie. Kriterien über die Entscheidung einer richtigen Interpretation sind ihre Wahrheit und ihr Nutzen für das geistliche Leben. Die unterschiedlichen Interpretationen, die genannt werden, grenzen eher die Sinnmöglichkeiten ein und präzisieren die Bedeutung, als dass sie neue Bedeutungen eröffnen. Allerdings bedeutet das gleichzeitig, dass Polysemie in einem bestimmten Rahmen akzeptabel erscheint.<sup>46</sup>

Dem Midrasch ist diese Auslegung von Gen 1,1 insofern ähnlich, als mehrere Interpretationen des Verses nebeneinander gestellt werden, wenn auch anonym. Allerdings wird hier die Frage nach der Wahrheit der Interpretationen explizit gestellt. Sicher gibt es, wie Stern deutlich macht, auch im Midrasch Grenzen der Interpretation, die aber nicht in dieser Weise deutlich gemacht werden, wie bei vielen christlichen Exegeten, die sich gegen verschiedene jüdische, gnostische oder andere christliche Deutungen abgrenzen.<sup>47</sup>

## Midrasch und Allegorese

Allegorese wurde nun schon als bedeutende patristische Auslegungsmethode erwähnt. Sie wird immer wieder in der Diskussion dem Midrasch gegenübergestellt. Der Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Midrasch und allegorischer Auslegung soll hier anhand der Überlegungen von Gerald L. Bruns ein wenig weiter nachgegangen werden.<sup>48</sup> Die Anfänge der Schriftauslegung sind in dieser selbst zu finden, die Bibel ist als „self-glossing book“ zu lesen.<sup>49</sup> Diese Vorstellung findet sich sowohl in der jüdischen als auch in der christlichen Bibelauslegung der Antike. Bruns versteht die hermeneutische Aufgabe von Schriftauslegung als

45 Die Annahme der Inspiriertheit Moses scheint mir auch der Grund zu sein, warum Augustinus auf dessen Aussage als der wahren Bedeutung des Textes beharrt.

46 Dieser ist, wenngleich Augustinus hier nicht dezidiert christlich oder christologisch auslegt, selbstverständlich von seinem christlichen Hintergrund bestimmt.

47 Möglicherweise hat das mit dem bei Stern, *Midrash*, S. 32 – 38 beschriebenen rabbinischen Bestreben, eine harmonische und friedliche Idealwelt zu suggerieren, zu tun.

48 Gerald L. Bruns, „Midrash and Allegory. The Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation.“ In: Robert Alter und Frank Kermode (Hgg.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. 7. Aufl. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1994, S. 625 – 646. Midrasch und Allegorese werden hier als verschiedene Weisen des Zugangs zum und des Umgangs mit dem Text verstanden, also in hermeneutischem Sinn.

49 Bruns, „Midrash“, S. 626.



„mediating between text and situation“.<sup>50</sup> Midrasch dürfe nicht als literarisches, sondern müsse als hermeneutisches Phänomen verstanden werden. Außerdem betont Bruns dessen pragmatische Dimension: Er ist sozial und dialogisch. „Understanding shows itself only in action in the world.“<sup>51</sup>

Allegorese (Bruns: „allegory“)<sup>52</sup> wird als „radikale Interpretation“ verstanden. „Allegory presupposes a cultural situation in which the literal interpretation of a text would be as incomprehensible as a literal translation of it.“<sup>53</sup> Diese These wird anhand von Philos Bibelinterpretation dargestellt, gilt aber auch für die christliche Bibelauslegung. Allegorese findet sich demnach immer dann, wenn andere Interpretationsmethoden, die stärker auf Kontinuität abzielen, die kulturelle Differenz nicht mehr überbrücken können.<sup>54</sup> Armin Lange und Zlatko Pleše sprechen in diesem Zusammenhang von „transpositional hermeneutics“.<sup>55</sup> M. E. spielen folgende Faktoren eine Rolle für die Anwendung einer Form von transpositional hermeneutics/Allegorese: das Ausmaß der Entfremdung zwischen dem traditionellen Text und seinen späteren Leser/innen bzw. das Ausmaß an Plausibilität, die der Text in einer neuen Situation noch beanspruchen kann. Entscheidend dafür ist der Abstand zwischen dem ursprünglichen und den späteren Kontexten: Je weiter entfernt, umso eher ist eine Form „radikaler Interpretation“ oder Transposition notwendig. Besonders zu beachten sind dabei die Kontinuität bzw. Diskontinuität zwischen den Gemeinschaften, die die Texte produzieren und rezipieren, d. h. das Ausmaß an soziologischer Differenz. Sicherlich fördert auch die Opposition einer oder mehrerer anderer Gruppen, die alle darauf bestehen, dass ihre eigene Interpretation das richtige Textverständnis wiedergebe, allegorische Interpretation, die den Text in den je eigenen Kontext einbindet und damit plausibel erscheinen lässt. Das trifft sich mit der Beschreibung Bruns', der Midrasch als nicht-radikale und Allegorese als radikale Interpretation versteht. Die Auslegungsgemeinschaften, die die Bibel mittels Midrasch auslegen, sind diejenigen, die sich selbst in besonderer Kontinuität mit der früheren Interpretationsgemeinschaft erleben, verstehen und rechtfertigen,

50 Bruns, „Midrash“, S. 629.

51 Bruns, „Midrash“, S. 629.

52 Im Folgenden wird unterschieden zwischen Allegorie, einer rhetorischen Figur der bildhaften Ausdrucksweise, und Allegorese, einer hermeneutischen Methode, die Texte allegorisch interpretiert, unabhängig davon, ob sie so intendiert sind oder nicht.

53 Bruns, „Midrash“, S. 637.

54 Meine bei dem Symposium „Transpositional Hermeneutics“ am Institut für Judaistik Wien am 9. Mai 2011 geäußerte These, dass „transpositional hermeneutics“ in der von Lange und Pleše definierten Form dann zu finden sei, wenn der kulturelle Abstand entsprechend groß ist, findet sich darin bestätigt.

55 Armin Lange und Zlatko Pleše, „Transpositional Hermeneutics. A Hermeneutical Comparison of the Derveni Papyrus, Aristobulus of Alexandria, and the Qumran Pesharim.“ *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012), S. 15 – 67.

spricht das rabbinische Judentum, das sich als bruchlose Fortsetzung des Judentums vor der Zerstörung des Tempels konstruiert, was in „Traditionsketten“ wie im Mischnatraktat Avot zum Ausdruck kommt. Aber auch inhaltlich wird Kontinuität postuliert. Für das alexandrinische Judentum behauptet Bruns eine „radikale Übersetzung“ aus dem Hebräischen, das nicht nur als eine Sprache, sondern als ein ganzes Denk- und Vorstellungssystem zu verstehen ist, in einen gänzlich verschiedenen „conceptual framework“, den des Griechischen.

Since languages are historical as well as grammatical, translation involves situating a text in a new conceptual framework – a new history – and not just transferring a meaning from one tongue to another. To be sure, translation implies synonymy, but we know that languages are not always cognate with one another, and in fact analytic philosophers of language have coined the phrase ‘radical translation’ to characterize translation between languages with completely independent histories, or between which there has been no extended period of contact (for example, between ancient Hebrew and Greek rather than, say, between modern French and English). It is in the context of radical translation that the subject of allegorical interpretation needs to be examined.<sup>56</sup>

Zweifellos galt es für Philo, eine erhebliche kulturelle Kluft zu überbrücken, dennoch besteht auch eine nicht zu vernachlässigende Kontinuität. Ähnliche Beobachtungen lassen sich auch im Prolog des Enkels des Jesus Sirach machen, der den Text seines Großvaters vom Hebräischen ins Griechische übersetzt. Ähnliches gilt aber auch für die Bibelauslegung der frühchristlichen Autoren. Die Situation ist von Diskontinuität und Kontinuität zugleich geprägt: Einerseits entsteht eine neue ideelle Vorstellungswelt durch das „Christusereignis“ und seine Interpretation in einer sich zunehmend entwickelnden Christologie. Andererseits besteht Kontinuität, zumindest teilweise auf der soziologischen Ebene (Judenchristentum), aber auch auf theologischer Ebene, insofern dieselben Heiligen Schriften unter Annahme einer kontinuierlichen Offenbarung, die AT und NT umfasst, für die Gruppe beansprucht und ausgelegt werden (mit teilweise denselben, teilweise völlig anderen hermeneutischen Voraussetzungen). Die Allegorese bietet eine Möglichkeit der Überbrückung der Diskontinuität, die ein Ausmaß erreicht hat, wo „radikale Interpretation“ zur Aufrechterhaltung der Plausibilität der Tradition (Kontinuität) notwendig ist. Diese ist eine zu dieser Zeit bereits traditionelle Methode der Transformation und Übersetzung eines Textes von einem kulturellen Kontext in einen anderen, stark differierenden, aber *nicht völlig unterschiedlichen* Kontext. Dabei können die frühchristlichen Autoren auf Philo zurückgreifen, der diese Auslegungsmethode aus der griechischen Kultur übernommen und bereits auf die Bibel angewendet hat. Nicht zufällig ist Origenes einer der ersten, der Allegorese christlich transformiert und

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<sup>56</sup> Bruns, „Midrash“, S. 636 f.

exzessiv anwendet (und sich aufgrund seiner Extreme auch der Kritik seiner christlichen Zeitgenossen ausgesetzt sieht).

An dieser Stelle sei auf James Kugel verwiesen, der versucht, den Unterschied zwischen Midrasch und Allegorese („allegorization“) als einer spezifisch christlichen Form der Auslegung v. a. in einem differierenden Zeitverständnis festzumachen. Für ihn ist Allegorese in erster Linie „de-particularization of the text“.<sup>57</sup> Als Grund wird die Diskontinuität zwischen Bibel und gegenwärtiger Welt bestimmt. Die Bibel wird mittels Allegorese so ausgelegt, dass, was als historisch erzählt wird, für alle Zeiten und Orte gelten kann. D. h. die Bibel ist nicht wirklich Vergangenheit, sondern „continuous with our spiritual present“.<sup>58</sup> Im Midrasch werde diese Kontinuität nicht hergestellt: „God acted (in the past), will act (in the eschatological future), but is not acting in between.“<sup>59</sup> Die Bibel sei eine Welt für sich und Midrasch ein Weg in diese Welt. Dem widersprechen die Beobachtungen Boyarins, die verdeutlichen, dass die Weltsicht der Rabbinen im Midrasch sehr wohl in die Welt der Bibel eingebracht wird und somit tatsächlich diese nach Kugel fehlende Brücke hergestellt wird, indem die Bibel ausgehend von den gegenwärtigen Überzeugungen und der rabbinischen Lebenswelt interpretiert wird.<sup>60</sup> Alexander Samely spricht von „seeing the present through biblical eyes“.<sup>61</sup> Auf unterschiedliche Weise werden biblische Texte auf gegenwärtige Ereignisse durchsichtig, etwa durch die Verwendung biblischer Namen für spätere Gegebenheiten (z. B. Esau oder Edom für Rom); biblische Beispiele dienen dazu, erwünschtes oder unerwünschtes Verhalten zu illustrieren usw.

In this perspective the present would be seen as merely re-enacting biblical events and biblical relevance. The meaning of current events in rabbinic times would be captured automatically by articulating the meaning of biblical events. If so, then of the three components in this hermeneutic relationship – biblical event, meaning, and current event – only the first two need to be spelled out.<sup>62</sup>

57 James Kugel, „Two Introductions to Midrash.“ *Prooftexts* 3 (1983) S. 131 – 155, hier S. 140.

58 Kugel, „Introductions“, S. 142.

59 Kugel, „Introductions“, S. 143.

60 Das Torastudium steht immer wieder im Mittelpunkt, auch dort, wo es eigentlich als anachronistisch betrachtet werden muss, etwa bei Abraham (vgl. BerR 59,2). Zahlreiche weitere Beispiele ließen sich anführen. BerR stellt auch eine weitere Behauptung Kugels infrage, dass nämlich Midrasch Auslegung von einzelnen Versen, nicht von Büchern sei (vgl. Kugel, „Introductions“, S. 145). Zweifellos unterscheiden sich die unterschiedlichen Midraschim voneinander, aber BerR weist doch eine zusammenhängende Auslegung von Gen auf, auch wenn hier eine Kompilation verschiedener Traditionen vorliegt. Einzelne Interpretationen konzentrieren sich natürlich auf einzelne Verse oder gar Versteile und Wörter, dennoch sind übergreifende Zusammenhänge zu erkennen. Dasselbe lässt sich auch an dem hier behandelten Text aus ShemR beobachten (s. u.).

61 Alexander Samely, *Forms of Rabbinic Literature and Thought. An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, S. 194.

62 Samely, *Forms*, S. 194 f. Ähnlich Jacob Neusner: *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*. New

Sowohl Midrasch als auch Allegorese stellen also eine Brücke zwischen den biblischen Texten und der Gegenwart der Leser/innen her, sie setzen dieses Ziel aber auf unterschiedliche Weise um.

Obwohl die allegorische Auslegung als charakteristisch für die frühchristliche (und im Mittelalter so fortgesetzte) Bibelinterpretation gilt, weil sie die wichtigste Methode der spezifisch christologischen Auslegung biblischer Texte ist, darf nicht vergessen werden, dass sie nicht die einzige ist. Autoren des syrischen Raumes, wie z. B. Theodor von Mopsuestia, haben viel stärker die Auslegung nach dem Wortsinn betrieben, was manchen von ihnen auch prompt den Vorwurf des „Judaisierens“ eingetragen hat. Aber auch andere, wie Hieronymus, benutzten eine Vielzahl an Auslegungsmethoden, um biblische Texte zu interpretieren. Christliche Auslegung kann nicht auf Allegorese reduziert werden. Zudem kann Allegorese als eine Form von metaphorischer Auslegung verstanden werden, sodass auch hier wiederum ein Element der Kontinuität enthalten ist, da metaphorische Ausdrucksweise ein Kennzeichen religiöser Sprache ist und sich in den biblischen Texten selbst findet.<sup>63</sup> Allegorische Auslegung wird in Kirchenvätertexten meist verbunden mit anderen Formen der Interpretation. Ausschließlich allegorische Deutungen finden sich eher selten. Allegorese kann zudem sehr verschieden ausgeprägt sein, von einer grundlegenden christologischen Hermeneutik eines Textes über das nicht-wörtliche Verständnis einzelner schwieriger Textelemente bis zu einer allegorischen Interpretation aller Details eines Textes. Daher erscheint eine differenziertere Betrachtung der Texte angemessen und notwendig.

## Beispieltext: Rabbinische und patristische Auslegung von Ex 1,15 – 22

An einer christlichen und einer rabbinischen Interpretation desselben Bibeltextes soll den Parallelen und Differenzen weiter nachgegangen werden. In diesem Zusammenhang muss darauf hingewiesen werden, dass es nicht unbedingt einfach ist, solche Paralleltexte zu finden, da die Schwerpunkte christlicher

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York: Doubleday, 1994, S. 383 f., über LevR: „Since biblical events exemplify recurrent happenings, sin and redemption, forgiveness and atonement, they lose their one-time character. At the same time and in the same way, current events find a place within the ancient, but eternally present, paradigmatic scheme. So no new historical events, other than exemplary episodes in lives of heroes, demand narration because, through what is said about the past, what was happening in the times of the framers of Leviticus Rabbah would also come under consideration.“ Vgl. auch die Bemerkung von Kugel (Anm. 59).

<sup>63</sup> Vgl. dazu die antike Definition der Allegorie, die sich z. B. bei Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* findet (9.2.46: ἀλληγορίαν facit continua μεταφορά).

und jüdischer Bibelauslegung unterschiedlich sind. So finden sich in der patristischen Literatur zahlreiche Kommentare zu den Prophetenbüchern (wobei die Prophetie grundsätzlich auf Christus und die Christen bezogen wird), Midraschsammlungen zu Prophetenbüchern gibt es hingegen nicht. Auch dort, wo die gleichen Bücher ausgelegt werden, sind es oft unterschiedliche Verse und unterschiedliche Themen, die behandelt werden.<sup>64</sup> Dabei ist ausdrücklich darauf hinzuweisen, dass dieser Textvergleich keineswegs repräsentativ ist, sondern an *einem* Beispiel die Verbindungen aufzeigen will. Patristische und rabbinische Texte weisen eine große Bandbreite auf und weitere Textarbeit könnte weitere und vielleicht auch ganz andere Ergebnisse zutage fördern. Hier soll die Episode über die hebräischen Hebammen (Ex 1,15 – 22) in der Auslegung bei Origenes und im Midrasch Schemot Rabbah in den Blick genommen werden.

Origenes behandelt den Text in der II. Homilie zu Exodus, die die Hebammen-Episode und die Geburt des Mose (bis Ex 2,10) auslegt.<sup>65</sup> In ShemR befassen sich die Abschnitte 13 – 18 in Kapitel 1 mit den hebräischen Hebammen in Ägypten. Beide Auslegungen sollen zunächst in ihrem Ablauf beschrieben werden, ihre hermeneutischen Vorentscheidungen – soweit erkennbar – aufgezeigt und die Auslegungen mit Schwerpunkt auf den Strukturen und Methoden dargestellt werden.

#### Origenes, Homilia II in Exodum<sup>66</sup>

In der ersten Homilie zu Exodus legt Origenes Ex 1,1 – 14 aus. Die zweite Predigt knüpft an die erste an, indem sie die Gegnerschaft des Pharao gegen das Gottesvolk (*adversum gentem Dei*) in Erinnerung ruft und dabei erneut Ex 1,8 zitiert, das bereits ausgelegt wurde. Sogleich werden auch die Hebammen (*obsetrices*) genannt, mit deren Hilfe der Pharao sein perverses Werk ausführen wollte, da ja Hebammen zum Leben verhelfen und nicht töten sollen. Nach der Frage *quid*

64 Vgl. Stemberger, „Exegetical Contacts“, S. 571 f.

65 Die Geburt Mose soll hier nicht mehr berücksichtigt werden. D. h. die Untersuchung wird sich bis Abschnitt 3, Zeile 31 erstrecken.

66 Die Exodus-Homilien des Origenes sind nicht mehr im griechischen Original, sondern nur in der lateinischen Übersetzung des Rufinus erhalten. Editionen und Übersetzungen: Marcel Borret (Hg.), *Origène. Homélie sur l'Exode*. Paris: Cerf 1985 (Sources chrétiennes 321), Homilie 2, S. 68 – 87 (lateinischer Text, kritisch ediert und französische Übersetzung). Theresia Heither (Hg.), *Predigten des Origenes zum Buch Exodus: Lateinisch-deutsch*. Münster: Aschendorff 2008, S. 38 – 51 (Heither gibt den lateinischen Text von Borret ohne Anmerkungen wieder). Ronald E. Heine (Hg.), *Origen. Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 1982 (The Fathers of the Church 71), S. 239 – 247. Die englische Übersetzung basiert auf dem lateinischen Text in der Edition von Wilhelm A. Baehrens, *Origenes Werke VI. Homilien zum Hexateuch*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung 1920 (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 29). Die Homilie entstand um 230.

*enim dicit* (nämlich die Schrift) zitiert er den auszulegenden Bibeltext Ex 1,15 – 16 und, nach einer kurzen Überleitung, V.17. Origenes erklärt nun, dass der Text nicht in historischem Sinn (*secundum historiae narrationem*) verstanden werden dürfe. Denn die Feststellung, dass die Hebammen den Befehl Pharaos nicht ausgeführt hätten, würde implizieren, dass sie nicht nur die männlichen Kinder am Leben gelassen hätten, sondern genauso die weiblichen getötet hätten. Also muss die Aussage geistlich ausgelegt werden: *legem spiritalem esse et spiritualiter intelligendam* („dass das Gesetz ein geistiges Gesetz ist ... und geistig verstanden werden muss“).<sup>67</sup> Der Bibeltext muss *pro disciplina et utilitate nostra* („zu unserer Belehrung und zu unserem Nutzen“)<sup>68</sup> gelesen werden. Diese Überlegungen bilden die Grundlage für die folgende Auslegung.

In diesem spirituellen Verständnis sind die Dinge, die in Ägypten geschehen, diejenigen, die in „dieser Welt“ (*hoc mundum*) geschehen, aber auch in den einzelnen Individuen (*in uno quoque nostrum*). Im Folgenden wird das Weibliche als das Fleischliche und die Affekte identifiziert, während das Männliche für Vernunft, Intellekt und Geist stehe. Der Pharao, der mit Röm 7,14 als „Herrscher dieser Welt“ bezeichnet wird, versuche also, den Geist und die Vernunft zu töten, das Materielle und Körperliche (*carnalia, temporalia*) hingegen am Leben zu erhalten, um die Menschen vom Himmel fernzuhalten.<sup>69</sup> Keine Seele solle sich ihrer Herkunft aus dem Paradies erinnern – eine Aussage, die deutlich den platonischen Hintergrund des Weltbildes des Origenes zeigt.<sup>70</sup> In diesem Abschnitt verarbeitet Origenes sechs neutestamentliche Stellen, auf die er teils anspielt, sie teils auch wörtlich zitiert (Röm 7,14; Joh 16,11; Kol 3,1; Phil 3,19; Kol 3,2; Lk 18,13).<sup>71</sup>

Zwei Typen von Menschen (*homines*) werden vorgestellt: diejenigen, die sich oberflächlichen Vergnügungen hingeben (Anspielung auf Röm 13,13), und diejenigen, die das nicht tun und sich Gott zuwenden (Zitat aus 2 Kor 4,18), die aber selten zu finden seien (*unum ex mille*: Koh 7,29). Erstere sind als *feminas* zu qualifizieren und werden vom Pharao am Leben erhalten, letzterer Typ ist *masculum* und vom Pharao verfolgt.<sup>72</sup> Diese Auslegung erlaubt Origenes eine allgemeine Aussage über die „Diener Gottes und alle, die Gott suchen“, die in dieser Welt stetig verfolgt werden.

67 Lat.: Borret, *Homélies*, S. 70. Dt.: Heithier, Predigten, S. 39.

68 Ebenda.

69 Hier reagiert Origenes auf eine Leerstelle im Bibeltext: Was ist die Motivation Pharaos, nur die männlichen, nicht aber die weiblichen Babys töten zu lassen? Der Midrasch beantwortet diese Frage ebenfalls, aber auf andere Weise (s. u.).

70 Vgl. Heine, *Homilies*, S. 240, Anm. 14.

71 Generell ist die Sprache der Kirchenväter stark biblisch geprägt. Nicht immer kann entschieden werden, ob ein Zitat bzw. eine Anspielung vorliegt oder der Autor aus seinem biblischen Hintergrund formuliert, ohne bewusst Bibel zu zitieren.

72 Borret, *Homélies*, S. 72.

Nun erst kommt Origenes wieder auf die Hebammen zurück: Pharao will sie verderben und für seine Zwecke benutzen. Die folgende Interpretation der Namen der beiden Hebammen bewegt sich ganz auf der Linie der bisher ausgeführten spirituellen Auslegung. *Sephora* (lateinische Namensform), wird als „Sperling“ übersetzt, *Phua* als *rubens* („rot werdend“) oder *verecunda* („bescheiden“).<sup>73</sup>

Abschnitt 2 beginnt wiederum mit einer Frage nach dem Schrifttext. Darauf wird erneut Ex 1,17 zitiert, das nun ausgehend von der Namensklärung interpretiert wird. Zunächst aber referiert Origenes eine ihm vorliegende Deutung des Verses (*dixerunt ante nos*), der er seine eigene gegenüberstellt (*mihi tamen ... videntur*).<sup>74</sup> Ein Ausschnitt aus Ex 1,17 wird in den Einleitungssatz integriert, um den Bibeltext wieder in Erinnerung zu rufen. Origenes interpretiert die Hebammen als *figura*, als Typus, der beiden Testamente. Dabei ist *Sephora*, der Sperling, das spirituell verstandene Gesetz (*spiritalis est*, vgl. Röm 7,14), *Phua* hingegen das Evangelium. Der Name, verstanden als *rubens*, erinnere an die rote Farbe des Blutes Christi.

Von ihnen werden die Menschen, die in der Kirche geboren werden, wie von Hebammen betreut, weil ihnen durch die Schriftlesung jedes Heilmittel und jede Erziehung und Bildung zuteil wird.<sup>75</sup>

So stellt Origenes erneut einen deutlichen Bezug zu seinen Hörer/innen her. Auch der Pharao wird nun in diese typologische Deutung eingeordnet: Er versucht mittels *haereticos sensus et perverse dogmata* die „Männlichen“ in der Kirche zu verführen.<sup>76</sup> Die Gottesfurcht der Hebammen wird nochmals erwähnt (Atomisierung von Ex 1,17) und interpretiert: Sie *lehren* die Gottesfurcht (im Gegensatz zur eben erwähnten häretischen Lehre Pharaos), was mit einem Zitat von Ps 110,10 untermauert wird. Origenes springt nun zu Ex 1,21 (Zitat), wo die Gottesfurcht der Hebammen erneut erwähnt wird. Auch hier spricht er dem Buchstaben (*secundum litteram*) den Sinn ab: „Denn wo besteht ein Zusammenhang zwischen den beiden Satzteilen: ‚Weil die Hebammen Gott fürchteten‘ und ‚bauten sie sich Häuser‘.“<sup>77</sup> Mit den Häusern seien daher die Schriften des Alten und Neuen Testaments gemeint. Sie füllen die ganze Erde mit „Häusern von Gebeten“ (*orationum domibus*; Anspielung auf Lk 19,46). Zum Schluss betont Origenes erneut die Vernunftgemäßheit dieser Deutung (*rationabiliter*).

Anschließend kommt er wieder auf den Befehl Pharaos zurück und stellt fest:

73 Borret, *Homélie*, S. 73, Anm. 5 verweist darauf, dass diese Deutung von Philo stammt (*Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 128). Dort wird Sephora (so die griechische Namensform) als ὀρνίθιον „kleiner Vogel“, und Phoua als ἐρυθρὸν „rot“, interpretiert.

74 Borret, *Homélie*, S. 74.

75 Heither, *Predigten*, S. 43.

76 Borret, *Homélie*, S. 74.

77 Heither, *Predigten*, S. 43. Ex 1,21 wird noch einmal zitiert.



Jedoch heißt es nicht, dass sie dem Befehl des Königs gehorchten, die Mädchen am Leben zu lassen. Ich wage vertrauensvoll dem Sinn der Schrift nach zu sagen: diese Hebammen ließen die Mädchen nicht am Leben. Denn in den Kirchen lehrt man nicht die Laster und predigt nicht den Luxus und nährt nicht die Sünden – dies nämlich will der Pharao, wenn er befiehlt, die Mädchen am Leben zu lassen – sondern die Tugend allein wird gepflegt, und sie allein wird genährt.<sup>78</sup>

Damit schließt Origenes den Bogen zu seiner spirituellen Deutung am Beginn. Wenngleich er damit keineswegs wirkliche männliche/weibliche Kinder meint, sondern symbolische Zuordnungen, bringen diese Aussagen natürlich deutlich seine mit den Geschlechtern verbundenen unterschiedlichen Wertungen zum Ausdruck (die er mit seiner Umgebung teilt), genauso, wie sie sich wiederum auf die Sicht von (realen) Frauen und Männern auswirken (können).<sup>79</sup>

Zum Schluss von Abschnitt 2 bezieht Origenes den Bibeltext explizit auf sich und seine Zuhörerschaft (*ad unumquemque nostrum referamus*)<sup>80</sup> und spricht diese mit „du“ direkt an. Er/Sie wird aufgefordert, den Befehl Pharaos nicht auszuführen, sondern den „Mann in dir“ (*masculum qui in te est, inferiorem tuum hominem*) zu stärken, „durch gute Taten und Verstehen“ (*per actus et intellectus bonos*).<sup>81</sup> Anspielungen auf 1 Joh 2,15 f und 2 Kor 4,16 sind in den Abschnitt integriert.

Abschnitt 3 beginnt mit einer Einleitung und einem Zitat von Ex 1,22. Der Text wird wiederum auf die Christen und Christinnen bezogen. Zitate von Mk 4,24 und Spr 23,1 unterstützen die Ermahnung. Die Versuchung Jesu durch den Teufel (Zitat Mt 4,1) wird als Parallele herangezogen. Auch Ps 68,2 – 3 (Zitat) wird als Bedrohung durch den Pharao gedeutet. Der Sieg Christi ist die Voraussetzung, dass auch den Christ/innen (*tibi*) der „Weg des Siegens offensteht“.<sup>82</sup> Noch einmal wird mit Zitaten aus Mt 4,2; Mk 9,29 und Mt 4,8 das Beispiel Jesu eingespielt, hauptsächlich anhand der Versuchungserzählung. Im Mittelpunkt steht der Sieg Jesu, der auch seinen Nachfolger/innen den Sieg über den Versucher und Herrscher dieser Welt, Pharao, ermöglicht.

Die Ägypter also, denen der Pharao diesen Befehl gegeben hatte, lassen nur die Mädchen am Leben, hassen aber die Jungen. Denn sie hassen die Tugenden, und nur die Laster und Begierden nähren sie. Und nun also lauern die Ägypter darauf, ob nicht etwa bei den Hebräern ein Junge geboren wird, um ihn sofort zu verfolgen und zu töten, wenn sie die Hebräer nicht vorsehen und den männlichen Spross nicht behüten und verbergen.<sup>83</sup>

78 Heither, *Predigten*, S. 45.

79 Vgl. dazu Siquans, *Prophetinnen*, S. 471 – 475.

80 Borret, *Homélies*, S. 76.

81 Borret, *Homélies*, S. 76 – 78.

82 Vgl. Borret, *Homélies*, S. 78.

83 Heither, *Predigten*, S. 47.



Mit diesen Worten fasst Origenes die bisherigen Ausführungen zusammen und leitet zugleich zu Ex 2,1, zur Geburt Moses, über.

Origenes entwirft in dieser Homilie also zu Beginn ein grundsätzliches Deutungsmuster, das er im Wesentlichen durchhält.<sup>84</sup> Er versteht den Bibeltext allegorisch und interpretiert die Elemente der Erzählung im Hinblick auf den Kampf gegen das Böse, Irdische, Materielle, Fleischliche. Das Himmlische ist dabei selbstverständlich das Männliche und auch das (orthodox) Christliche. Die allegorische Deutung ist also deutlich moralisch orientiert, worauf Origenes selbst explizit bei der Auslegung des Namens Pua hinweist. Die allegorische Interpretation der Namen nimmt breiten Raum in der Homilie ein.

Origenes stellt, dem Genre entsprechend, direkte Bezüge zu seinen Zuhörer/innen her. Die Rhetorik der moralischen Ermahnung prägt die Bibelauslegung. Zahlreiche Bibelzitate und Anspielungen aus AT und NT werden in die Interpretation integriert. Die intertextuellen Bezüge unterstützen seine Argumentation und verdeutlichen zugleich den christlichen Bezug. Christus selbst dient als Beispiel für den Kampf gegen Satan. Die Aufforderung zu diesem Kampf, die Ablehnung materieller Vergnügungen hingegen ist noch nicht spezifisch christlich. Sie wird aber dazu gemacht, indem Origenes Gegnern – nicht in dieser Homilie, aber bei vielen anderen Gelegenheiten<sup>85</sup> – immer wieder vorhält, sich „weiblich“ zu verhalten und irdischen Begierden zu folgen.

#### Midrasch Schemot Rabbah 1,13 – 18<sup>86</sup>

Kap. 13 schließt an die vorhergehenden Abschnitte an und erzählt die Geschichte entsprechend dem Verlauf des Bibeltextes weiter. Ex 1,15a wird zitiert und dann die Frage nach der Identität der beiden Hebammen gestellt. Zwei Meinungen

84 Eine gewisse Inkonsistenz entsteht dadurch, dass er die Hebammen zunächst typologisch auf die beiden Testamente deutet, dann aber die Zuhörer/innen auffordert, selbst Hebammen für ihre Seelen zu werden (so am Ende von Abschnitt 2, Borret, *Homélies*, S. 76).

85 Vgl. etwa Homilie V zu Exodus, wo Origenes sich von einer jüdischen Auslegung der Auszugserzählung abgrenzt, oder Homilie VII zu Num 12, wo er den *Iudaeus* und die *haeretici* als Gegner nennt (Louis Doutreleau (Hg.), *Origène. Homélies sur les Nombres*. Paris: Cerf, 1996 (Sources chrétiennes 415), S. 168 – 170); in den Ezechielhomilien werden unterschiedliche häretische Gruppen namentlich genannt (Marcel Borret (Hg.), *Origène. Homélies sur Ézéchiel II*. Paris: Cerf, 1989 (Sources chrétiennes 352), S. 104, 106, 108, 118 u. a.) In der Auslegung von Ez 13 ordnet Origenes ähnlich wie bei Ex 2 „männlich“ und „weiblich“ einem bestimmten moralischen Verhalten zu. Dort werden explizit die Häretiker „weiblichen“ Verhaltens beschuldigt. Vgl. dazu Siquans, *Prophetinnen*, S. 293 – 299.

86 Avigdor Shinan, *Midrash Shemot Rabbah, Chapters I – XIV. A Critical Edition Based on a Jerusalem Manuscript with Variants, Commentary and Introduction*. Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1984, ShemR 1,13 – 18, S. 56 – 69 (kritische Edition basierend auf einem Jerusalemer Manuskript); englische Übersetzung: S. M. Lehrman (Hg.), *The Midrash Rabbah 3*.

werden wiedergegeben: Rav identifiziert die Hebammen mit Jochebed und Elisheba, R. Samuel mit Jochebed und Mirjam.<sup>87</sup> Mirjams Alter wird aufgrund von Ex 7,7 erschlossen und dann eine Aussage über ihren Charakter gemacht, begründet mit Spr 20,11. Ex 1,15b, das die Namen der Hebammen erwähnt, wird zitiert und anschließend werden verschiedene Auslegungen dieser Namen gegeben. Sie alle beruhen auf sprachlichen Assoziationen im Hebräischen und setzen offensichtlich die Identifikation mit Jochebed und Mirjam voraus, da sie auf Ereignisse, an denen die beiden beteiligt waren, anspielen. In einem Fall wird ein Zitat von Ijob 26,13 eingebracht, um die Argumentation zu bestärken. Am Schluss von Kap. 13 findet sich eine Erzählung über Mirjams Verhalten ihrem Vater gegenüber: Dieser trennt sich nach dem Dekret des Pharaos, alle männlichen Kinder in den Nil zu werfen (Zitat von Ex 1,22), von der Mutter, um keine weiteren Kinder zu zeugen. Da er Mitglied des Sanhedrin ist,<sup>88</sup> folgen ihm die anderen Israeliten. Mirjam überzeugt ihn, diesen Entschluss zurückzunehmen, worauf er seine Frau wieder zu sich nimmt.<sup>89</sup> Aufgrund dieser Erzählung wird der Name Pua (פועה) für Mirjam mit dem Verb הופיעה („tadeln“) erklärt.<sup>90</sup>

Kap. 14 beginnt mit einem Zitat der ersten Worte von Ex 1,16, setzt also im Bibeltext fort. Eine Frage nach dem Grund des Verhaltens Pharaos wird gestellt und beantwortet. Danach werden die nächsten Worte von Ex 1,16 zitiert. Die Erklärung konzentriert sich hier auf das schwierig zu deutende hebräische Wort הַאֲבִיבִים. Unterschiedliche Deutungen, teilweise namentlich bestimmten Rabbinen zugeschrieben, werden angeführt. Ein Zitat von Jer 18,3 unterstützt eine dieser Erklärungen. Danach wird das Zitat von Ex 1,16 fortgesetzt. Zunächst wird der Text paraphrasiert, um seinen Sinn zu präzisieren. Anschließend wird die Frage gestellt, wie männliche und weibliche Kinder unterschieden werden können, zumal die männlichen ja noch während des Geburtsvorganges getötet werden sollen (um keinen Mord zu begehen, was der Fall wäre, wenn das Kind schon vollständig den Mutterleib verlassen hätte). R. Simons Meinung dazu wird wiedergegeben. Die Unterscheidung wird aus Gen 2 abgeleitet (Zitat von Gen

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*Exodus*. London: Soncino Press, 1961, S. 16 – 25. Die englische Übersetzung beruht auf einem anderen hebräischen Text. Die folgende Darstellung folgt der Ausgabe von Shinan, mit Hinweisen auf Abweichungen an wichtigen Stellen. ShemR greift bSota 11b – 12a zurück. Stemberger, „*Einleitung*“, S. 304 datiert den ersten Teil von ExR in das 10. Jh.

87 Zu Mirjam in der rabbinischen Tradition vgl. Devora Steinmetz, „A Portrait of Miriam in Rabbinic Midrash.“ *Prooftexts* 8 (1988), S. 35 – 65.

88 Diese Bemerkung ist wiederum eine anachronistische Eintragung einer späteren, rabbinischen Vorstellung in die Auslegung des Bibeltextes.

89 Diese Erzählung ist motiviert durch eine Unklarheit im Bibeltext: Ex 2,1 spricht davon, dass der Mann eine Frau heiratet und ein Sohn zur Welt kommt. In V.4 tritt aber plötzlich eine ältere Schwester auf. Der Midrasch erklärt dies damit, dass Amram sich zwischenzeitlich von Jochebed getrennt und sie dann wieder genommen habe.

90 Wörtlich: „Sie richtete das Gesicht auf gegen ihren Vater.“

2,21): Männliche Kinder wenden ihr Gesicht zur Erde, weil sie von dieser stammen, weibliche hingegen nach oben, weil sie aus der Rippe erschaffen wurden. Nun wird eine Rede Gottes eingefügt, die die Dummheit von Pharaos Befehl verdeutlicht, und mit einem Zitat von Jes 19,11 belegt:

Der Heilige, gepriesen sei er, sagte zu ihm [dem Pharao]: Der dir diesen Rat gegeben hat, ist ein Idiot. Du solltest besser die weiblichen töten, denn wenn es keine weiblichen gibt, woher sollten sich die männlichen Frauen nehmen? Eine Frau kann nicht zwei Männer heiraten, ein Mann (hingegen) kann zehn oder hundert Frauen heiraten.<sup>91</sup>

Kap. 15 befasst sich mit Ex 1,17 – 18. Der Beginn von V.17 wird zitiert und mit Spr 31,30 verknüpft. Damit werden die Hebammen und die אשת חיל von Spr 31 miteinander identifiziert. Das Ex-Zitat wird sodann weitergeführt und die außergewöhnliche Verwendung der Präposition (להן statt אליהן) gedeutet (nach R. Jose b. Chanina). Der nächste Teil von V.17 wird zitiert und interpretiert. Die Hebammen handelten nicht nur gegen den Befehl Pharaos, die männlichen Kinder zu töten, sondern taten ihnen darüber hinaus Gutes, indem sie sie versorgten, wie R. Meir sagt. Noch einmal werden die Worte ותחיינ את הילדים zitiert und ein anderer Aspekt erläutert. Zunächst stellt sich die Frage, wie die Hebammen reagierten, wenn ein Kind behindert zur Welt kam oder wenn es während der Geburt nötig wurde, ein Glied zu amputieren. Man hätte ihnen dann vorwerfen können, dass sie versucht hätten, das Kind zu töten. Daher beteten sie in dieser Angelegenheit zu Gott und er erhörte sie, sodass alle Kinder gesund geboren wurden. Darauf folgt ein weiterer Einwand, der R. Levi zugeschrieben wird:

Warum zitierst du das Leichtere – zitiere das Schwerwiegendere. Es gibt Kinder, die in der Stunde ihrer Geburt sterben würden oder ihre Mütter nach ihrer Geburt gefährden.<sup>92</sup>

Hier liegt also ein *qal wa-chomer* (Schluss *a minori ad maius*) vor. In diesem Fall hätte man den Hebammen vorwerfen können, sie hätten das Kind bzw. die Mutter getötet. Also beteten sie auch in diesem Anliegen zu Gott, der sie erhörte.<sup>93</sup> Dahinter steht ein Weltbild, das überzeugt davon ist, dass Gott die belohnt, die ihn fürchten und sich an ihn wenden. דבר אחר, eine weitere Auslegung, zu den Worten „und die Hebammen fürchteten Gott“ schließt sich hier an. Sie werden mit Abraham in Verbindung gebracht, der eine Herberge eröffnet habe, in der er alle Vorüberziehenden versorgt habe, und zwar Unbeschnittene.<sup>94</sup> Den

<sup>91</sup> Shinan, *Midrash*, S. 60.

<sup>92</sup> Shinan, *Midrash*, S. 62.

<sup>93</sup> Dabei wird die *nota accusativi* אה auf die Mütter bezogen, das Wort ילדים klarerweise auf die Kinder. Die Verwendung von אה, die nicht unbedingt nötig wäre, wird also dahingehend interpretiert, dass es noch eine zusätzliche Aussage enthält.

<sup>94</sup> Eine Textvariante enthält eine Ergänzung, die einen Bezug zu Gen 22,12 herstellt, wo von Abraham gesagt wird, dass er Gott fürchtet (vgl. auch Lehrman, *Midrasch*, S. 21). Auf diese Weise wird klar, wie die Verbindung zu Abraham hergestellt wurde. Was hier nicht thema-

Hebammen selber wird hier eine Schlussfolgerung nach dem Prinzip *gal wa-chomer* in den Mund gelegt: Wenn Abraham Unbeschnittene sättigt, wie könnte man von ihnen verlangen, sie sogar zu töten? Zum Abschluss dieses Kapitels wird zu Ex 1,18 überleitet:

Und als der Pharao sah, dass sie seinen Befehl nicht befolgten, ließ er sie rufen und fragte sie: Warum übertretet ihr meinen Befehl? Das meint, was geschrieben ist: „Und der König von Ägypten rief die Hebammen.“ (Ex 1,18)<sup>95</sup>

Der erste Teil von Kap. 16 beschäftigt sich mit den Worten *כי חיות הנה* – wörtlich: „denn sie sind Tiere“. Als erste mögliche Erklärung wird angeführt: „Sie sind Hebammen“. Diese Möglichkeit wird aber sogleich zurückgewiesen: Selbst wenn sie Hebammen wären, dann bräuchten sie doch trotzdem die Hilfe anderer Hebammen, wenn sie selbst Kinder zur Welt bringen. Deshalb ist eine andere Deutung notwendig: *אומה זו כחיות השדה נמשלו שאנן צריכות לסייע אדם* („dieses Volk ist wie Tiere des Feldes, die nicht der Hilfe eines Menschen bedürfen.“). Diese Behauptung wird mit Zitaten aus dem Jakobssegen Gen 49 und dem Mosesegen Dtn 33 untermauert, wo einige der israelitischen Stämme mit verschiedenen Tieren verglichen werden, zusammenfassend wird Ez 19,2 zitiert („Was war deine Mutter eine Löwin unter Löwen, sie lagerte mitten unter jungen Löwen, zog ihre Jungen groß.“).

Ex 1,20 wird nun zitiert und ausgelegt. Zunächst wird thematisiert, was das Gute ist, das Gott den Hebammen zukommen lässt. R. Berechiah zitiert Ijob 28,28, wonach die Gottesfurcht mit Weisheit gleichzusetzen sei. Danach wird die Frage gestellt, was der Lohn der Gottesfurcht sei. Die Antwort: Tora. In den anschließenden Ausführungen kommt wieder die Identifikation der Hebammen mit Jochebed und Mirjam ins Spiel. Konkret wird als Lohn der Gottesfurcht Jochebeds die Geburt Moses genannt, durch den Gott Israel die Tora gab. Zitate von Ex 2,2; Spr 4,2 und Mal 3,22 werden in die Argumentation integriert. Als Mirjams Nachkomme wird hier Bezalel erwähnt, dem mit Ex 31,3 Weisheit zugeschrieben wird (siehe oben die Identifikation von Gottesfurcht mit Weisheit in Ijob 28,28). Bezalel ist insofern mit der Tora verbunden, als er eine „Lade für die Tora, die gut genannt wird“, herstellte (*ועשה ארון לתורה הנקראת טוב*).<sup>96</sup> Das Stichwort „gut“ führt die Auslegung wieder zum Bibelfers zurück (*וייטב אלוהים למילדת*), der abschließend noch einmal zitiert wird. Nun wird erneut konkret nach dem „Guten“

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tisiert wird, aber zweifellos im Hintergrund mitgedacht werden muss, ist die Erzählung in Gen 22, wo Gott (!) von Abraham verlangt, seinen Sohn zu töten. Diese Erzählung kann mit Gen 22,1 als Prüfung Abrahams verstanden werden (*נסה pi.*). Möglicherweise wird mit dieser Verknüpfung angedeutet, dass durch den Befehl Pharaos Gott die Hebammen prüft und für gottesfürchtig befindet.

<sup>95</sup> Shinan, *Midrash*, S. 63.

<sup>96</sup> Shinan, *Midrash*, S. 64.

gefragt, das hier erwähnt ist: nämlich dass der Pharao den Hebammen nichts antat, als sie ihm diese Antwort gaben. Der letzte Teil von V. 20, der von der Vermehrung des Volkes spricht, wird nun zitiert und als Erfüllung von Kgl 3,37 (Zitat) dargestellt und kurz erklärt: Was immer der Pharao befiehlt, wenn Gott es nicht befiehlt, nützt es nichts.

Ex 1,21 spricht davon, dass Gott den Hebammen aufgrund ihrer Gottesfurcht „Häuser baute“. Mit diesem Vers befasst sich Kap. 17, das sich großteils damit beschäftigt, unterschiedliche Personen zu identifizieren und auf diese Weise Verbindungen herzustellen, insbesondere die Verbindung zwischen Mirjam und David. Zunächst wird eine Meinungsverschiedenheit zwischen Rav und Levi wiedergegeben: Der eine meint, sie hätten priesterliche und levitische Familien gegründet, der andere spricht von einer königlichen Familie. Beide Meinungen werden akzeptiert: erstere stammen von Mose und Aaron ab, letztere von Mirjam, da einer ihrer Nachkommen David sei. Das ist nicht so ohne weiteres einsichtig, sodass es eines Beweises bedarf. Dazu wird 1 Chr 2,18 zitiert: „Und Kaleb, der Sohn Hezrons, zeugte Azuba, seine Frau und Jeriot und diese waren ihre Söhne: Jasher und Schobab und Ardon.“ – עֲזוּבָה זֶה מִרְיָם – „Azubah, das ist Mirjam“. Diese Identifikation wird mit einem Wortspiel begründet. Weitere ausführliche Identifikationen folgen aufgrund von 1 Chr 2,19 und 1 Chr 4,5 ff. Zusammenfassend wird noch einmal 1 Chr 2,19 zitiert, um auf Kaleb und Efrat zurückzukommen.

Jetzt erst wird die Frage gestellt, woher man denn wisse, dass David von Mirjam abstammt. Das Zitat von 1 Sam 17,12 stellt die Verbindung her: „Und David war der Sohn dieses Efratiters aus Betlehem in Juda.“ Der Efratiter ist also ein Nachkomme Efrats, die mit Mirjam gleichgesetzt wurde. Nach weiteren Identifikationen schließt ein Zitat von 1 Sam 2,10 das Kapitel mit David ab.

Kap. 18 behandelt Ex 1,22. Zunächst wird der Ausdruck לְכָל־עַם diskutiert. R. Jose b. R. Chanina wird mit der Ansicht zitiert, dass sich Pharaos Befehl auch gegen das eigene Volk richte. Die Astrologen sagten ihm die Geburt eines Retters für Israel voraus, wussten aber nicht, ob dieser ein Israelit oder ein Ägypter sein würde. Also sollte, wie der Bibeltext sagt, „jeder Sohn“ – ob Israelit oder Ägypter – in den Nil geworfen werden. Die Ägypter aber stimmten ihm nicht zu, sondern bestanden darauf, dass es ein Hebräer sein müsse. Danach wird gefragt, warum er gerade in den Fluss geworfen werden sollte.

Weil die Astrologen sahen, dass der Retter Israels durch Wasser bestraft werde. Sie meinten, er werde durch Wasser bestraft werden, indem er ertrinkt. So war es aber nicht, sondern durch den Wasserbrunnen wurde über ihn das Todesurteil beschlossen, wie gesagt ist: Weil ihr nicht an mich geglaubt habt (Num. XX,12).<sup>97</sup>

97 Shinan, *Midrash*, S. 69.

Den ägyptischen Magiern wird also ein bestimmtes Maß an Wissen zugestanden, das aber mangelhaft ist und das sie daher falsch interpretieren.<sup>98</sup>

Der nächste Teil von Ex 1,22 wird zitiert: „und jede Tochter sollt ihr am Leben lassen.“ Den Ägyptern wird unterstellt, sie wollten die Hebräerinnen für sich als Frauen nehmen, mit ein Grund für die Ermordung der männlichen Nachkommen. Ihre Unmoral (זמה) wird explizit festgestellt.

ShemR zu Ex 1,15 – 22 legt den Abschnitt als zusammenhängenden Text aus. Der hebräische Wortlaut wird ernst genommen und Namen sowie schwierige Ausdrücke mit Hilfe von Assoziationen anderer Wörter gedeutet. Die Erklärung des Textes verbleibt, anders als bei Origenes, in der historischen Situation und versucht die berichteten Geschehnisse als solche zu deuten. Dennoch ist der Referenzrahmen für die Interpretation die gesamte hebräische Bibel und damit zugleich die Geschichte des Volkes Israel, insbesondere in Kap. 17, wo die Verbindung Mirjams mit David eingehend beleuchtet wird. Die Identifikation der unterschiedlichen Personen bindet die scheinbar disparaten Texte zusammen, sodass sie in gegenseitiger Beleuchtung einen neuen Sinn erhalten.

Ein direkter Bezug zur Leserschaft bleibt hier im Hintergrund. Dennoch scheint das Milieu, in dem der Midrasch entstand und rezipiert wurde, immer wieder durch: etwa in dem Fokus auf die Tora (Kap. 16 zu Ex 1,20) oder in der Erwähnung des Sanhedrin (Kap. 13). Eine negative moralische Bewertung Pharaos und der Ägypter wird immer wieder deutlich. Die Hebammen werden durchaus als Vorbilder dargestellt, wenngleich auch das nicht direkt gesagt wird.<sup>99</sup> Ganz klar werden Gottesfurcht, Weisheit und Toratreue als vorbildhaft gezeigt. Dass Gott sein Volk vor den böstigen Plänen Pharaos rettet – und zwar durch gottesfürchtige Frauen – ist eine wichtige Botschaft von Ex 1, die in der rabbinischen Auslegung unterstrichen wird.

## Vergleich der beiden Auslegungen

### Die ausgelegten Textteile

Obwohl beide Auslegungen am Text entlang gehen, werden manche Verse bzw. Verseteile vernachlässigt und unterschiedliche Fragen zum Text gestellt. Origenes konzentriert sich in V. 15 auf die Namen der Hebammen. Bezüglich V. 16 kommt es ihm auf die metaphorische Deutung des Männlichen/Weiblichen an.

<sup>98</sup> Sie wissen, wie die Fortsetzung sagt, auch, dass Gott „Maß für Maß“ bestraft, aber dass er keine Flut mehr über die Erde bringen wird. „Biblisches“ Wissen wird hier den Ägyptern zugeschrieben.

<sup>99</sup> Dennoch ist das Bild Mirjams nicht ungetrübt: Ihre Kritik an ihrem Vater Amram (Kap. 13) und ihre Krankheit (Kap. 17) lassen sie in einem etwas zweifelhaften Licht erscheinen.

In V. 17 diskutiert er, inwiefern die Hebammen dem Befehl Pharaos zuwider gehandelt hätten. V. 18 – 20 werden übergangen. In V. 21 wird die Gottesfurcht thematisiert. Aus V. 22 greift er den Befehl Pharaos heraus, der als Versuchung zum Bösen interpretiert wird.

Der Midrasch beginnt mit der Identifikation der Hebammen (V. 15). Zu V.16 wird nach dem Zeitpunkt und der Möglichkeit der Unterscheidung von männlichen und weiblichen Kindern gefragt. Zu V. 17 wird einerseits das rettende Handeln der Hebammen betont als auch ihr Gebet, sodass keine Kinder bei der Geburt starben. V. 18 wird nur als Abschluss einer Einheit zitiert und nicht weiter ausgelegt. In V. 19 wird auf den Vergleich mit den Tieren fokussiert, in V. 20 steht Gottes Lohn für die Hebammen im Mittelpunkt. Die Auslegung von V. 21 befasst sich eingehend mit dem „Haus“, also den Nachkommen, die den Hebammen entstehen. Zu V. 22 werden die Fragen, ob die Ägypter ebenfalls von Pharaos Befehl betroffen seien und warum die Mädchen nicht getötet werden sollten, behandelt.

Die Schwerpunkte unterscheiden sich also deutlich, was von Seiten des Origenes vor allem durch die allegorische Auslegung bedingt ist, die sich durch die ganze Homilie zieht.

### Hermeneutische Vorentscheidungen

Während Origenes von Anfang an eine allegorische Auslegung des Textes auf den inneren Kampf gegen das Böse vorlegt, bleibt der Midrasch bei den Ereignissen des Bibeltextes und versucht, seine textlichen und inhaltlichen Schwierigkeiten zu klären und ihn in das Gesamt der heiligen Schriften einzuordnen. Dieses Anliegen teilt er zweifellos mit Origenes, der aber 1. von einem anderem Korpus heiliger Schriften, das sich v. a. durch das NT von der hebräischen Bibel unterscheidet, ausgeht und 2. die Aktualisierung auf anderem Weg vornimmt, nämlich durch allegorische Deutung auf innere Vorgänge.

Dazu kommt, dass die Homilie des Origenes deutlich von einer Rhetorik der Ermahnung zu einem moralisch einwandfreien christlichen Leben geprägt ist, während der Midrasch sich weniger auf die Leserschaft, sondern stärker auf den Text konzentriert. Dennoch haben beide ein bestimmtes Publikum vor Augen, dem sie durch die Textinterpretation ihre Weltsicht mitteilen wollen. Beide Auslegungen bewegen sich im Rahmen eines bestimmten Weltbildes, das vorausgesetzt wird und auch bestimmte religiöse und moralische Vorstellungen beinhaltet.



## Methodik

Beide Auslegungen gehen formal gleich vor: Der Bibeltext wird zitiert, dann folgt der Kommentar. Atomisierung findet sich dabei im Midrasch häufig, bei Origenes ansatzweise. Oft werden nach dem Zitat oder am Beginn einer neuen Einheit explizit Fragen nach der Bedeutung des Verses gestellt, z. B. „was bedeuten die Worte?“, „warum wird sie so genannt?“ etc. Immer wieder reagiert die Auslegung auf ein Problem im Text, wie ein schwer verständliches Wort oder eine Leerstelle, wie die Frage nach der Motivation Pharaos, nur die männlichen Kinder töten zu lassen, oder die Frage nach den „Häusern“, die den Hebammen gebaut werden.<sup>100</sup>

Gemeinsam und wesentlich ist die aus der Annahme der Bibel als eines einzigen zusammenhängenden Textes resultierende intertextuelle Auslegung. Andere Bibeltexte werden herangezogen, um unklare Stellen zu erklären, Argumentationen zu unterstützen bzw. zu „beweisen“ oder eine Auslegung weiterzuführen, in einen größeren Rahmen zu stellen, zu illustrieren oder abzuschließen.<sup>101</sup> Die Interpretation von Namen wird intensiv zur Deutung herangezogen. Dem Midrasch steht dafür natürlich der gesamte hebräische Bibeltext zur Verfügung, während Origenes sich auf die Bedeutung der Namen selbst beschränkt, die er von Philo übernommen hat, und diese dann weiter in die Interpretation einbezieht. In beiden Texten werden auch Interpretationen zitiert, die dann zurückgewiesen werden und denen die richtige Auslegung gegenübergestellt wird.

Bei Origenes dominiert allerdings in dieser Homilie die Allegorese als Auslegungsmethode. Die hermeneutische Vorannahme einer geistigen Bedeutung, die sinnvoller sei als die wörtliche/historische, bestimmt den ganzen Text.

## Inhalte

Inhaltlich gibt es aufgrund der Vorentscheidungen, des jeweiligen Weltbildes und Selbstverständnisses sowie der Schwerpunktsetzung bzgl. der Textauswahl (3.3.1) große Unterschiede.<sup>102</sup> Nichtsdestotrotz lassen sich aber grundlegende

100 Die Fragen sind in diesem Fall die gleichen, die Antworten unterscheiden sich aufgrund der jeweiligen Hermeneutik. Origenes sieht die Motivation Pharaos in seinem Bestreben, die Menschen vom Himmel fernzuhalten und das Böse zu verbreiten; der Midrasch in der sexuellen Unmoral des Pharao. Beides betrifft die Bosheit des Pharao und seine Unmoral, differiert aber im Detail. Die Häuser der Hebammen werden im jeweiligen Kontext identifiziert: im Midrasch innerhalb der hebräischen Bibel, bei Origenes mittels des NT in der Kirche.

101 Die vielfältigen Funktionen von Bibelzitaten in der frühchristlichen und rabbinischen Bibelauslegung wären eine eigene Untersuchung wert.

102 In der Exegese der Kirchenväter sind neben Einflüssen der Religionsgemeinschaft und



Gemeinsamkeiten feststellen, die in der Struktur von Ex 1 begründet sind. Eine Dichotomie von Eigenem und Anderem, Selbstbild und Feindbild ist Ex 1 bereits inhärent und wird auf die jeweils eigene Gruppe übertragen: Israel wird im Midrasch in Kontinuität mit der eigenen Gruppe gesehen,<sup>103</sup> ebenso wie Origenes für das Christentum (implizit) in Anspruch nimmt, das neue Israel zu sein. Der Feind Pharao repräsentiert hier wie dort die Macht des Bösen, wobei dieses bei Origenes stärker spirituelle Qualität annimmt. In beiden Fällen aber ist das Böse zumindest *auch* moralisch bestimmt und führt das falsche Verhalten, das falsche Leben vor Augen. Die Hebammen werden demgegenüber als Vorbilder dargestellt. In beiden Fällen soll das Publikum – mehr oder weniger deutlich – zu einem gottesfürchtigen Leben hingeführt werden.

## Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede in rabbinischer und patristischer Hermeneutik

Hier sollen kurz die schon in der vorangehenden Untersuchung deutlich gewordenen Voraussetzungen zusammengefasst werden. Zu den gemeinsamen Prämissen gehört wesentlich die Überzeugung vom göttlichen Ursprung der gesamten Heiligen Schrift. Daraus leitet sich ein Verständnis der Bibel als einer Einheit ab, das es erlaubt, alle Einzeltexte, wie unterschiedlich sie auch von ihren Entstehungsverhältnissen und ihrem literarischen Charakter sowie ihrem Inhalt her sein mögen, miteinander in Beziehung zu setzen. Dabei gilt auch das Prinzip der Widerspruchslosigkeit der Schrift, das sich logisch aus der göttlichen Urhebererschaft ableitet. Konsequenz daraus ist die Notwendigkeit, diese Widerspruchslosigkeit, die an der Textoberfläche ja durchaus nicht immer einsichtig ist, auch aufzuweisen.

Gemeinsam ist jüdischen und christlichen Auslegungen auch der Bezug auf die Glaubens- und Interpretationsgemeinschaften, die die Schriften auch hinsichtlich ihres Nutzens für die Praxis auslegen.<sup>104</sup> Die Übereinstimmung der eigenen Lehre und Praxis mit der Heiligen Schrift muss dargelegt und bestätigt werden.<sup>105</sup> Hier liegt

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gesellschaftlich-kulturellen Vorgaben immer wieder auch individuelle Schwerpunktsetzungen festzustellen, vgl. z. B. Siquans, *Prophetinnen*, S. 522 – 524.

103 Vgl. Porton, „Definitions“, S. 520: „Each group of Jews in antiquity sought to ground itself in the biblical text, and each segment of the Jewish community viewed Scripture through the lens of its unique theology and distinctive worldview. Separate Jewish communities portrayed their own history as the subject of the Bible’s mythologies of election, covenant, punishment, exile, and redemption.“

104 Bruns, „Midrash“, S. 644: „There is always a dialogue of text and history, in which the one is adapted to new situations and the other ... is shaped by what the text has to say.“

105 Vgl. Porton, „Definitions“, S. 523: „Clearly one of the major impetuses for the creation of midrash was the desire by some rabbis to make explicit the connection between their

aber zugleich die entscheidende hermeneutische Differenz. Jede Glaubensgemeinschaft legt die Texte im Rahmen ihrer Lehre und Praxis aus (christlich als *regula fidei* gefasst). Dabei unterscheidet sich explizit christliche Auslegung von der jüdischen, insofern sie die nunmehr „alttestamentlichen“ Schriften, meist auf Grundlage der Septuaginta, auf Jesus, die Christen und die Kirche bezieht. Hier ist auch der Ort der spezifisch christlichen Allegorese anzusetzen.<sup>106</sup>

### Parallelen und Differenzen in der Methodologie

Die Methodologie patristischer und rabbinischer Bibelauslegung ist zunächst von den hermeneutischen Zugängen bestimmt. Entscheidenden Einfluss haben aber auch bereits vorhandene Formen der Textauslegung.<sup>107</sup> Die frühchristliche Bibelauslegung kann dabei auch schon auf jüdische Vorarbeit zurückgreifen, so wie etwa Origenes auf Philo oder Hieronymus auf die von ihm genannten „hebräischen“ Gewährsleute.<sup>108</sup> Man kann zudem davon ausgehen, dass bestimmte hermeneutische Vorstellungen und verschiedene Methoden der Textinterpretation damals allgemein verbreitet waren.

Während die Allegorese, die auf griechische Wurzeln zurückgeht, von christlichen Exegeten aber wohl bereits durch die jüdische Bibelauslegung in Alexandrien, insbesondere Philo, übernommen wurde, sich als spezifisch christliche Zugangsweise und Methode für die christologische Interpretation des AT weiterentwickelt, werden andere Methoden der Auslegung sowohl in der jüdischen als auch in der christlichen Bibelinterpretation verwendet. Das soll hier durch wenige Beispiele illustriert werden. So findet sich die für den Midrasch als typisch betrachtete Atomisierung vielfach auch in patristischen Kommentaren und Homilien, ausgehend von der Lemma-Kommentar-Form.<sup>109</sup> Interpretation eines Bibeltextes mittels anderer Bibeltexte, intertextuelle Auslegung also, treffen wir bei den Kirchenvätern sehr häufig an: Die Bibel aus AT und NT wird als *ein* Text betrachtet, in dem beliebig Verse zur Auslegung anderer herangezogen werden können (und müssen, um die Widerspruchsfreiheit der Bibel als ganzer

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teachings – the Oral Torah – and the Written Torah.“ Porton, „Definitions“, S. 531 sieht als Adressaten der meisten rabbinischen Midraschim andere Rabbis oder rabbinische Schüler. Die Kirchenväter dagegen richten sich zumindest in ihren Predigten an ein breiteres Publikum. Kommentare wiederum dürften ebenfalls nur Gebildeten (auch Frauen, wie im Fall des Hieronymus) zugänglich gewesen sein.

106 Vgl. dazu Henri de Lubac, *Der geistige Sinn der Schrift*. Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1952, S. 20 und öfter.

107 Siehe dazu die Literatur in Anm. 1.

108 Vgl. Literatur in Anm. 2.

109 Ein schönes Beispiel dafür ist Georg Bürke (Hg.), *Gregor der Große. Homilien zu Ezechiel*. Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1983 (Christliche Meister 21).

zu erweisen).<sup>110</sup> Diverse Operationen im Bereich der Philologie werden im christlichen wie im jüdischen Umfeld angewendet. Hier sollen zur Veranschaulichung konkrete Beispiele angeführt werden. Häufig ist die Erklärung von Namen, wie das Beispiel des Origenes gezeigt hat.<sup>111</sup>

Philologisch gebildete Kirchenväter argumentieren auch mit dem hebräischen Text. So weist Hieronymus in seiner Interpretation von Jes 7,12<sup>112</sup> darauf hin, dass alle *similiter* übersetzten: „Ich werde den Herrn nicht versuchen“. Zugrunde liegt (richtigerweise) das Verb נסה. Seiner Ansicht nach könne aber auch gelesen werden: „Ich werde den Herrn nicht erhöhen.“ Diese Lesart würde das Verb נשא voraussetzen. Beide werden unterschiedlich geschrieben, klingen aber in der Aussprache gleich. Assoziationen ähnlicher Art finden sich auch in rabbinischen Texten, so etwa in Meg. 14a: „לא תקרי... אלא“, „Lies nicht ... sondern“, oder in GenR 55,1 zu Gen 22,1 das Wortspiel נסח – נסח.

Strukturelle Ähnlichkeiten finden sich auch bei den folgenden Beispielen. Petrus Chrysologus (ca. 380–451) schließt von dem lateinischen Wort *maria* in Gen 1,10 auf die Schöpferfunktion der Gottesmutter Maria:

Maria wird Mutter genannt; und wann ist Maria nicht Mutter? ‚Die Ansammlungen der Wasser‘, sagt sie [die Schrift], ‚nannte er Meere (*maria*)‘ (Gen 1,10). Hat nicht diese das Volk, das aus Ägypten auszog, in einem Mutterschoß (*uno utero*) empfangen, damit eine himmlische Nachkommenschaft auftauchte, wiedergeboren zu einer neuen Schöpfung?<sup>113</sup>

BerR 12,9,1 interpretiert בְּהִבְרָאָם in Gen 2,4 auf ähnliche Weise:

Es sprach R. Jehoschua b. Qorcha: ‚als sie erschaffen wurden‘ [ist zu lesen als] ‚durch Abraham‘, [denn] wegen des Verdienstes Abrahams [wurden sie erschaffen].

Die Identität der Konsonanten motiviert die Identifikation mit Abraham, ähnlich wie oben bei Maria. Diese wenigen charakteristischen Beispiele sollen genügen, um darzulegen, inwiefern der Umgang mit dem Bibeltext bei Rabbinen und Kirchenvätern zahlreiche Parallelen aufweist. Die Unterschiede in den Refe-

110 Beispiele dafür sind wiederum die Ezechielhomilien Gregor des Großen, die Homilien des Origenes, die Kommentare des Hieronymus u. v. a. Leider kann hier nicht auf die verschiedenen Texte eingegangen werden.

111 Dazu wurden in der Antike vielfach Onomastika verwendet. Man wollte die Dinge ihrem Wesen entsprechend benennen, vgl. dazu Victor Ehrenberg, „Onomastikon.“ In: *Pauly's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 18,1 (1939), S. 507 – 516.

112 Marc Adriaen, *Hieronymus: In Esaïam*. Turnhout: Brepols 1963 (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 73), S. 101.

113 Petrus Chrysologus, „Sermo 146. De generatione Christi secundus 7.“ In: Alexander Olivar (Hg.), *Sancti Petri Chrysologi collectio sermonum*. 3. *A felice episcopo parata sermonibus extravagantibus adiectis*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1982 (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 24B), S. 905 – 906, Übersetzung Agnethe Siquans. Anschließend wird Maria wiederum mit Mirjam in Ex 15 identifiziert. In diesem Abschnitt, der als Predigt konzipiert ist, faktisch aber Mt 1,18 auslegt, werden verschiedene Texte des AT herangezogen, um die gleichzeitige Mutterschaft und Jungfräulichkeit Marias zu belegen.

renzsystemen werden gerade auch in dem letzten Beispiel deutlich, wo einerseits Abraham, andererseits Maria, die Mutter Jesu, im Mittelpunkt stehen.

## Schlussfolgerungen

Rabbinische und patristische Bibelauslegung teilen ein gemeinsames Grundanliegen, das Parallelen in der Durchführung zur Folge hat: den (alten) heiligen Text für die gegenwärtigen Leser/innen verständlich und für ihr religiöses Leben nutzbar zu machen bzw. seine Nützlichkeit aufzuzeigen. Außerdem teilen beide eine fundamentale Grundannahme, nämlich den göttlichen Ursprung und die göttliche Autorität der heiligen Schriften, die infolgedessen als *ein* Text gelesen werden. Dieses Schriftkorpus der jeweils normativen Schriften wird als Offenbarung verstanden, die in sich konsistent (und bis zu einem gewissen Grad suffizient) sein muss. Von daher eröffnet sich die Möglichkeit, die Schrift aus sich selbst zu erklären, ein Interpretationsprinzip, das sich bereits auch in der griechischen Antike findet.<sup>114</sup> Konsequenz daraus ist die starke Intertextualität i. S. der Verknüpfung unterschiedlicher Bibelstellen bzw. des Heranziehens unterschiedlichster Bibelstellen für die Argumentation einer Interpretation, die ein auffälliges Kennzeichen patristischer wie rabbinischer Auslegung darstellt und wohl als die primäre Interpretationsmethode bestimmt werden kann. Das trifft genau Boyarins Definition von Midrasch als „radical intertextual reading of the canon“.<sup>115</sup> Die Schrift erklärt sich selbst, (scheinbare) Widersprüche müssen ausgeräumt werden, verschiedene Texte erhellen einander – dieses Vorgehen findet sich sehr häufig.<sup>116</sup>

Andere Methoden, etwa philologische, werden ebenfalls aus der nichtbiblischen antiken Textauslegung übernommen. Hier entstehen Unterschiede zwischen rabbinischer und patristischer Exegese, weil erstere den hebräischen Text in seiner ursprünglichen Sprache auslegt, letztere dagegen meist mit einer Übersetzung arbeitet und sich dessen bewusst ist. Das bedingt eine unterschiedliche Wertung des Wortlauts bzw. auch Streitigkeiten über richtige

114 Vgl. Christoph Schäublin, „Homerum ex Homero“. *Museum Helveticum* 34 (1977), S. 220 – 277.

115 Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 16.

116 Boyarins Vorstellung von Midrasch, bei der das Lesen („reading“) im Mittelpunkt steht als Interaktion zwischen den Lesern und dem Text, der Leerstellen aufweist und zugleich dialogisch ist („gapped and dialogical“, Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 17), kann auf die Bibelauslegung der Kirchenväter ohne Weiteres angewendet werden. Die Kirchenväter sind wie die Rabbinen „readers doing the best they could to make sense of the Bible for themselves and their times and in themselves and their times—in short, as readers.“ (Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, S. 14)

Übersetzungen.<sup>117</sup> Die patristische Auslegung muss, obwohl sie dem Wortlaut der Bibel Offenbarungsqualität zugesteht, gleichzeitig davon in gewissem Maße abgehen, da die Übersetzungen eben nicht immer wortwörtliche Wiedergaben des Originals sind und dies auch offensichtlich war.<sup>118</sup> Die Frage der anderen Sprache ist zweifellos auch ein Faktor, der Kontinuität oder Diskontinuität herstellt bzw. verstärkt (vgl. Kap. 2). Die Übersetzung der Bibel in die griechische oder lateinische Sprache bedeutet zugleich eine Übersetzung in eine andere kulturelle Welt. Damit ist auch der Abstand zwischen dem Bibeltext und der Gegenwart der Rezipient/innen größer, als wenn beide in der gleichen Sprachwelt leben (wenngleich auch diese sich natürlich im Laufe der Zeit massiv verändern kann und tatsächlich verändert hat). Daraus ergibt sich aber die Notwendigkeit einer Interpretationsmethode, die imstande ist, diesen Abstand zu überbrücken. Die patristische Auslegung fand diese in der (aus dem griechischen Raum stammenden) Allegorese, vermittelt über die alexandrinische jüdische Auslegung, die bereits allegorische Auslegung der Bibel praktizierte. Da eine stärker am Literalsinn orientierte Interpretation die Plausibilität der tradierten Schriften für die Gegenwart nicht mehr ausreichend einsichtig machen konnte, wurde eine zweite Sinnenebene angenommen, die sich vom Wortsinn entfernte und eine übertragene Bedeutung der Texte annahm. Diese wird in der göttlichen Urheberschaft der Texte begründet und findet Anhalt in der metaphorischen Sprache zahlreicher Bibeltexte, wie prophetischer Texte oder Psalmen. Zudem wird die prophetische Qualität alttestamentlicher Texte stärker in den Mittelpunkt gerückt und auf Christus bezogen.<sup>119</sup> Die Leseweise prophetischer Texte wird auf immer mehr Texte und schließlich auf das Alte Testament als ganzes ausgedehnt. Damit ist es ein Leichtes, das ganze AT christlich zu lesen und die Brücke zu christlichen Leser/innen herzustellen.<sup>120</sup>

Ein wichtiger Unterschied zwischen patristischer und rabbinischer Bibelauslegung ist, dass es sich bei ersterer überwiegend um Autorenliteratur handelt, während letztere in Sammlungen, die aber sehr wohl die Namen von Gelehrten bewahren, tradiert ist.<sup>121</sup> Das Nebeneinander unterschiedlicher Meinungen, die bisweilen dialogische Form der Midraschim ist zwar auch diesem Sammlungscharakter zu verdanken, dürfte letztlich aber eine Folge des Schulbetriebs in den

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117 Vgl. z. B. Kamesar, „Virgin“ sowie Siquans, „Übersetzung“.

118 Vgl. zur Bedeutung der hebräischen Sprache für die Kirchenväter und ihre Beurteilung von hebräischem Text bzw. Septuaginta als ursprünglicherem Text Edmon Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory. Canon, Language, Text*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

119 Hierin liegt wohl ein grundlegender Unterschied zu den Rabbinen.

120 Kritik an allzu exzessiver Anwendung der Allegorese wurde sehr früh geäußert und Beschränkungen eingefordert. Vgl. dazu Siquans, *Prophetinnen*, S. 535 f.

121 Vgl. Porton, „Definitions“, S. 532, der dieses Kennzeichen als Merkmal des rabbinischen Midrasch gegenüber anderen Formen wie Pescharim oder Targumim nennt.

rabbinischen Lehrhäusern sein.<sup>122</sup> Für die Redaktoren dieser Texte steht offensichtlich eine gewisse Polysemie des Bibeltextes außer Frage.<sup>123</sup> Die Bibelkommentare der Kirchenväter sind – abgesehen von den Katenen – unter den Namen der Autoren als selbständige Werke überliefert, sodass ein Werk jeweils eine Ansicht repräsentiert. Diese Werke sind selbstverständlich auch dem Urteil der Kirche hinsichtlich ihrer Rechtgläubigkeit unterworfen, wobei manche Autoren erst längere Zeit nach ihrem Tod unter ein Verdikt fielen.<sup>124</sup> Die Vorstellung der Polysemie des biblischen Textes ist im Modell des mehrfachen Schriftsinnes verankert, der verschiedene Bedeutungen zulässt, die sich aber auf unterschiedlichen Sinnesebenen finden. Selten werden mehrere Interpretationen auf gleicher Ebene nebeneinander gestellt, dann aber unproblematisch. M. E. ist für die Kirchenväter eine plurale Interpretation eines Textes (innerhalb eines grundsätzlich vorgegebenen christlichen Rahmens natürlich) nicht ausgeschlossen. Diese Pluralität wird dann sichtbar, wenn Kommentare mehrerer Autoren zu einer Bibelstelle nebeneinander gestellt werden, kaum aber innerhalb eines Werkes. In rabbinischen Midraschim werden die Differenzen in einem gewissen Sinn kultiviert, aber ebenfalls in einem begrenzten Rahmen.<sup>125</sup>

Wenn auch wesentliche Differenzen zwischen der Bibelinterpretation der Kirchenväter und dem Midrasch bestehen, so fällt doch eine Nähe und Verwandtschaft auf, die durch die Konzentration auf die Allegorese oft übersehen oder verschleiert wurde.<sup>126</sup> Jüdische und christliche Bibelauslegung bewegen sich in der Antike in einem gemeinsamen kulturellen Raum, in dem sie ihren je eigenen Platz suchen und finden.<sup>127</sup>

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122 Vgl. Porton, „Definitions“, S. 532 f.

123 Möglicherweise ist dies durch die Autorität der Rabbinen bedingt, in deren Namen die unterschiedlichen Auslegungen überliefert sind.

124 Vgl. dazu den Origenismusstreit, in dem Origenes irrige Ansichten zu Fragen vorgeworfen wurden, die zu seiner Zeit noch gar nicht geklärt waren. Vgl. zu dem Streit, in den Hieronymus wesentlich involviert war und in dem er keine ruhmreiche Rolle spielte, und seinen Folgen Fürst, *Hieronymus*, S. 30 – 36.

125 Porton, „Definitions“, S. 524: „[T]he rabbis did *not* view the Torah as open to limitless interpretations.“ Siehe dazu auch oben in 1. die Überlegungen von Stern.

126 Noch einmal ist darauf hinzuweisen, dass die untersuchten Texte Charakteristisches zutage fördern, aber keineswegs eine Verallgemeinerung zulassen. Weitere Untersuchungen in diesem Bereich wären wünschenswert.

127 An dieser Stelle möchte ich Gerhard Langer für seine hilfreichen Hinweise im Bereich der Midraschforschung Dank sagen.

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## **Reading Against the Grain: Humor and Subversion in Midrashic Literature**

The past several decades have witnessed the recovery and rehabilitation of the study of midrash. Advancements in related fields and in the humanities in general have paved the way for its re-emergence and have established it as a firmly rooted area of study in its own right. This transformation is most palpable in works that address the literary and cultural aspects of rabbinic literature. The diverse approaches to midrashic studies, moreover, highlight the trend to move beyond the strictures of disciplines and to engage in multidisciplinary research. Now more than ever as secular institutions have established programs in ancient Judaism, scholars of rabbinics are exposed to various discourses and intellectual crosscurrents, and therefore bring to the study of rabbinic texts a rich array of questions and a broad set of theoretical skills.

And while scholarship in this area has advanced on the heels of other fields, it in turn has contributed to the study of the New Testament, patristic exegesis, the Talmud, Late Antique Judaism, and has made its presence felt in other circles such as literary theory. In fact, trends in midrashic studies impact other seemingly far afield areas of interest. We see a glimmer of this in “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis and Hermeneutics with a Critical Edition of the *Sūdgar Nask* of *Dēnkard* Book 9”,<sup>1</sup> a recent publication by Yuhan Vevaina that applies principles of midrashic intertextual studies to the study of a Zoroastrian text.

The current state of midrashic studies is aptly described by Richard Sarason:

The cautious, methodologically self-conscious juxtaposition and interweaving of multiple textual loci; of texts and a variety of contexts; of literary, historical, and religious-cultural perspectives and methodologies—all provide the contemporary scholar with fruitful lenses for the interpretation of what more and more is understood to be a dense, richly layered, multiform, and overdetermined (in the Freudian sense of being generated by multiple causal factors) literary corpus bearing witness to a complex

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1 Harvard dissertation (2007), forthcoming Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

and dynamic culture that produced and lies behind it. Under these circumstances, no single reading or interpretive lens will suffice to do justice to this rich complexity.”<sup>2</sup>

More and more, rabbinic narratives are analyzed in terms of their literary quality. At the same time, however, they are regarded as artifacts that function as conveyors and mediators of rabbinic culture.<sup>3</sup> The historical import of narratives is therefore undiminished to the extent that they yield insight into the milieu of those who recorded, transmitted and lived by them.

If we were to trace the history of the literary critical approach to rabbinic literature, one would unquestionably point to the late 70’s and early 80’s as a watershed moment when the midrash-theory linkage developed, which to my mind continues to flourish. However, no other work – even if one were merely to thumb through it – of the past several years better captures this linkage than Joshua Levinson’s 2005 tour de force, *Ha-Sipur she-lo’ supar: Omanūt ha-sipur ha-mikra’i hamurḥav be-midreshe ḥazal*, translated into English as *The Twice Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash*. Literally, *Ha-Sipur she-lo’ supar* is the untold tale. Between the literal, “untold tale,” and the more poetic “twice told tale,” is an instantiation of the notion that the rabbinic narrative is at once never and always told, at once concealed and revealed. But Levinson’s masterpiece does more than that – as in all his works, he uncovers layers of literary meaning while at the same time attending to cultural concerns and contexts. Equipped with a prodigious arsenal of literary and cultural theories that he handily deploys at every turn, Levinson casts new light on rabbinic narratives and thus in turn on the rabbinic *Weltanschauung*. Anyone familiar with rabbinic sources knows this is a notoriously difficult task.

By and large, scholars of rabbinics nonetheless take up this challenge and engage rabbinic sources as literary and cultural artifacts and explore them from the perspective of cultural poetics. One by-product is the blurring of obstructionist lines between rabbinic law and narrative;<sup>4</sup> another is the integral trend to employ literary-critical tools ever so vigorously in order to unpack forms and functions of rabbinic interpretation within a textual and cultural matrix. The list of recent studies is rather impressive but I’ll simply note a few – Boyarin’s *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, Holger Zellentin’s *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature*, Galit Hasan Rokem’s *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*, and her study of Jewish narrative dialogue in Late Antiquity,

2 Richard Sarason, “Introduction”. In: Matthew Kraus (ed.), *How should rabbinic literature be read in the modern world*. Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press 2006 (Judaism in Context 4), pp. 1 – 10; quote from p. 9.

3 See Joshua Levinson’s contribution in this volume.

4 Barry Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011.



Jeffrey Rubenstein's work on Talmudic stories and rabbinic culture, and Dina Stein's, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self*.<sup>5</sup>

The above survey of the literary approaches to midrashic material provides a backdrop for my attempt to situate midrashic sources within the realm of literary discourse. An exploration of the literary quality of these texts throws light on the sages who created and transmitted these narratives. Specifically, I will analyze two rabbinic texts that illustrate a penchant for parody. The parodic aspect that I will focus on is the ironic attitude that, as Patrick O'Neill notes, "is characterized by an oppositional or disjunctive structure, by a play on difference."<sup>6</sup> While two examples (LevR 23:1 and bPes 119b) may not constitute evidence to support the claim that the rabbis had a "penchant" for parody, there are several other cases that scholars of rabbinics have examined, and thus I hope these two may be added to the growing number of such illustrations. Yet, if we consider parody "the most overtly ludic form of literature," a form that at its core is intertextual, then in this sense all rabbinic texts are parodies, and indeed all writing, as Roland Barthes observes, becomes parody.<sup>7</sup> The aspect of parody, however, that is of most interest to me in this interrogation of Leviticus Rabbah 23:1 and Pesahim 119b is "the perception of incongruity, a discrepancy, between the parodied text and the new context."<sup>8</sup> "Two texts rather than a single text," writes O'Neill, "are offered within one work, in other words, balancing identity and difference, sympathy and criticism, playing off the evocation of audience expectations."<sup>9</sup> Or, put in another way – these texts display the hallmark of irony, that is they exhibit "the kind of discrepancy between expression and meaning, appearance and reality, or expectations and event...artfully arranged to draw attention to itself."<sup>10</sup>

Our first text, Leviticus Rabbah 23:1, translated from the Margoliot critical edition, is as follows:

*Like the practice of the land of Egypt* (Lev. 18:3). Rabbi Isaac opened [expounded the verse]: *Like a rose among the thorns* (Song of Songs 2:2). Rabbi Isaac interpreted the verse as referring to Rebecca: *Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebecca, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddam-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean* (Gen 25:20). Why does Scripture state "sister of Laban the Aramean"? Did it not already state "daughter of Bethuel the Aramean"? And why does it state, "daughter of Bethuel the

5 Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012.

6 Patrick O'Neill, *The Comedy of Entropy: Humour, Narrative, Reading*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 113.

7 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975, p. 31.

8 O'Neill, *The Comedy*, p. 114.

9 Ibid., p. 114.

10 Alan R. Thompson, *The Dry Mock: A Study of Irony in Drama*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948, p. 10. See Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Aramean"? Does it not already state, "sister of Laban the Aramean?" [why the superfluity?] Rather, the Holy One Blessed be He said, "Her father is a deceiver [*ramai*] and her brother is a deceiver and the people of her place are deceivers [*rema'im*], and this righteous one emerged from among them. She is like a rose among the thorns." Rabbi Berekhiah in the name of Rabbi Simon makes the point in connection with this verse, *And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Paddan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean* (Gen 28:5), thus labeling them all as practicing deception [*ramma'ut*]. All of them are deceivers.

Like most of the chapters in *Leviticus Rabbah*, chapter 23 opens with a *petiḥa* (or *petiḥta*), a proem, comprising a verse usually from the Writings portion of the Bible – in this case Song of Songs 2:2, "Like a rose among the thorns." Through a series of word plays, allusions, and analogies, *inter alia*, this verse is linked to the verse to be explicated – Lev 18:3, the unequivocal prohibition against Israelite assimilation: "Like the practice of the land of Egypt which you dwelled in, you should not practice, and like the practice of the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you, you should not practice, and in their laws you should not go." The Israelites, poised between their past in Egypt and their future in Canaan, must maintain their distinctiveness and thus avoid appropriating the ways of their cultural surroundings. This is illustrated in our midrash where Rebecca is likened to the rose among the thorns. That is, she is surrounded by deceivers, *rema'im*. By means of a play on *arami* (Aramean) and *ramai* (deceiver), the rabbis also draw an analogy between the thorns and members of Rebecca's family, her father, Bethuel, and her brother, Laban. But they are not the only thorns; rather the entire town is full of deceivers.

According to the midrash, Rebecca's moral character sets her apart from her kin and townsfolk, from the other Arameans. Later units, 4 and 7, of the same parashah of the same chapter, draw on the analogy in this portion to make a similar claim, but in those instances with respect to Israelite distinctiveness. In fact, one may argue that R. Berekhiah's prooftext, Gen 28:5, "And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Paddan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean," already foreshadows that claim. In other words, Jacob/Israel is now the rose among the thorns, and so, too, the Israelites in later units of the same chapter. Indeed, commenting on Rabbi Berekhiah's prooftext, Margoliot considers Jacob as the rose among the thorns. And, moreover, although in her analysis of this chapter Beth Berkowitz omits R. Berekhiah's prooftext, she would also argue that the midrash should be read as an attempt to distinguish Israel from the nations of the world. More specifically, she contends that chapter 23 in its entirety coheres around the theme of Jewish difference. The units, she maintains, produce a host of paradigms of Jewish identity that

include moral probity, physical appearance, ritual life, and sexual practice.<sup>11</sup> According to her reading of Leviticus Rabbah 23:1, I quote:

What defines Jewishness here is not the family one is born into but the moral traits one is born with, yet in an implicit circular logic these moral traits come to characterize one's ethnicity. This first unit thus represents Israelite identity as clearly and inherently distinct from its degenerate surroundings, creating an ideal type of static Jewish difference constituted mainly by moral superiority, although Israelite difference is also destabilized by the ethnic background Rebecca shares with her kinsmen.<sup>12</sup>

But, is Jacob a rose among the thorns or rather is he implicated in *rama 'ut*? Is the pericope, as Berkowitz contests, about Jewish difference, or should it be read with greater nuance, perhaps as subverting the very notion of difference? Might it reflect uneasiness with the notion of distinction, an anxiety about difference? In contradistinction to Berkowitz's reading of the entire chapter "as a virtual manifesto on the theme of Jewish difference,"<sup>13</sup> I would submit for your consideration that it be understood as a manifestation of rabbinic anxiety about Jewish difference. The notion of difference should be understood ironically. Counterpoising the prohibition to be unlike the other nations, a notion that runs to varying degrees throughout chapter 23, is, put mildly, an attenuated notion of Jewish difference, one marked by anxiety and ambivalence. Rather than exhibiting the ways in which Israel is unlike the other nations, the midrashim demonstrate how much Israel is *like* the other nations. We detect this right at the outset in our midrash – a parody on difference. As I previously noted, Margoliot reads Jacob as the rose among the thorns, and Berkowitz omits the prooftext, which is found in all manuscripts and printed editions. The prooftext, however, is the linchpin, not only of our unit, but of the entire chapter, and must be read simultaneously along two vectors, one that hews to audience expectations, the other that upends and devastates those expectations. That is to say, the prooftext, "And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Paddan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean," at once supports the notion that Rebecca and by extension the Israelites are unlike the Arameans, and subverts that very notion. The midrash simultaneously introduces and traduces the notion of distinction. For indeed, the midrash continues: "All of them are deceivers." But who constitutes "All"? All Arameans? Does all include Rebecca and Jacob, and by extension Israel and the Jewish people? Through wordplay, *arami* becomes the nexus between ethnic identity and moral orientation, thus making it difficult to distinguish Rebecca from her kinsmen and thus subverting the notion of moral superiority.

11 Cf. Beth Berkowitz, *Defining Jewish Difference from Antiquity to the Present*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 135.

12 Ibid., p. 118.

13 Ibid., p. 114.

“Aramean” is a complicated label, used in Deut 26:5 (“My father was a fugitive Aramean”) to describe Israel’s origins. This is certainly not lost on the rabbis. Nor is Jacob’s relationship to Laban lost on them, for we read in Genesis 29:12, “Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother, that he was Rebecca’s son.” But this relationship is not only of blood, for if we maintain the notion rendered in the first part of the midrash, it is also of character. And indeed, his trickster character is explicitly noted in bMeg 13b, which explains Gen 29:12:

*And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother... Now was he her father’s brother? Was he not the son of her father’s sister? [as the verse states, “Rebecca’s son”]? [In other words, the Talmud inquires, what does it mean that Jacob is Laban’s brother?] What it means is this [here the Talmud produces extra-scriptural dialogue between Jacob and Rebecca]: He said to her, ‘Will you marry me?’ She replied, ‘Yes, but my father is a trickster, and he will outwit you,’ literally, “you will not be able to deal with him.” He replied, “*Ahiv ana be rama’ut*,” “I am his brother in trickery,” that is in deception.*

Lest I be accused of committing the sin of omission, Rachel then asks Jacob if indulging in trickery is permitted to the righteous, to which he responds with a verse from 2 Sam 22: 27: “With the pure you act in purity, and with the perverse You are wily”, words spoken by David about God. These words are taken out of their scriptural context to justify “righteous” Jacob’s trickery. The rabbis ask if chicanery is permissible to one righteous, and their *prima facie* response must be probed. 2 Sam 22:27 draws a connection between Jacob the deceiver, and David, no less a deceiver. In other words, here, too, Megillah 13b depicts Jacob as at once righteous and deceptive – the brother of Laban in *rama’ut*.

Before moving on to our next source, let me pause for a moment to summarize my argument: LevR 23:1 attempts to set Rebecca, Jacob, and by extension the Jewish people morally apart from other nations, but simultaneously functions to undermine that notion of exceptionalism or distinction. To read it on one plane, according to Margoliot and Berkowitz, is to lose sight not only of the midrash’s literary richness, but also to limit its theological implications and to ignore rabbinic anxiety, ambiguity about Jewish difference. This is echoed throughout the rest of chapter 23. In fact, LevR 23:2 makes the claim that it is only because God vowed to take for himself a nation that Israel is redeemed, not because of its exceptional virtuous behavior or its separation from ambient cultural trappings, but because of God’s choice to redeem them. Since the Israelites behaved like the Egyptians, that is, they wore the same garments and were also uncircumcised, he could not distinguish them one from the other. It is only on account of God making an oath that the Israelites were redeemed.

My reading of these rabbinic texts assumes that the rabbis are well attuned to the various vectors on which the midrash operates – generally speaking the overt and covert lines of communication. Cognizant of the ludic possibilities of the

text, the rabbis were “aware of the covert-signal information,” that is, the intertextual connections and ruptures that continually relativize the overt line of communication.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, I also draw attention to self-reflexivity that is inherent to the rabbinic intertextual enterprise.

Let us now move to Pesahim 119b, where we read an exegetical narrative about a future feast the Holy One Blessed Be He prepares for the righteous. The narrative is an interpretation of Gen 21:8:

*The child grew up and was weaned, [and Abraham had a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned].* What, the Talmud asks, is implied by this verse? Assembled at the banquet are the illustrious, Israelite grandees, the patriarchs of the Jewish people. After they eat and drink, a cup of wine is given to Abraham who is expected to say the blessing over it, but he demurs, saying: “I am not blessing, for Ishmael emerged from me.” They give the cup to Isaac, but he also refuses, saying to them, “I am not blessing, for Esau emerged from me.” They give the cup to Jacob, who objects: “I am not blessing, for I married two sisters, and the Torah came and forbid them to me.” Then Moses will be asked to take the cup and say grace but he also declines, noting the fact that he was prohibited from entering the land of Israel. Then Joshua will be asked, but also declines for he was not given the privilege to have a son, as it is written, *Joshua the son of Nun* (Num 14: 38, passim); *his son Nun, his son Joshua* (1 Chron 7: 27) [this occurs in a genealogical list which ends with Joshua]. Then David will be asked: “Take it and say Grace.” To which he replies, “I will say Grace, and it is fitting for me to say Grace,” as it is said, *I will lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.* (Ps 116:13).

What at first appears as a laudatory depiction of David, giving him pride of place among Israel’s patriarchs is an ironic parody that draws the listener’s attention to David’s many misdeeds. As Richard Kalmin compellingly demonstrates in his monograph, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*,<sup>15</sup> Palestinian rabbis tend to whitewash David’s character; his behavior is rendered as comporting with the acts of saints not sinners. The Babylonian sages, on the other hand, have no vested interest in diminishing David’s scandalous behavior. That said, Kalmin nonetheless attributes a pro-David sentiment to bPes 119b. Moreover, Avigdor Shinan in his article, “Al Demuto shel hamelech Dovid besifrut hazal”<sup>16</sup> (“The image of King David in rabbinic literature”), also considers this exposition an approbation of David’s character. I, however, suggest that like James Diamond, it should not be read as a rabbinic rehabilitation of his character but rather as ironically antagonistic, a parody that again operates on two levels. In the very act of praising David it highlights his character flaws, making him the least worthy to raise the cup and say Grace. While those who precede David show deference and

14 O’Neill, *The Comedy of Entropy*, pp. 114 – 115.

15 London, New York: Routledge, 1999.

16 In: Yair Zakovitch (ed.), *Dovid: mi-roeh l’Meshiach*. Jerusalem: Yad Yitshaq ben Tsvi, 1995, pp. 181 – 199.

humility, “conceding their honor” and expressing their limitations, which are not immoral or necessarily a fault of their own, David by sharp contrast, as Diamond avers, “chronologically places last, and is therefore the youngest of the group that has gathered, ignores the model of self-deprecation projected by his cohorts and hurriedly accepts the privilege they have denied themselves.”<sup>17</sup>

While Diamond produces an excellent reading of the passage, his focus is solely on its parodic composition with respect to David. If we step back for a moment and return to the beginning with the image of Abraham preparing a feast of thanksgiving for Isaac when he was weaned – *va-yiggamel*, we discover the exegetical narrative is a double parody. The depiction of David vis-à-vis the great patriarchs and hoary heroes is a parody within a parody. That is to say, the entire exegetical narrative is a parody that once again calls into question Israel’s distinction. The philological linchpin here is the *yiggamel*, weaning, and God’s demonstrating or repaying his love for the seed of Isaac, *yigmol*, and Ps 116:12, the verse preceding David’s prideful proclamation that he will raise the cup: “How can I repay the Lord for all His bounties (*tagmulohi*) to me?” David’s announcement is all the more audacious in light of this verse which reflects humility.

The narrative builds a parallel between Abraham and God. Abraham holds a feast for Isaac when he is weaned. He repays God for Isaac, the son of promise, and God repays the seed of Isaac for their righteousness. But, as the narrative nears completion we are presented with a litany of seeming imperfections that betray the participants’ unworthiness. While compared to David’s flaws, these might be considered rather venial. However, the notion that Abraham and Isaac produced unfit (*pesolet*) offspring is fairly common not only in the Amoraic period but also in the Tannaitic. Only righteous Jacob is the Lord’s portion, as we read in Deut 32:9: “For the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” In Sifre Deut. (Ha’azinu 312) we read

...a parable of a king who had a field that he gave to tenants, who in turn began to rob it. So, he took it from them and gave it to their children and they became wickedder than the previous. A son was born to him and he said to them, “Get out of what is mine.” It is impossible for you to be in it. Give me my portion so I will recognize it.” So when Abraham came into the world, something unfit came from him – Ishmael and all the children of Keturah. Isaac came into the world and something unfit came from him, Esau and all the chieftains of Edom. They became wickedder than the previous ones. When Jacob came into the world nothing unfit came from him, rather all his children were proper when they were born, as it is said, *And Jacob was a perfect man dwelling in tents* (Gen 25:27). When will the Lord recognize his share? From Jacob, as it is said, *For the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his own allotment* (Deut 32:9) (*ki hehleq Adonai amo; Yaacov hevel nahalato*).

17 James A. Diamond, “King of the Sages: Rabbinic Rehabilitation or Ironic Parody.” *Prooftexts* 27.3 (2007), pp. 373 – 426, quote from pp. 394 – 395.

This notion that both Abraham and Isaac produced blemished offspring is fairly common in rabbinic literature and is used to explain, for example, why God says, "Speak to the children of Israel," but here in bPes 119b, even Jacob is deemed unrighteous. Abraham who has a feast for God on the day Isaac is weaned puts in stark relief the banquet which God arranges for Isaac's seed, but by the end of the story, while we may laugh at David's boastfulness, we are left with a sense of uneasiness. Is Isaac's seed – the people of Israel, the Jewish people – meritorious, deserving of the feast, deserving of God's unconditional love? Both the covenant God makes with Abraham and the Davidic covenant are called into question.

In bPes 119b and in LevR 23:1, by means of ironic parody we detect an anxiety with respect to Israel's distinction. Both passages take up the issue of moral rectitude and righteousness, and simultaneously subvert the notion. I have stitched a story much like the rabbis who interweave dialogue within the interstices of biblical verses, and biblical verses within the interstices of their dialogue. I do so, much like the rabbis, in order to tell a story of rabbinic self-reflection that contrasts and rubs against their assertions of Jewish distinction and merit, and much like the rabbis' narratives, it is a story that reveals a penchant for parody.





## Post-Classical Narratology and the Rabbinic Subject

### Introduction

More than a decade has passed since David Herman described the transition of narratology into a post-classical phase.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean, as Herman is at pains to stress, that a post-classical perspective replaces or discredits its predecessors. Rather, it both exploits the possibilities of the older structuralist models, and “is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses; resulting in a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself.”<sup>2</sup> While debate continues on the fuzzy borders of this renaissance in narrative theory,<sup>3</sup> Ansgar Nünning has pointed out three major characteristics of this transition. Firstly, post-classical narratology has moved away from the identification and systematization of the properties of narrative texts that was heavily indebted to structuralist assumptions and methods,<sup>4</sup> towards an awareness of the complex interplay that exists between both texts and their cultural contexts and between textual features and the interpretive choices and strategies involved in the reading process. Secondly, anthropological and genealogical models have replaced formalist paradigms in a move towards thicker

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1 David Herman, “Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology.” *PMLA* 112 (1997), pp. 1046 – 1059.

2 David Herman, “Introduction: Narratologies.” In: D. Herman (ed.), *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999, pp. 2 – 3.

3 Herman, “Introduction”, p. 8; Ansgar Nünning, “Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term.” In: T. Kindt and H. H. Müller (eds.), *What Is Narratology?: Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, pp. 243 – 246; David Herman, “Histories of Narrative Theory (I): A Genealogy of Early Developments.” In: J. Phelan and P. Rabinowitz (eds.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 20; Biwu Shang, “Plurality and Complementarity of Postclassical Narratologies.” *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 6 (2011), pp. 132 – 147.

4 Not surprisingly, the very term narratology (*narratologie*) was coined by Todorov in 1969 as the literary equivalent of biology, sociology, etc., to denote “the science of narrative” (T. Todorov, *Grammaire du “Décaméron”*. The Hague: Moutin, 1969, p. 10).

descriptions. Lastly, while classical narratology was a more or less unified discipline that was interested mainly in the synchronic dimension of the poetics of narrative, most of the new approaches represent interdisciplinary projects that focus on the changing forms and functions of a wide range of narratives and the dialogical negotiation of meanings, focusing on issues of culture, context, and the reading process.<sup>5</sup> In short, “the root transformation can be described as a shift from text-centered or formal models to models that are jointly formal and functional – models attentive both to the text and the context of stories.”<sup>6</sup>

The literary approach to Midrash was greatly influenced by classical narratology which radically changed the academic study and understanding of rabbinic texts.<sup>7</sup> However, more recent developments in narrative theory have yet to leave their mark on the study of rabbinic texts, which have been left in the Saussurian dust. For sure, there have been many important and truly insightful studies, but rarely from a post-classical perspective or even involving the use of narratological tools. I cannot discuss here the various reasons for this situation,<sup>8</sup> but whatever the causes, it is becoming increasingly apparent that one of the major challenges facing the literary school is to utilize the powerful discourses of narratology to forge a renewed and more sophisticated dialogue between text and context, creating a cultural poetics that views literature neither as a separate and separable aesthetic realm nor as a mere product of culture, but as one realm among many for the negotiation and production of social meaning, of historical subjects, and of the systems of power that at once enable and constrain those subjects.

In this essay, I will attempt to take some steps towards addressing this situation by investigating the rabbinic subject under the rubric of what I call the “literary anthropology” of the Rabbis. As the anthropologist can study a culture as text, because “the real is as imagined as the imaginary,”<sup>9</sup> as Geertz said, so too the literary scholar can investigate the work of the text in the world, because the imagined is as real as reality. One of the bridges between anthropology and literature is the category of the subject, the specific form or position that the self can take in a given culture. My use of this term relates to the manner in which a culture tells certain types of stories about a person’s relationship to himself and to the world around him, how cultural artifacts construct certain types of subjectivity, or a sense of self.

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5 Nünning, “Narratology or Narratologies”, p. 244.

6 Herman, “Introduction”, p. 8.

7 Classical examples would be the studies of Yona Fraenkel on sage narratives and David Stern on the rabbinic parable.

8 See my “Literary Approaches to Midrash.” In: C. Bakhos (ed.), *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*. Leiden: Brill 2005, pp. 189 – 226.

9 Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theater State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 136.

A post-classical perspective on rabbinic literature has a number of ramifications pertinent to this project. Because the category of the subject encompasses various types of cultural selves and fictions of identity, it enables us to expand our purview beyond the literary character to include both legal and other discourses which create various types of subjects. As the literary text creates characters, so the ideological apparatus of a society fashions subjects. Moreover, both the subject and the literary character receive their identity through narrative, as the individual becomes a subject only once he has accepted upon him or herself a narrative function.<sup>10</sup> So, instead of reifying the problematic distinction between the legal and imaginative discourses in the rabbinic corpus, this classification itself is problematized as both become cultural expressions of a common anthropology.

I would like to begin to sketch the contours of the rabbinic subject and sense of self that is shared by both the legal and literary discourses of the rabbinic corpus;<sup>11</sup> to investigate both the formal properties and the functional work of the text in the world; or, to use Greenblatt's phrase, to investigate both "imagination at play" and "imagination at work" in the complex interplay that exists between texts and their cultural contexts.<sup>12</sup> In the first part of this essay I will discuss some of the contours of the rabbinic legal subject and then move on to investigate the representation of the subject as character in rabbinic literary discourses.

## Historical Context

As I mentioned above, one of the markers of post-classical narratology is a shift from text-centered formalist models to those that are more attentive to their cultural contexts. There has been much important work done recently on what Richard Sorabji has called "the explosion of new ideas about the Self" in Late Antiquity.<sup>13</sup> Gill has noted that Roman thought is marked by a heightened focus

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10 Simon Frith, "Music and Identity." In: S. Hal and P. du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 122; Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*. London: Verso, 1991, p. 145.

11 Even though most of my examples here are drawn from Palestinian rabbinic literature, for the purposes of this article I have not distinguished between the various strata of the rabbinic corpus, which remains very much a scholarly desideratum. On some of the problems and issues in defining the rabbinic subject see Jonathan Schofer, "Spiritual Exercises in Rabbinic Culture." *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 27 (2003), pp. 203 – 226; *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005. Schofer was one of the first scholars to substantially engage these issues.

12 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 23.

13 Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*.

on self-consciousness, and Foucault has argued that a special feature of this period was the emergence of new technologies of the self that expressed themselves in “the forms in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself.”<sup>14</sup>

Moving to the Christian subculture of the Empire, Guy Stroumsa, among others, has also emphasized the crucial importance of the emergence of a “newly reflexive self” in early Christianity, and by tracing its Judaic and Hellenic roots, he has shown how this new anthropology crystallized in the period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Common Era.<sup>15</sup> This intellectual and religious ferment could be said to reach a certain maturity in the writings of Augustine, who gave unprecedented prominence to the place of will in moral and religious life, declaring that “in the inward man dwells truth.”<sup>16</sup> This period coincides with the formation of classical rabbinic literature and, therefore, begs the question not of Judaic influences, but rather of Jewish expressions of this new anthropology. Moreover, when scholars discuss these issues they usually limit themselves to a certain type of discourse.<sup>17</sup> Rabbinic literature, with its unique medley of imaginative and legal discourses, provides us with an opportunity to follow this question across various generic registers.

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 43; Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 41.

- 14 Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 330 – 334; Michael Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*. Transl. R. Hurley. London: Vintage Books, 1988, p. 42. Alongside agreement with Foucault’s general observation there is much cogent criticism of his (overly modern) conception of the self and subjectivity, his methodology and historical conclusions, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995, pp. 206 – 213; Shadi Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the early Roman Empire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 251 – 255.
- 15 Guy Stroumsa, “‘Caro salutis cardo’: Shaping the Person in Early Christian Thought,” *History of Religions* 30 (1990), pp. 25 – 50 at p. 35; Idem, “Interiorization and Intolerance in Early Christianity.” In: J. Assmann (ed.), *Die Erfindung Des Inneren Menschen: Studien Zur Religiösen Anthropologie*. Gutersloh: Mohn 1993, pp. 168 – 182.
- 16 Augustine, *De vera religione* XXXIX.72 (*in interiore homine habitat veritas*) quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 129; Sorabji, *Self*, p. 50;; Dihle, *Will*, p. 129; Gill, *Self*, p. 328; Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 17 A rich exception to this tendency is the erudite work of Gill (1996, 2006) who masterfully uses the Greek literary and philosophical traditions to illuminate each other.

## The Subject in Legal Discourse

In a number of previous studies I have exemplified this inward turn in rabbinic legal texts, and I will cite here just a few short examples in order to concentrate on midrashic literature.<sup>18</sup> At the risk of over-generalizing, the subject in biblical law, with very few exceptions, is defined and evaluated mostly by what he does, and these actions determine if the agent is guilty or innocent, pure or impure. Suddenly, in rabbinic literature, we begin to hear echoes of a different type of legal subject. This is seen most clearly in certain legal terms and categories that emerge here for the first time, like; “commandments must be performed with intention”, or, the countenancing of unintentional work on the Sabbath. Without, at present, going into the history of these concepts, they are all rabbinic innovations that grant a new legal status to the internal world of the legal subject.

It is important to stress two caveats at this stage. Firstly, I am not positing a strict dichotomy between biblical law that only rarely takes account of the legal ramifications of interiority or *mens rea*, and between rabbinic literature that does. However, even if biblical law recognizes a few cases of diminished punishment for unintentional acts,<sup>19</sup> I suggest that rabbinic literature reflects a fundamental shift in its understanding of the reflexive self that expresses itself both in its conceptualization of the subject and in its legal ramifications. Secondly, although there is still much work to be done in order to delineate the emerging contours of the rabbinic self and its relation to similar developments in antiquity, I am by no means suggesting that this new legal subject and sense of self are equivalent to a post-Cartesian concept of the individual marked by a unified and unique personality, fundamentally different from all other selves.

Now, let us see how these issues are worked out in a few texts, and I begin with a simple example to set the terms of our discussion. As is well known, the prohibition of writing on Shabbat is defined as the writing of two separate letters. The Mishnah in Shabbat 12:5 states as follows:

If one intends to write a ‘heth’ (ה) but wrote two ‘zayyinin’ (זז) [...] he is not culpable.

According to this Mishnah, in spite of the fact that two letters are written, and they even form a word, the writer is exempt because the actual result does not coincide with the intended result.<sup>20</sup> Intention is a necessary component of proper

18 See Levinson, “From Narrative Practice to Cultural Poetics: Literary Anthropology and the Rabbinic Sense of Self.” In: M. Niehoff (ed.), *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*. Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 345 – 367.

19 The *locus classicus* for the place of intention in biblical law are the statutes related to unintentional murder (Ex 21:13, Deut 19).

20 See Tosefta Shabbat 11:12 and Lieberman’s discussion of the manuscript variants in *Tosefta Ki-fshutah* III, 1962, p. 178. The Tosefta, perhaps as clarification and perhaps in argument,

legal action (or perhaps, a type of internalized action itself),<sup>21</sup> and therefore action unaccompanied by the proper internal component is not considered an adjudicative deed. This small example illustrates how rabbinic law constructs a legal subject whose inner world must be both cognizant of and concomitant with his external actions.

Proper intention plays a critical role in the rabbinic system of purities.<sup>22</sup> According to chapter 11 of Leviticus (32 – 34), corpses can transfer their impurity only to food “that may be eaten” and vessels “that can be used.” Only that which is defined as such can become impure if it comes into contact with a source of contagion. Against this biblical background, I want to take a short look at some rabbinic texts.

A table one of whose legs was broken is pure. If a second leg was lost it is still pure, but if a third was lost it becomes impure if the owner has the intention of using it. (mKelim 22:2)

A three-legged table is a useful object and can, therefore, contract impurity. However, if it lost one or two of its legs it ceases to become an expression of agency and remains pure, irrespective of what it comes into contact with. If, however, it lost all of its legs, then it is transformed from a broken table into a potential tray, and if the owner entertained the thought to use it in this manner, then mere thought changes the status of the object to one which can contract impurity.

We seem to be a far cry from the biblical texts where impurity is inherent in an object, and is therefore contagious by physical contact. In rabbinic law, we can witness the emergence of a new type of legal subject whose intentions influence the nature of the object. Here, “impurity pertains to artifacts insofar as they are part of the human sphere, since they are invested, in a way, with the subjectivity of their makers and owners.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, only an entity which is considered to be an expression of subjective agency can contract impurity. Again, this new legal subject is not marked by a personal individuality, autonomy, or unitary consciousness in the Cartesian sense; rather it is an expression of the relation of the self to a consensual community of values – what is considered edible or what is considered useful – and not the modern selfhood of a unique individuality. As

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adds that culpability is determined only by the conjunction of action and intention, and one without the other is not considered a sufficient manifestation of agency necessary to create accountability.

21 I wish to thank Y. Rosen-Zvi for this formulation which improves upon some of my earlier articulations.

22 Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Human Will in Judaism: The Mishnah's Philosophy of Intention*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.

23 Mira Balberg, “Recomposed Corporealities: Body and Self in the Mishnaic Order of Purities.” Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2011, p. 118.

Mira Balberg has stated, “the Mishnah introduces a notion of *standardized subjectivity* rather than of individual subjectivity.”<sup>24</sup>

My last example from rabbinic law is concerned with the impurity of produce. Types of produce can become contaminated only when moist, since water acts as a conductor of impurity, as it says in Leviticus 11:38: “But if water is put on the seed, and any part of a carcass falls upon it, it shall be unclean for you.” We have for this law a parallel text from Qumran 4Q274 which seems to follow the biblical conception:

Any herb [which has no] dew may be eaten. For if one [were to put it on] the ground and [water] wetted it [when] the rain [falls] upon it, if an [unclean person] touches it, let him by no means [eat it].

Here, as Baumgarten has remarked, the laws of pure and impure – like in the Bible – are based upon objective circumstances, giving no place to will or intention.<sup>25</sup> Once again, the Rabbis take a different approach, and so we read in the Mishnah:

If one gathers grass to moisten wheat, and dew is upon them, the law *if water is put* does not apply; but if he intended [that the dew should moisten] it, then the law applies. If one carried wheat to be milled and rain came down upon it and he was glad of it, it comes under the law of *if water is put*. (mMachshirim 3:5 – 6)

The Rabbis severely limited the ability of water to transfer impurity to the situation where the produce became wet with the express approval of the owner. Therefore, the mere presence of moisture – which is sufficient in the Bible and Qumran – is here only a necessary but not a sufficient condition to transfer impurity; what is missing is intention. For this same reason the Mishnah rules that minors cannot create susceptibility to impurity because “they have actions but no thought” (3:8).

24 Balberg, “Recomposed Corporealities”, p. 131. Similarly, Reydams-Schils characterizes the Roman Stoic self as embedded, indicating “that the self is intrinsically connected to others in a network of relationships that each has its specific claims and standards of behavior” (Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2005, p. 17); Christopher Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1996, pp. 11 – 16. In his later work, Gill expressed a healthy skepticism concerning the applicability of Greek and Roman notions of the self to the modern conceptions of “subjectivity and self-consciousness, understood in terms of ‘I’-centered subjectivity” (*Structure*, p. xv).

25 Joseph Baumgarten, “Liquids and Susceptibility to Defilement in New 4Q Texts.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 85 (1994), pp. 98 – 99; Joseph Baumgarten, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert XXV*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1999, p. 90; Eric Ottenheim, “Impurity Between Intention and Deed.” In: M. J. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (eds.), *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*. Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 134.



What is the upshot of these few examples? In all of these cases the Rabbis have introduced a new dimension into the biblical law, whereby a subject's thoughts and intentions play a significant role in establishing the nature of an object or the value of a deed. Self and interiority have come together in a new perception of agency. Moreover, in those cases where we have parallels from 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple legal texts, they almost always seem to follow the biblical realist conception of action.<sup>26</sup> I suggest that if we seek the ideological framework that enables the emergence of this new legal sense of self, then it is at least partially to be found in a new type of subject. Without a concept of self that assumes that "in the inward man dwells truth", as Augustine said, these laws could not have come into existence.<sup>27</sup>

More importantly, I suggest that rabbinic law is not only legislating the necessity of intention as a component of action, but by doing so constructs a new kind of legal subject who must be constantly aware of the thoughts that accompany his actions. This transformation concurs with what Gill and others have suggested concerning a heightened focus on self-consciousness and a new concept of self that emerges in Stoic thought of the period, especially in that of Epictetus (55 – 135 CE). The Stoic philosopher – through what Pierre Hadot has called "spiritual exercises" whose goal is to develop *prosechô* or attention – strives to achieve a state of "continuous vigilance and presence of mind so that he is fully aware of what he does at each instant, and he *wills* his actions fully."<sup>28</sup>

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26 It must be said that we begin to find within Second-Temple literature an emerging voice of interiorization. Qimron and Anderson have shown that the Qumran sect applied the biblical model of unintentional sin to the special laws of the sect. Likewise, Y. Rosen-Zvi ("Two Rabbinic Inclinations? Rethinking a Scholarly Dogma." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008), pp. 513 – 539 at 522 and M. Kister ("The Inclination of the Human Heart', The Body, and the Purification from Evil." In: M. Bar-Asher and D. Dimant (eds.), *Meghillot VIII – IX: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2010, pp. 243 – 284 [Hebr.]) have convincingly shown how the evil inclination as an external demonic entity is gradually transformed into an independent yet internalized force, such that "the dangers lurking for man are within him, and not outside." For example, we find in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs that Joseph declares that "not even in thought did I yield to her" (T. Jos. 9:2, and "the disposition of his soul did not admit an evil desire" (T. Reu. 4:9). The scene of seduction has moved from the bedroom of Potiphar's wife to Joseph's soul, and as Rosen-Zvi remarked in a different context, "inner thoughts and internal conflicts, rather than external deeds, stand at the center of the narrative" (Rosen-Zvi, "Bilhah the Temptress: The Testament of Reuben and 'The Birth of Sexuality.'" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96 (2006), pp. 65 – 94 at p. 74.) In relation to the materials mentioned above, these examples raise the interesting possibility that legal discourses may change and evolve at a more conservative pace than their literary equivalents.

27 Of course, the nature of this truth envisioned by Augustine may be very different from that of the Rabbis.

28 Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 84; See also Arnold Davidson, "Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot." *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990), pp. 475 – 482; Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. Oxford:



The rabbinic legal subject with its attendant emphasis on thought and intention strives to achieve a similar goal. By making proper legal practice contingent upon a certain type of attention to how one does what one does, rabbinic legal discourse actually creates a reflexive second-order or dialogic self that promotes “a continuous vigilance and presence of mind.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, perhaps the most important innovation here is that biblical law has become in the hands of the Rabbis a technology of self-fashioning, transforming the subject into an object of knowledge for himself. The law itself has become a discourse that constructs a reflexive self, which is not the source of discursive practices, but rather its effect.<sup>30</sup>

### Intention and Subjectivity in Midrash Aggadah

Given this concept of a legal subject, the question I now wish to address is whether we find in midrashic literature a concomitant anthropology. When we move from legal to imaginative discourse – a bad name for sure, as if the legal is any less imagined – then we are moving from subjects to characters. While a subject is not a character, nor is a character exactly a subject, for our purposes here we can say that a character enacts a certain type of subjectivity.<sup>31</sup> What would be the narrative equivalent or manifestation of this new sense of self? Since a literary character is a non-actual individual or a semiotic construct that is always incomplete, one can ask about the minimal constitutive conditions under which he or she can be introduced and sustained. In other words, since verisimilitude is achieved when states and behaviors in the narrative generally conform to its readers’ ideology and/or model of the world,<sup>32</sup> what does a character have to be in order to be a recognizable subject?

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Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 228 – 252; Jonathan Schofer, “Spiritual Exercises in Rabbinic Culture.” *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 27 (2003), pp. 203 – 226.

29 As Epictetus said, “Show me the person who cares how they act [...] who is deliberating on the deliberation itself, and not just the outcome” (Discourses II, 16, 15, In: Robert Dobbin, *Discourses and Selected Writings*. London: Penguin Classics 2008, p. 113).

30 In Judith Butler’s formulation, “to understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic acts” (J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 145).

31 See Christopher Gill, “The Question of Character and Personality in Greek Tragedy.” *Poetics Today* 7 (1986), pp. 251 – 273.

32 Brian McHale, “Verisimilitude.” In: D. Herman et al. (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London: Routledge 2005, p. 627.

## Biblical Characters in the Midrash

A particularly fruitful genre for exploring this question is the rabbinic expansions of the biblical narrative. Here, we can readily see how the Rabbis revise the biblical narrative to align it with their own concerns. Already more than sixty years ago Erich Auerbach had characterized biblical narration as “fraught with background,” where “thoughts and feelings are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches.”<sup>33</sup> While it may be true that he has oversimplified the narrative complexity and ideological pay-off of the biblical reticence,<sup>34</sup> many scholars have pointed out the opposite tendency in midrashic expansions of the biblical text. Here we see that the Rabbis constantly strive to reveal the inner world of the characters so absent or muted in biblical poetics.

For example, in the dramatic story of Jacob stealing his father’s blessing (Gen 27), Jacob is presented with great reserve in contrast to the portrait of his brother Esau. Whatever the reasons for this restraint in the biblical text, the midrash creates a very different scenario:

*And he went, and took, and brought them to his mother* (Gen 27:14) – under duress, forced (bent), and weeping. (Genesis Rabbah 65:15)<sup>35</sup>

This vignette touches upon the question of Jacob’s relation to his mother’s plan to deceive his infirm father in order to steal the blessings. Do the three concurrent verbs – went, took, and brought – convey commitment or coercion? The midrash solves this problem by linking these three verbs of action to three adjectives indicating Jacob’s inner reluctance. Thus, while the biblical narrative describes only what Jacob does and leaves us to speculate about his motives, the midrash works to justify Jacob’s actions by exposing the internal conflict of the son caught between his two opposing parents. Jacob is exonerated for deceiving his father in spite of his actions because of his thoughts.

This short text exemplifies the cultural poetics we have been discussing. The biblical text itself has not been altered and continues to represent only Jacob’s actions. The midrash writes between its lines, as it were, so that these external actions are re-motivated as contrasting expressions of the character’s internal world. The full meaning of the verse is now a conflicting combination of the external and internal, the biblical and the rabbinic; “he went” under duress, “and

33 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representations of Reality in Western Literature*. Transl. W. R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, p. 9.

34 Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press 1985, p. 232; Egbert J. Bakker, “Mimesis as Performance: Rereading Auerbach’s First Chapter.” *Poetics Today* 20 (1999), pp. 11 – 26.

35 According to M. Sokoloff, *The Geniza Fragments of Bereshit Rabba*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982, p. 150.

took” while forced, “and brought them” weeping “to his mother.” As exegesis, the narrative clarifies what has already been said in the biblical text (the external actions) by revealing what has not been said there (the internal motivations). The Rabbis would have agreed with William Thackeray that, “it is the unwritten part of books that would be the most interesting.”<sup>36</sup> It is the silences of the text – what it does not say or is unable to say – that allow the reader to make his own voice heard, and the voice that they wish to hear is an internal one.

In a similar vein, the biblical Patriarchs are often portrayed as living in a kind of narrative present, oblivious even to their own previous actions, and rarely engaging in self-reflection on that past. They often seem to have no yesterdays with which to judge their todays. The following text from Genesis Rabbah that relates to Jacob sending his son Joseph to meet his brothers in Shechem paints a different picture:

*And he (Joseph) said to him (Jacob): here I am:* R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: Jacob would remember these words and his insides would be consumed; ‘You know that your brothers hate you, and yet you answered me *here I am*.’ (Genesis Rabbah 84:13)<sup>37</sup>

Here, perhaps in connection to Jacob’s seemingly excessive mourning for Joseph (Gen 37:34 – 35), he recollects the narrative moment when he unwittingly sent his favorite son to his death. Jacob is portrayed as having a continuity of self, a narrative past that he carries within himself as a constant burden, reflecting upon his present situation as the result of his past mistakes.<sup>38</sup>

There is a common denominator of these two texts concerning the patriarchal family; the first represents a self conflicted between volition and action, and the second portrays the self as an object of its own critical gaze.<sup>39</sup> Both present radically different characters from their biblical precursors.

These texts are usually understood as resulting from a rabbinic reading practice that fills in the gaps of the biblical narrative in an attempt to enliven the characters by adding a certain roundness and depth. I think this view is both right and wrong. While it is true that the midrash is closing gaps in the biblical narrative, we have to remember that gaps themselves are contingent and depend

36 G. N. Ray (ed.), *The Letters and Private Papers of W. M. Thackeray*. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946, p. 391.

37 Mss. Vatican 30, 60.

38 It is not uncommon for the midrash to “remind” a biblical character of his past. Thus, Abraham at the Akedah rebukes God for his contradictory commands; “From the time that You commanded me *take your only son* (Gen 22:2) I could have responded; yesterday you told me that *through Isaac you shall have offspring* (21:12), and now You tell me *take Isaac!*” (GenR 56:14).

39 On self-reflexivity in rabbinic texts see Dina Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

upon the conventions of a given reading formation.<sup>40</sup> We perceive an element as lacking because we approach the text with certain presuppositions and expectations about what should be there. Here poetics joins history; what is new in rabbinic poetics is precisely this expectation of an interiority that defines the nature of the character and the value of his actions. Therefore, what was an unproblematic blank for the biblical narrator – and did not need mentioning – becomes a gap in the rabbinic reading formation.

I am suggesting that we can see a cultural homology between legal and imaginative discourses, both in the Bible and in the rabbinic sources in the manner they construct their subjects. Just as the legal subject in biblical law is constituted and evaluated mostly by his actions – and these determine if he is innocent or guilty, pure or impure – so too the biblical narrator does not usually penetrate into the subjective world of his characters, and only rarely does he let that world speak for itself. In contrast to this biblical poetics, I suggest that just as the Rabbis demand a certain interiority for legal acts to be valid – and thereby transform legal discourse into a means of self-fashioning that trains the subject to constantly observe his “manner of action and deliberation” as Epictetus said – so too when they re-write the biblical narrative they constantly expose and interrogate the interior world of its characters. In both the legal and the imaginative discourses of the Rabbis, we see again and again that a person’s thoughts and emotions determine the religious significance of his actions.

### Exegetical Narrative

I want now to take a very brief look at an exegetical narrative about Abraham’s journey to Canaan in order to begin to delineate in a more detailed manner the contours of this internal landscape. Firstly, a few telegraphic remarks about this genre are in order. It is composed of a narrative that simultaneously represents and interprets its biblical counterpart. As a hermeneutical reading of the biblical story, its defining characteristic lies precisely in this synergy of narrative and

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40 “By reading formation I mean a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations which organize and animate the practice of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another in constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be-read in particular ways ... Texts exist only as always-already organized or activated to be read in certain ways just as readers exist as always-already activated to read in certain ways: neither can be granted a virtual identity that is separable from the determinate ways in which they are gridded onto one another with different reading formations ... Different reading formations produce their own texts, their own readers and their own contexts.” (Tony Bennett, “Texts in History: The Determinations of Reading and their Texts.” In: D. Attridge, G. Bennington, and R. Young (eds.), *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 70.)

exegesis. As exegesis, it creates new meanings from the biblical verses, and as narrative, it represents those meanings by means of the biblical world. It is this tension between sameness and difference, subservience and creativity, which establishes this genre's identity. This doubleness creates a special version of the hermeneutical circle, as the narrative created from the verses it claims to represent also re-interprets the same verses that formed it. This type of exegesis is best summed up in the words of Foucault: "Commentary must say for the first time what had nonetheless already been said ... It allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is this text itself which is said, and in a sense completed."<sup>41</sup>

Now, in Genesis 12, Abraham receives the command to leave his family and country for an unknown destination and immediately sets out. There are various problems and issues in these verses, but what interests me is precisely what is not problematic for the biblical narrator: what was Abraham's reaction to this commandment? According to what I have been saying till now, it would seem that this question is not a question at all for the biblical narrator who wishes to present Abraham as a paradigm of obedience according to his actions.

One of the most fascinating aspects of text reception is its interpretive 'after-life,' how textual blanks are transformed into narrative gaps as the text moves into a new reading formation. As Wolfgang Iser has taught us, a gap derives from lack of information concerning the represented world, whether with regard to its events or characters, or from the causality of the plot itself. The gaps' purpose is to activate the reader to create a coherent imagined world by filling them in. The blank, likewise, is a result of omission and lack of representation within the text, however it has no artistic motivation. It is very difficult to separate these two concepts because there is no formal distinction between them. Only after the reader posits a certain artistic intentionality or motivation can he attempt to distinguish between a gap and a blank, between that which is missing in order to arouse interest and that which is missing due to lack of interest. What Iser did not stress sufficiently is that the very choice between gap and blank depends upon the reading formation in which the text is interpreted.<sup>42</sup>

At a fairly early stage in the reception of this tale of Abraham's journey, a new question began to trouble ancient readers transforming a biblical blank into a gap. If we calculate the biblical chronology, then it becomes apparent that Abraham abandoned his aging father in order to fulfill the divine command.

41 Michael Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 221. For a descriptive poetics of this genre see my book *The Twice-Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press 2005 [Hebr.].

42 On the function of gaps in the rabbinic reading formation see Levinson, *Twice-Told Tale*, pp. 45 – 59.

“Could it be,” as Kister has remarked, “that the first commandment of God to Abraham was to violate the sacred duty to honor his father, to stay with him until his death and to bury him?”<sup>43</sup> Ancient interpreters solved this problem in a variety of ways: the Samaritan translation, Philo, and Acts all change the biblical chronology by stressing that Abraham left only after his father died, while Ephrem says that his “parents did not wish to join him,” and the author of Jubilees has Abraham departing with his father’s blessing, with the express intention of returning to take him.<sup>44</sup> Now let us see how the midrash deals with this problem:

*Now the Lord said unto Abram: Go forth (lech lecha) [...] But Abraham was anxious, saying, ‘If I leave then I will cause a desecration of the Divine Name, as people will say, ‘He abandoned his father in his old age and departed?’ Therefore the Holy One said to him, ‘You (lecha) I exempt from the duty of honoring your parents, but I exempt no one else from this obligation.’ (Genesis Rabbah 39:1)<sup>45</sup>*

This text also addresses the chronological problem of Abraham’s hasty departure. However, in spite of the functional identity to earlier traditions, there is a critical difference between them; the biblical and post-biblical Abraham neither hesitates nor deliberates. For the midrash, the exegetical problem becomes an opportunity to display the character’s inner reflections and turmoil. Just as there is religious value to the legal act only when it is accompanied by proper intention – so too we can say that there is value to Abraham’s obedience, because it is accompanied by proper deliberation. I would even say that according to the Rabbis, if he had not so deliberated then he would not have been worthy of being chosen.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, we could also say that this text constructs two subjects. Not only has the hero pattern become internalized as Abraham is transformed from an obedient servant into one whose character is evaluated through his internal deliberations, but also the exegetical problem that the reader confronts in the biblical narrative (how could Abraham abandon his aging father?) has become dramatized as part of the represented world of the midrash in the form of an internal conflict of the character (“If I leave then I will cause a desecration of the Divine

43 Menachem Kister, “Leave the Dead to Bury Their Own Dead.” In: J. Kugel (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Midrash*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 44.

44 Jubilees 12:28 – 31; Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham*, 177 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1968, p. 235); Acts 7:4; Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 1994, p. 149. See also Moshe J. Bernstein, “4Q252: From Re-Written Bible to Biblical Commentary.” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 45 (1994), pp. 12 – 13; Augustine, *City of God*, XVI.15 (Middlesex: Penguin Books 1986, pp. 673 – 675).

45 Ms. Vatican 30.

46 In Levinson, “From Narrative Practice” (above note 18), I contrasted this midrash with John Chrysostom’s solution to the same problem (*Homilies On Genesis* 31. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 1994, pp. 243 – 246).

Name"). We can witness here another aspect of the homology between legal and literary discourses. I suggested above that rabbinic legal discourse constructs a self-reflexive legal subject attentive to his internal motivations and intentions. In a similar fashion, the literary text also creates its implied readers. While many descriptions of the dynamics of reading have emphasized how the reader creates the text, with greater or lesser autonomy, less attention has been paid to how the text creates its reader. By stressing the reciprocal process by which readers and texts are mutually produced and mutually productive, we move from the textual immanence of an "Iserian" model towards a restoration of a dialogical agency to the reading process.<sup>47</sup> In this exegetical narrative, the implied reader who struggles with the morality of Abraham's obedience finds his twin in the character himself as each is constructed in the other's image.

### Canonicity, Breach and the Disnarrated

To further our understanding of these dynamics I want to utilize a narratological concept that I believe is crucial for understanding midrash in general, and the exegetical narrative in particular, what David Herman has called the dynamics of "canonicity and breach." Firstly, we must recognize that every genre creates a unique narrative situation, and the inherent belatedness of the exegetical narrative as rewriting creates a situation that is different from the normal narrative contract. Usually, the relationship between the narrator and reader is asymmetrical to the advantage of the former. He is at liberty to create a narrated world at will and, generic conventions aside, the reader only becomes aware of its rules and properties in the process of reading. In the exegetical narrative, however, the situation is more balanced to the detriment of the narrator. He is confined by the nature of the material when he begins to re-tell the biblical story and must contend with the expectations and foreknowledge of his audience, what Doležal called "the actual-world encyclopedia of the (biblical) text."<sup>48</sup>

47 See W. C. Dimock, "Feminism, New Historicism, and the Reader." In: J. L. Machor (ed.), *Readers in History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963, pp. 85 – 106; Janusz Slawinski, "Reading and Reader in Literary Historical Process." *New Literary History* 19 (1988), pp. 521 – 539.

48 "The fictional encyclopedia is the only store of knowledge of the fictional persons; they have no access to the actual-world encyclopedia. The actual readers have a wider cognitive range; they store the actual-world encyclopedia, and they can acquire the fictional one by reading" (Lubomir Doležal, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 178). In fact, this phenomenon is more complex in the exegetical narrative where the characters often have knowledge of the readers' actual-world encyclopedia.



Herman's concept of canonicity and breach highlights this play of expectation and transgression in the exegetical narrative. He adopts this concept from Bruner that "to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence [...] to [its] legitimacy."<sup>49</sup> A script is a representation of how a stereotypical, or canonical, sequence of events is expected to unfold in a well-known situation (e. g., eating a meal at a restaurant).<sup>50</sup> As applied to literary texts, scripts are a necessary component of all narrative comprehension, as readers could not draw textual inferences of the most basic sort – for example, that a masked character represented as running out of a bank probably just robbed it. They highlight the links between prestored representations bound up with everyday life and the stereotyped plot structures that readers use to anticipate the unfolding story logic of literary works written in different periods and genres.<sup>51</sup> "Every act of telling arguably requires that a listener or reader use scripts to help set the narrative in motion, to cocreate the story."<sup>52</sup> As such, they are an integral aspect of a given text's narrativity. "Maximal narrativity can be correlated with sequences whose presentation features a proportional blending of 'canonicity and breach,' expectation and transgression of expectation. Conversely, a story's narrativity decreases the more its telling verges on pure stereotypicality, at the one end of the spectrum, or on a wholesale particularity that cannot help but stymie and amaze, at the other end."<sup>53</sup>

Following Herman, I believe that we can readily transfer the idea of a canonical script as an abstract schema for building coherence to midrashic discourse where it becomes the background against which narrative imagining takes place. While all narratives necessitate the construction of ad hoc scripts in the process of reading, for the reader of the exegetical narrative the biblical text that is being rewritten constitutes an ever-present script against which the new story world unfolds. This approach seems particularly appropriate to the exegetical narrative, in which the canonical script violated is the most canonical text of all – the Bible. The narrativity (or tellability)<sup>54</sup> of the exegetical narrative is a consequence of the

49 Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), pp. 1 – 21 at p. 11.

50 Herman, "Scripts", p. 1050; idem, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, p. 89.

51 Herman, *Story Logic*, p. 382, n. 2.

52 Herman, "Scripts," p. 1051; idem, *Story Logic*, pp. 90, 103.

53 Herman, *Story Logic*, p. 91.

54 There is a considerable amount of scholarly literature on these two concepts, their definitions and differences, that is not germane to my project here. See Herman, *Story Logic*; idem, *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 133 – 136; Marie-Laure Ryan, "Embedded Narratives and Tellability." *Style* 20 (1986), pp. 319 – 339; eadem, "Embedded Narratives and the Structure of Plans." *Text* 6 (1986), pp. 107 – 142; Gerald Prince, "Narrativity, Narrativeness, Narrativity, Narratability." In: J. Pier and J. Garcia Landa (eds.),



relative mixing between canonicity and breach, between expectations and their violation. Narrativity diminishes to the extent that the narrative remains close to the familiar and the expected (the biblical script) and increases as it deviates from the cultural scenarios available to the reader. Hence, one may say that an exegetical narrative having a low level of narrativity is one that does not greatly deviate from the biblical plot, in which “stereotypicality outstrips remarkableness, with canonicity leaving no room for breach.”<sup>55</sup>

Seen in this light, the problem that confronts the narrator of any exegetical narrative is how to tell a given story twice. In light of this genre’s synergy of exegesis and narrative, every reader or listener to an exegetical narrative knows two things for sure: that the canonical story world must be modified, otherwise it would merely repeat the biblical text, and yet, the narrative must end by re-integrating itself back into the biblical framework, otherwise it would create a new narrative and not explicate an existent one. Thus, if the midrashic narrative begins, for example, with Abraham receiving the divine command to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22:2), then it must end with the angelic intervention that prevents its fulfillment (Gen 22:12). Given the fact that the narrative must move from A (command) to B (intervention), but cannot do so directly (for that would constitute canonicity without breach), the narrator has two complementary options. He may interrupt this progress by creating obstacles that impede the development of the biblical script, or he can threaten to subvert the biblical telos by developing an alternate narrative trajectory so as to almost tell a different story. In either case, the moment of transgressive breach initiates the “three narrative dynamics of suspense, curiosity, and surprise” that Sternberg sees at the heart of narrativity.<sup>56</sup>

This dynamic of canonicity and breach may be further enriched by Gerald Prince’s category of the disnarrated. Many researchers have pointed out that narrative imagining always takes place against a background of representations of events that might have happened in the story-world but did not.<sup>57</sup> Already Claude Bremond demonstrated that every narrative function opens an alternative, a set of possible directions as opposed to others. For Prince, the disnarrated events are the roads not taken, the possibilities not actualized, “those events that *do not* happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypo-

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*Theorizing Narrativity*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 19 – 27; Meir Sternberg, “Narrativity: From Objectivist to Functional Paradigm,” *Poetics Today* 31 (2010), pp. 507 – 659.

55 Herman, *Story Logic*, p. 103. This distinction is also useful, in my opinion, to explain differences between the poetics of the classical midrash and that of the later midrash.

56 Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 159; idem, “How Narrativity Makes a Difference,” *Narrative* 9 (2001), pp. 115 – 122 at p. 117.

57 Herman, *Story Logic*, p. 56; William Labov, *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1972, p. 381.

thetical mode) by the narrative text.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, every narrative consists not only of an actual world, but also a virtual one, the prevented (or anticipated) events. These work to increase tellability by stressing that this narrative is worth telling because it could have been otherwise, because it usually is otherwise, or because it was not otherwise. Even if these virtual narratives are not actualized, they remain as much a part of the story as those that are, as they also determine the behavior of characters and the understanding of the readers.

There is a clear connection between Prince’s category of the disnarrated, the concept of tellability, and the tension between canonicity and breach. In fact, M. L. Ryan sees the tellability of a plot as predicated on the complexity of its system of underlying embedded narratives.<sup>59</sup> All other things being equal, the greater the number and diversity of the repertoires set into play during the processing of a narrative sequence, the more narrativity will the reader ascribe to that sequence.<sup>60</sup>

Returning now to our exegetical narrative, we can see that it threatens to derail the biblical telos by making these virtual narratives actual. In creating the possibility that Abraham will refuse the divine command to abandon his father, it is giving narrative form to the disnarrated. There are, of course, endless ways to generate this tension of canonicity and breach, be it outright refusal, blaming the weather, or prevarication (like Moses at the burning bush). Yet this midrash threatens to derail the biblical narrative by presenting Abraham’s inner struggle between opposing values, and thus creates the narrative possibility that he will choose to remain with his ageing father. This breach of the canonical script creates a new narrative tension that does not, and could not, exist in the biblical text. What was originally an exemplary tale of Abraham’s obedience becomes in the hands of the Rabbis a display of his dialogical self, deliberating between conflicting courses of action.

## History of the Sage as Subject

Until now we have witnessed the emergence of a new sense of self in a number of different rabbinic genres, both legal and literary. I now would like to use the last part of this essay to investigate this inward turn in the narrative genre of tales of

58 Gerald Prince, “The Disnarrated,” *Style* 22 (1988), pp. 1 – 8, at p. 3.

59 Ryan, “Embedded Narratives”, p. 324; eadem, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 156. There are important differences between Prince’s ‘disnarrated’ and Ryan’s ‘virtual embedded narratives’ that I cannot discuss here. See Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, pp. 148 – 174; eadem, “Revisiting Narrativity.” In: W. Grünzweig and A. Solbach (eds.), *Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*. Tübingen: Narr, 1999, pp. 43 – 51; Herman, *Story Logic*, pp. 100 – 104.

60 Herman, “Scripts”, p. 1048.

the sages. It would not be difficult to accumulate examples of a new interest in interiority in the descriptions of the sages themselves as characters.<sup>61</sup> However, I would like to develop my argument in a different direction. What we have seen so far is that there is a history of the subject. And if there is such a history, then it is reasonable to assume that we can witness transformations not only from biblical and post-biblical literatures to rabbinic texts, as I have indicated, but also within rabbinic literature itself, between classical and late midrash. I now want to pursue this direction and look at two final texts that address the process of the rabbinization of the individual subject.

### The Beginnings of Rabbi Eliezer (Genesis Rabbah 41:1)

A story of R. Eliezer whose brothers were once plowing in the plain, and he was plowing on the mountain. His cow fell and broke [its leg], he said, 'It is for my benefit that my cow was maimed.'

He fled to R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, and he was eating there clods of earth until his mouth emitted an offensive odor. They [the students] went and told R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, 'The breath from Eliezer's mouth is bothersome.' He said to them, 'As the smell of his mouth became unpleasant for the sake of the Torah, so will the fragrance [of his learning] spread from one end of the world to the other.'

After some time, his father came up to disinherit him. He found him sitting and expounding with the wealthy of the land sitting before him; Ben Zizzith Hakeseth, Nikodemon ben Gurion, and Ben Kalba Savua. He was expounding this verse: *the wicked draw their swords* (Ps 37:14); this alludes to Amraphel and his companions; *to bring down the lowly and needy* – this refers to Lot. *To slaughter upright men* – this is to Abraham. *their swords shall pierce their own hearts* – as it is written, *at night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them* (Gen 14:15). His father said to him, 'My son, I came here only to disinherit you from my property, now, however, all my property is given to you as a gift.' He replied, 'Let them be forbidden to me, rather I will take only an equal share with my brothers.' (Genesis Rabbah 41:1)<sup>62</sup>

I cannot present a full analysis of this tale here, and will concentrate on the question of the social structures that form and enable the subject to perform his

61 One well-known example is the wonderful story of R. Hiyya bar Ashi (bKiddushin 81b). This overly pious Rabbi tried to conquer his sexual lust by withdrawing from his wife. Then, as an act of protest, she dressed up as a prostitute and seduced him. Upon returning home he attempts to kill himself in remorse. When his wife reveals to him that she was the woman he slept with, he rejects her entreaties by saying, "I, however, intended to sin." R. Hiyya sees himself as guilty of sleeping with another woman – in spite of the fact that this other woman was his wife – because that was his intention.

62 According to Ms Vatican 30.

identity.<sup>63</sup> The story neatly divides into three sections; the first focuses on Rabbi Eliezer's biological family, the second on the disciple-circle, and in the third there is a utopian synthesis of the two, as Hyrcanus the father enters the House of Study and accepts the primacy of Torah. The main dramatic tension is therefore between two families, the biological and the spiritual, and Yohanan b. Zakkai is presented as the ideal spiritual father who displaces the biological father, just as the house of study is represented as the ideal family where all its members display a mutual concern for each other.<sup>64</sup>

There is much more to be said here, but I want to concentrate on the conclusion of the story. As a rabbinic Bildungsroman, Eliezer must sever himself from his biological father in order to become rabbinized and incorporated into the house of study. Only here does he receive his new identity as part of an ideal family. This identity expresses itself first in the acquisition of rabbinic knowledge (only alluded to by his ascetic practice) and culminates in its transmission and performance. It is important to note that while the house of study supplants the biological home and family as the social institution that forms and validates identity, it nevertheless models itself upon it, appropriating its structure and cultural capital. This is not an insignificant move. It is not surprising that this fifth century Palestinian text does not present the study sessions as taking place in a full-fledged academic institution that has a corporate life and structure of its own that transcended the existence of the Rabbis who constituted it at any given time. "Instead we find a non-institutionalized disciple circle where a small group of students cluster around a master."<sup>65</sup> However, what is surprising is that this disciple circle is represented here as a metaphorical and utopian "family."

We can witness here ideological forces at work as one social domain is re-constructed in terms of another. "Indeed a valuable way of thinking about ideology is to conceive of it as the way discursive traffic and exchange between different domains are structured and controlled."<sup>66</sup> Identity in this short narrative is always corporate, and the individual becomes a subject only as he becomes subject to a

63 There are numerous studies of this narrative, see the bibliography mentioned in Dina Stein, *Maxims, Magic, Myth: A Folkloristic Perspective of Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004 [Hebr.], p. 116, and her own illuminating analysis there.

64 An example of this is the difference between the objective description by the narrator that Eliezer's breath as offensive (רע), and the students' more delicate description as bothersome (הקשה), which is then attenuated a third time by Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai.

65 David Goodblatt, "The Political and Social History of the Jewish Community in the Land of Israel, c. 235 – 638." In: S. Katz (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 404 – 430 at p. 427. See also idem, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia*. Leiden: Brill, 1975, p. 267; Jeffrey Rubenstein, "The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence." *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 1 (2002), pp. 55 – 68.

66 Peter Stallybrass and Alon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, p. 149.

family type of affiliation; without such a group Eliezer would have no identity. It is not fortuitous that this type of familial identity that “is intrinsically connected to others in a network of relationships” dovetails with what we saw concerning the “embeddedness” of rabbinic legal subject. There too, the self was expressed as a collective subjectivity that stresses the relation of the self to a consensual community of values and not to an emerging unique individuality.<sup>67</sup>

In this context, I am reminded of the wonderful talmudic rewriting of Joseph’s seduction by Potiphar’s wife in bSotah 36b. At the climax of that scene, when both protagonists lie naked in bed, the intimate boudoir suddenly becomes very crowded, as both his father and brothers suddenly appear to Joseph in a vision:

At that moment the image of his father appeared to him in the window, and said, ‘Joseph Joseph, your brothers will have their names written on the priestly breastplate, and yours amongst them. Do you want it effaced?!’

As I have been arguing, it is a characteristic of rabbinic literature that the scene of seduction has moved from the bedroom of Potiphar’s wife to Joseph’s soul, and as Rosen-Zvi has remarked in a different context, “inner thoughts and internal conflicts, rather than external deeds, stand at the center of the narrative.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, we must ask why at this moment does Jacob threaten Joseph with eradication from the names of the Twelve Tribes engraved on the priestly garments? The sin of Joseph is precisely in preferring individual desire and identity to a corporate one. The counter-seduction of Jacob presents a spiritual fraternity, as normative cultural identity is likened to the names of the Twelve Tribes on the High Priest’s breastplate. Thus, the anti-social forces of individual desire are restored to proper social order through the re-establishment of like-mindedness between the individual and his or her community.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> See note 24 above.

<sup>68</sup> Rosen-Zvi “Bilhah the Temptress”, p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> In another context, both David Stern and I have examined the influence of the Greek romance upon the post-biblical and rabbinic Joseph traditions (David Stern, “The Captive Woman: Hellenization, Greco-Roman Erotic Narrative, and Rabbinic Literature.” *Poetics Today* 19 (1998), pp. 91 – 127; Joshua Levinson, “An-Other Woman: Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife. Staging the Body Politic.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 87 (1997), pp. 269 – 301). Seen in this light, the comments of Kate Cooper about the Greek Romance are extremely pertinent here: “Since love and disruption were linked in the ancient imagination, romance was a narrative form well suited to the exploration of the limits of an established identity [...] Romance represents the ultimate reunion of the individual to common purpose, as the potentially antisocial force of desire is reconciled to the urgent civic necessity of biological and social renewal [...] Instead of self-absorption, forming allegiances is what romance is about.” (Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 36 – 39). See also Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 46. In addition, Maren Niehoff has recently noted that this image of Jacob is strikingly similar to the Stoic philosopher Seneca’s advice to internalize a proper role model: that one should “choose a master

## Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer

With this image in mind, I want to take a look at a late rendition of this narrative that is found in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, a text most likely from the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>70</sup> As this narrative is rather long I will just summarize it, focusing on Eliezer's character and the tale's denouement (the full text appears as an appendix). We seem to have the same tripartite structure as in *Genesis Rabbah*: the biological family, the house of study, and their convergence. Nevertheless, it is clear that this is a different story altogether. Here, at each of the plot's junctions, Eliezer sits down and weeps. His father moves him to plow arable land, but once again he sits down and weeps. In answer to his father's inquiry, Eliezer reveals to him that he wishes to study Torah. Here his father has no principled objection to the rabbinic habitus, merely that his son is too old to begin his studies at the age of twenty-eight. Eliezer again weeps and fasts for two weeks, and then Elijah the Prophet appears to him and urges him to go to the school of Yohanan ben Zakkai in Jerusalem. Upon arriving, he sits before his teacher and again weeps, and ben Zakkai teaches and initiates him into the rabbinic world.

Meanwhile, Hyrcanus, at the urging of his other sons, travels to Jerusalem to disinherit his wayward son. While sitting among the Rabbis and their admirers at a feast (and not in the study house), ben Zakkai requests his new pupil to expound upon the Torah. At first Eliezer refuses, claiming that he cannot teach anything he has not received from his master. Yohanan b. Zakkai responds that "you can teach more Torah than what Moses received at Sinai. Perhaps, he says, you are embarrassed to teach before me? If so, then I will take my leave. And Yohanan b. Zakkai arose and went outside." The text continues:

4.a. And R. Eliezer was sitting and expounding the words of Torah, and his face shone like the light of the sun and like the dawn rising and showing forth, and his radiance beamed forth like that of Moses, so that no one knew if it was day or night ...

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whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector or your pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters; you can never straighten that which is crooked unless you use a ruler" (Ep. 11.10; Niehoff, "Biographical Sketches in *Genesis Rabbah*," forthcoming).

- 70 The recent study of Eliezer Treitel has convincingly argued for the inclusion of these first two chapters in the original composition. Although it is likely that the author used the version of this tale that appears in *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan II*, 13 (Solomon Schechter, *Aboth De Rabbi Nathan*. New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1967, pp. 30–32), he refashioned it according to his own needs. Treitel posits an 8th century date of composition in Palestine or the Greek East (*Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer: Text, Redaction and a Sample Synopsis*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 2012 [Hebr.]).

4.b. His father said to him, 'My son, I only came here to disinherit you from my possessions, but now that I have come and seen all of this praise, behold your brothers are disinherited and I gift them all to you.

4.c. R. Eliezer replied, 'Behold, I am to be reckoned as one of them. If I wished to have lands, the Holy One would have given me ... If I wanted money, He would have given me, as it says, *silver is mine and gold is mine* (Hag 2:8). Rather I have not requested from God anything but Torah.'

At present, I want to concentrate only on some of the more blatant differences between this 8<sup>th</sup> century text and the 5<sup>th</sup> century text we saw in Genesis Rabbah:

- 1) Throughout most of the tale, Rabbi Eliezer is portrayed as a weak and dependent character, and unlike his precursor in Genesis Rabbah, he is unable to decide anything without external intervention. He sits and weeps at every moment of decision, and continues to do so until Yohanan b. Zakkai's prophetic pronouncement. This in itself indicates that we are dealing with a different kind of subject.
- 2) Hyrcanus, the father, has no principled objection to his son's studies. He merely thinks that at the age of twenty-eight he has missed his chance and should raise children who will study. This change mitigates the fundamental dichotomy between two social spaces found in Genesis Rabbah.
- 3) If the amoraic text concludes with the performance of knowledge before his teacher, here Rabbi Eliezer teaches only after his master departs. This event is portrayed in theophanic language as "his face shone like the light of the sun whose rays beamed forth like that of Moses, so that no one knew whether it was day or night." And yet, in distinction from Genesis Rabbah, the actual content of his teaching itself does not appear.
- 4) Finally, the conclusion of the story is very different. Instead of becoming an equal partner in the family fortunes, Rabbi Eliezer rejects any part of them, declaring that "the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains" (Ps 24:1).

I suggest that we can explain the greater part of these differences not only as an expression of the different poetics of late midrash, or the unique generic identity of this text, but also in the emergence of a new and different sense of self. Like Genesis Rabbah, this is a story of becoming a new social self, but a different kind of social self than we saw there. The Genesis Rabbah narrative concerns how Eliezer becomes incorporated into the house of study at a time when the valorization of study was not a necessary cultural assumption. This situation dictates both the tension between the two social spaces of home and study, and the nature of its utopian solution. Therefore, the performance of rabbinic knowledge must be staged before both father figures, Yohanan b. Zakkai and Hyrcanus. As the conflict is between two conflicting corporate identities, Eliezer must choose



between two collective subjectivities, demonstrating to one his allegiance to the other.

In the late midrash, there is no principled tension between the two sites of subjecthood, and the battle for the primacy of study has already been won. This is not a tale of how Eliezer becomes incorporated into the house of study, but rather how he comes to be himself through study. Here, study is a means to achieve an identity and not an end in itself. The central motif here is Eliezer's growing independence; therefore it is essential that he teach alone, severing himself from both his biological and his spiritual fathers. But as there is no need to represent Eliezer as one who has internalized rabbinic knowledge, the actual content of his teaching is unimportant and need not be conveyed.

There are many other differences, but for my limited purposes here we can see that in this text from the 8<sup>th</sup> century the nature of the subject has changed, just as the cultural structures for defining and performing identity have been transformed. Here, Rabbi Eliezer sets out on a journey to create his own identity, which he can accomplish only by severing all external ties, declaring his independence from both father-figures, and like Moses, connecting directly to God. With a certain amount of caution, I suggest that we seem to be closer here to the idea of a semi-autonomous social subject. For sure, we should not exaggerate; this is not Polonius' advice to his son: "this above all: to thine own self, be true."<sup>71</sup> Neither is it the authentic, unique, and autonomous modern subject. As I have stressed, we should be wary of speaking about an individual as particular and unique in this period.<sup>72</sup> And yet, I think we can say that at least vis à vis the classic midrash of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the contours and technologies of the self have been significantly transformed.

It is thus not insignificant that Rabbi Eliezer rejects taking part of his family's possessions. As Dina Stein has suggested, there are many motifs here that are reminiscent of the late antique holy man<sup>73</sup> and come close to Peter Brown's depiction of the holy man as "the 'stranger' *par excellence*, who disengages himself from social connections." As Brown has said, "For the society around him, the holy man is the one man who can stand outside the ties of family, and of economic interest ... He was thought of as a man who owed nothing to society."<sup>74</sup> While classical rabbinic hagiography does not emphasize these motifs, they are, I think, very much the image of R. Eliezer at the end of this late midrash.

71 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.3.

72 Caroline W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, pp. 82 – 102.

73 Stein, *Maxims, Magic, Myth*, pp. 158 – 165.

74 Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 91 – 92.



## Conclusion

The status of classical narratology as the *lingua franca* of literary studies was based on its promise to provide a critical metalanguage that could bridge institutional gaps and disciplines dealing with fictional literature. Various scholars have pointed out why these aspirations were overly ambitious.<sup>75</sup> However, as Herman has quipped, “it seems that rumors of the death of narratology have been greatly exaggerated.”<sup>76</sup> One of the reasons for the post-classical renaissance and the field’s continued vitality is its ability to overcome the traditional restrictions of literary studies and facilitate collaborations across disciplinary boundaries by abandoning the earlier “universalistic aspirations in favor of a multidisciplinary approach combining multiple and contrasting perspectives.”<sup>77</sup> A post-classical literary perspective on rabbinic texts is just now emerging, and there is much work to be done. I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper how the study of midrash can profit from a cultural poetics that views literature as one of the means by which social subjects were formed, re-formed, and enabled to perform in Late Antiquity.

## Appendix: Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 1 – 2<sup>78</sup>

1.a. A story of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus whose father had many ploughman, and he was ploughing stony plots while they were ploughing along furrowed ground. He sat down and wept. His father said to him, ‘My son, why are you weeping? Perhaps you are distressed because you are ploughing stony plots while we are ploughing along furrowed ground? You go and plough along furrowed ground and we will plough the stony plots.’

1.b. He sat down on the furrow and wept. His father said to him, ‘My son, why are you weeping? Are you distressed that you are plowing furrowed land?’ ‘No,’ he answered. ‘So then why are you weeping?’ he asked. He answered him, ‘Because I wish to learn Torah.’ [Hyrcanus] said to him, ‘But are you twenty-eight years old and you wish to learn Torah? Rather, go, take a wife for yourself and have male children, and you can take them to the synagogue and school to learn Torah.’

1.c. He fasted for two weeks until Elijah [the Prophet] appeared to him. He [Eliezer] sat down and wept. He [Elijah] said to him, ‘Son of Hyrcanus, why are

75 Roy Sommer, “Beyond (Classical) Narratology: New Approaches to Narrative Theory,” *European Journal of English Studies* 8 (2004), pp. 3 – 11 at p. 4; Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, p. 5.

76 Herman, “Introduction”, p. 1.

77 Sommer, “Beyond (Classical) Narratology”, p. 11.

78 Based on the Yemenite manuscript Enelow 866.

you weeping?’ He replied, ‘Because I wish to learn Torah.’ He [Elijah] replied, ‘If you wish to study Torah then go to Jerusalem to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.’

2.a. He arose and went up to Jerusalem, to R. Yohanan ben Zakkai. He sat down and wept. (R. Yohanan ben Zakkai) said: ‘Why are you weeping?’ He answered: ‘Because I wish to learn Torah. He asked: Whose son are you?’ But he did not tell him...

... [R. Yohanan ben Zakkai teaches him]...

3.a. The sons of Hyrcanus said to their father, ‘Go up to Jerusalem and disinherit Eliezer your son from your possessions.’ He went to Jerusalem to disinherit him, and found there a celebration for R. Yohanan ben Zakkai, and all of the greatest of the land were dining with him [...] R. Yohanan ben Zakkai was informed that Eliezer’s father had come, and he said to them, ‘Make room for him,’ and they sat him among them.

3.b. R. Yohanan ben Zakkai turned to R. Eliezer and said, ‘My son, tell us something from the Torah.’ He replied, ‘I will tell you a parable: To what am I like? To this cistern that cannot yield more water than it contains; so I cannot speak more words of Torah than I have received from you.’

3.c. R. Yohanan ben Zakkai replied, ‘Son, I will tell you a parable. To what is the matter like? To this well-spring that flows and emits more water than enters into it. Likewise, you can teach more words of Torah than you learnt (you can teach more words of Torah than what Moses received at Sinai). My son, perhaps, you are embarrassed (to teach in my presence)? If so, then I will take my leave of you.’

4.a. R. Yohanan ben Zakkai arose and went outside, and R. Eliezer was sitting and expounding the words of Torah, and his face shone like the light of the sun and like the dawn rising and showing forth, and his radiance beamed forth like that of Moses, so that no one knew if it was day or night [...]

4.b. (His father said to him), ‘My son, I only came here to disinherit you from my possessions, but now that I have come and seen all of this praise, behold your brothers are disinherited and I gift them all to you.’

4.c. R. Eliezer replied, ‘Behold, I am to be reckoned as one of them. If I had asked the Holy One, blessed be He, for lands He would have given them to me, as it says, *the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains* (Ps 24:1). And if I requested silver and gold, He would have given them to me, as it says, *silver is mine and gold is mine* (Hag 2:8). Rather I have not requested from God anything but Torah, as it is says, *truly by all your precepts I walk straight; I hate every false way* (Ps 119:128), and it is written, *her value in trade is better than silver, her yield, greater than gold* (Prov 3:14), and it is written, *I prefer the teaching you proclaimed to thousands of gold and silver pieces* (Ps 119:72).

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Paul Mandel (Jerusalem)

## Kidor's Revenge: Murder, Texts and Rabbis – An Analysis of a Rabbinic Tale and its Transmission (BT *Yoma* 83b)

### Introduction

The nature of the rabbinic corpus (the edited collections of *halakhah* [law] and *aggadah* [lore] in Talmud and Midrash, redacted during the third to fifth centuries CE), being the result of an originally oral transmission of material through many generations and geographic areas, leads to two potentially contradictory phenomena: on the one hand, much effort was expended to preserve ancient traditions, often purportedly the *verbatim* statements of named scholars (sages or “rabbis”), as faithfully as possible in accordance with the originally transmitted statement, while on the other hand, the traditions were edited and redacted by later compilers who have left traces, to greater or lesser degrees, of their interaction with the earlier traditions. This is true of purely legal statements (*halakhah*) for which precision in formulation was important, and all the more so applies to the exegeses, parables and tales that make up the *aggadic*, non-normative lore in the rabbinic works. In particular, many *aggadic* traditions appearing in the Palestinian corpus (Mishnah and Tosefta, redacted in the third century, and the Palestinian Talmud, redacted near the end of the fourth century) are found in new forms in the main collection of Babylonian tradition, the Babylonian Talmud, compiled by the end of the fifth century; a comparison of the Babylonian reports with the Palestinian parallels leads to greater understanding of the changes in poetics, thought processes, and world views effected through the transmission.

The availability of multiple textual versions of a rabbinic work as attested in medieval manuscripts, as well as among the generally older text witnesses from the fragments found in the Cairo Genizah and also, as uncovered in recent decades, in the bindings of ancient books and other bound records found in European libraries and archives (the so-called “European genizah”<sup>1</sup>), allows for a

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1 For a general description of the “Italian Genizah” from which a fragment of the text discussed in this paper is found, see M. Perani, “The ‘Italian Genizah’: Hebrew Manuscript Fragments in

similar study of the later transmission of the traditions as the rabbinic works were copied and distributed in the Jewish communities after the period of their redaction. Despite the generally held respect for the texts and the motivation of a scribe to produce a faithful reproduction of the original text which he is copying, a comparison of manuscript evidence of the same work often offers surprising evidence for the continued interaction by later transmitters, especially in the non-legal sections of the corpus. While most Palestinian traditions did not survive in many versions, the more ubiquitous and authoritative Babylonian Talmud has been preserved, depending upon the particular tractate, in a number of textual witnesses, often up to four or more. Only one medieval manuscript contains the entire Talmud; usually, however, medieval scribes would copy just one or a few tractates at a time in one volume. Medieval commentators and anthologists provide further evidence of the text, especially of the Babylonian Talmud, through their citation of passages as part of a running commentary on the Talmudic text or in their citation of entire passages within a commentary or anthology. The first editions of the major rabbinic works at the turn of the sixteenth century serve as the culmination of the transmission of the ancient texts, as these were then fixed and protected, more or less, from further change in later printings due to the wide nature of the publication of the works, their higher legibility, and lower price.

In this paper we shall study one *aggadic* tale found in tractate *Yoma* of the Babylonian Talmud as it appears in the first printed edition of the entire Talmud (which also serves as the basis for all subsequent printed editions of the Talmud), comparing the motifs of this tale to Palestinian traditions, both early and late, and following the transmission of the tale from the earliest manuscript evidence of the Talmudic text to the final version as found in the first printed editions. The comparative study of the tale will demonstrate the differing world views of the versions as well as the variation in stylistic traits, which did not end with the redaction of the rabbinic works, as later generations of transmitters adapted, augmented, and changed the early tale, in the process transforming it in significant ways.

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Italian Archives and Libraries," in: *Jewish Studies* 34 (1994), pp. 39 – 54; idem, *The "Italian Genizah": General Description and Report on the Research*, available on-line at [http://www.morasha.it/zehut/mp02\\_ghezaitaliana.html](http://www.morasha.it/zehut/mp02_ghezaitaliana.html). See Appendix II concerning the Bazzano fragment.

## The Tale of Kidor: Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 83b

In tractate *Yoma* of the Babylonian Talmud, folio 83b, we read the following story:<sup>2</sup>

רבי מאיר ורבי יהודה ורבי יוסי הוו קא אזלי באורחא.  
 רבי מאיר הוה דייק בשמא; רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי לא הוו דייקי בשמא.  
 כי מטו לההוא דוכתא, בעו אושפיזא. יהבו להו.  
 אמר לו: מה שמך? אמר להו: כידור.  
 אמר: שמע מינה אדם רשע הוא, שנאמר, "כי דור תהפוכות המה".  
 רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי אשלימו ליה כיסיהו.  
 רבי מאיר לא אשלים ליה כיסיה; אזל אותביה בי קיברי דאבוה.  
 אתחזי ליה בחילמיה: תא שקיל כיסא דמנח ארישא דההוא גברא.  
 למחר אמר להו: הכי אתחזי לי בחלמאי.  
 אמרי ליה: חלמא דבי שמש לית בהו מששא.  
 אזל רבי מאיר ונטריה כולי יומא, ואייתיה.  
 למחר אמרי ליה: הב לן כיסן.  
 אמר להו: לא היו דברים מעולם.  
 אמר להו רבי מאיר: אמאי לא דיקיתו בשמא?  
 אמרי ליה: אמאי לא אמרת לן מר?  
 אמר להו: אימר דאמרי אנא [א] חששא, אחזוקי מי אמרי?  
 משכוח ועיילוהו לחנותא. חזו טלפחי אשפמיה.  
 אזלו ויהבא סימנא לדביתיהו, ושקלוה לכיסיהו ואייתו.  
 אזל איהו וקטלה לאיתתיה.  
 היינו דתנן: 'מים ראשונים האכילו בשר חזיר; מים אחרונים הרגו את הנפש.'

2 The story is one of two tales appearing together on this page of the Talmud concerning journeys taken by Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Yossi (in the present narrative they are accompanied by Rabbi Meir). The narrative preceding this one relates an event in which these sages were seized with bulimia (ravenous craving for food), and thus fits naturally into the context of the Talmudic discussion to Mishnah *Yoma* 8, 6, which discusses leniencies in feeding a person who is seized with bulimia. It may be assumed that the two stories concerning the sages were transmitted together, and therefore both were included in the Talmudic discussion, despite the fact that our narrative is unrelated to the issues discussed in the Talmud here. Stories describing journeys of the sages are relatively common in both the Tannaitic and Amoraic corpora; in particular, there are approximately a dozen such stories in the Babylonian Talmud told in Aramaic, beginning, as these tales do, with the expository phrase, "Rabbi X and Rabbi Y were going on the way." However, it is noteworthy that **only** the two tales appearing here in *Yoma* 83b tell of Tannaitic sages; all other similar "journey" tales told in Babylonian Aramaic concern Amoraim. Other tales concerning Tannaim appear in the Tannaitic literature as well as in the Babylonian Talmud in Hebrew and begin with the parallel Hebrew phrase, "Rabbi X [and Rabbi Y] were going on the way" (רבי א' ורבי ב' היו מהלכים בדרך); thus their linguistic form as well as their content may have been transmitted from the Tannaitic period (late 1<sup>st</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE). The storyteller of the tales in *Yoma* 83b, on the other hand, telling his tale in Aramaic of no earlier a time than the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century, is relating events supposed to have occurred over a century or more before his time. This raises questions concerning the origin of the tales and their transmission history and historicity, suggesting a larger degree of creativity on the part of the storyteller.

ולבסוף הוו דייקי בשמא. כי מטו לההוא ביתא דשמיה בלה לא עיילו לגביה;  
(אמר: שמע מינה רשע הוא), דכתיב, "ואמר לבלה נאופים",  
כמו "אחרי בלותי הייתה לי עדנה". כלומר, זקנה בנאופים.<sup>3</sup>

R. Meir and R. Yehuda and R. Yossi were going on the way.

R. Meir would investigate a [person's] name [inferring from it regarding his character],

R. Yehuda and R. Yossi would not investigate a [person's] name.

When they arrived at a certain place they sought an inn. They offered them [an inn].

They asked him, "What is your name?" He said to them, "Kidor."

He [R. Meir] said [to himself]: "One may infer from this that he is an evil man, as it says, 'for a generation [*ki dor*] of perversities are they [children in whom there is no trust]' (Deut 32, 20)."

R. Yehuda and R. Yossi entrusted their purses to him.

R. Meir did not entrust his purse to him; he went and placed it in his [the innkeeper's] father's grave.<sup>4</sup>

He [the landlord's father] appeared to him [the landlord] in a dream [saying], "Come and take the bag [*kisa* = 'purse'; also 'covering'<sup>5</sup>] that is lying on that man's [= my] head."

The following day he [the landlord] said to them, "Thus-and-such appeared to me in a dream."

They said to him, "A Friday night dream has no significance."

R. Meir went and guarded it [his purse] all day, and brought it back [in the evening].

The following day they said to him [the landlord], "Give us our purses."

He said to them, "There were no such things."

R. Meir said to them, "Why didn't you investigate the name?"

They said to him, "Why didn't you tell us [about his character]?"

He said to them, "You may say that I acted [lit., spoke] out of suspicion [of dishonesty on the part of the landlord, based on his name], [but] would I [dare to definitively] presume [dishonesty on his part]?"

They lured him and brought him into a tavern. They noticed lentils on his lips.

They went and gave [it] as a sign to his wife, and took their purses and went (lit., 'came').

He [the landlord] went and killed his wife.

This is [in accordance with what] we have learned: "[The omission of] water [for washing one's hands] before [the meal] caused [one] to eat pig's meat; [while the omission of] water [for washing one's hands] after [the meal] killed a person."

In the end they [Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Yossi] would investigate names.

When they arrived at a certain house [of one] named Bala they did not enter.

(They said: One may deduce that he is a wicked person.)

as it is written: "Then I said, 'To destruction [*labalah*] with adultery! [They are still going on with the same fornications...]" (Ezekiel 23:43)

3 The two sentences placed in parentheses appear only in the Venice and subsequent printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud, and are clearly interpolations. See Appendix I.

4 The text in the printed edition of the Talmud is *bei kivrei* = "cemetery," but all other textual witnesses read here *bekivra* = "in the grave"; see Appendix I.

5 See M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic*. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Univ. Press, 2002, s.v. כִּיסָא #1 and כִּיסָא #2, p. 576.

(as “after I am grown old will I have pleasure” [Genesis 18:12]; that is, an old woman who fornicates.)<sup>6</sup>

This is a surprising tale. Indeed, it (along with its Palestinian parallel – see below) is the only story told in Rabbinic literature concerning wife-killing. It is all the more surprising because in it we read of three of the foremost sages of the mid-second century CE who use dubious means to retrieve their stolen money. By luring the innkeeper into a tavern the rabbis discover information which they subsequently use to their advantage by delivering a false message to the innkeeper's wife. This wily ruse leads not inevitably, perhaps, but nonetheless quite directly, to tragic consequences. Thus, while the subsequent vengeful murder by the innkeeper could certainly not have been foreseen, it might be assumed that the death of the poor wife, who innocently – and rightfully – returned the rabbis' money, should have weighed upon the rabbis' consciences. One might have expected a lesson to be learned from such a tragedy, *viz.*, that no good can come from subterfuge, and that one should be very careful not to come between a man and his wife. But the only lessons learned, according to the Talmud here, are the care to be taken in using cleansing water after the meal (had he done so, Kidor would not have been found out!), and a warning to stay away from people with menacing names.

The section describing the landlord's dream, in particular, raises further questions of interpretation and ethics. If we grant that this dream must have bothered the landlord who then turns to his illustrious guests for an interpretation, it is nonetheless strange that the rabbis together deny the significance of the dream. Certainly Rabbi Meir is aware of the reality behind the dream; might he not be guilty of at least a modicum of dissembling in joining his colleagues in their denial of the dream's significance?

## The Parallel Palestinian Traditions

The Babylonian narrative is predicated on Rabbi Meir's ability to correctly decipher the name of the scoundrel Kidor: this was due to his custom of “examining” names, inferring personal character by uncovering the paronomastic reference of a name. This ability of R. Meir is attested in Palestinian sources, where the Babylonian phrase, *R. Meir hava dyyk beshema*<sup>7</sup> appears in Hebrew as *Rabbi Meir haya doresh shemot*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>7</sup> The verb in the tale is the Babylonian Aramaic term *dyyk*, meaning “to examine precisely,” “to infer.”

<sup>8</sup> On *doresh* as “expound,” “teach the significance of (to others),” see P. Mandel, “*Darash Rabbi Peloni*”: A New Study,” *Dappim: Research in Literature* 16 – 17 (2009), pp. 27 – 55 [Hebr.]. By

Thus, in Genesis Rabba, in a midrashic comment to Genesis 14:2, the names of the five kings mentioned there are “expounded” paronomastically by Rabbi Meir, the names alluding to the kings’ evil natures:

‘שהיה שואב ממון; ‘שמאבר’ – שהיה בן רשע; ‘שנאב’ – שהיה בן רע; ‘ברשע’ – רבי מאיר היה דורש שמות: ‘ברע’ שנתבלעו דיוריה. – שהיה פורח ומביא ממון; ‘בלע’ –

Rabbi Meir would expound names: Bera’ – for he was the son of a wicked man (= ra’); Biresha’ – for he was the son of a wicked man (= rasha’); Shin’av – for he would absorb (or “draw in”; sho’ev) money; Shem’ever – for he would fly (out) [’ever = bird’s wing] and bring back money; Bela’ – whose inhabitants were swallowed up (nitbal’u).<sup>9</sup>

In this passage Rabbi Meir employs his exegetical technique in the interpretation of biblical names. An inference of bad character from the name of a contemporary is reported in the Palestinian Talmud in a comment appended to a discussion of the paronomastic use of *naḥash hanēḥosheth* by Moses in Numbers 21:8 – 9:

Rabbi Yasa said: In four places it is said, “Make for yourself”; in three [the verse] specifies [the material]; in one [Scripture (or God)] does not specify [the material]: “make for yourself an ark of gopher wood” (Genesis 6:14); “make for yourself two silver trumpets” (Numbers 10:2); “make for yourself stone flints” (Joshua 5:2). [However:] “Make for yourself a serpent (*saraph*)” (Numbers 21:8) – it did not specify [the material]. Moses said [to himself]: “Is it (the *saraph*) not essentially a *naḥash* (= serpent)?” Therefore: “And Moses made a serpent (*naḥash*) of bronze (*neḥoshet*).”

מיכן היה ר' מאיר דורש שמות. חד בר נש הוה שמיה כידור. אמ' לון ר' מאיר: הבאלכון – "ויעש משה נחש נחשת" מיניה, בר נש ביש הוא: 'כי דור תהפוכות המה'.

From here Rabbi Meir would expound names.

There was a person named Kidor. Rabbi Meir said to them: Be careful of him;<sup>10</sup> he is a scoundrel: “for a generation [*ki dor*] of perversities are they [children in whom there is no trust]” (Deut 32:20).<sup>11</sup>

The tradition concerning Rabbi Meir contains two parts. The first statement, in Hebrew, relates Rabbi Meir’s custom of “expounding names” to Moses’ use of paronomasia in creating the copper serpent: “From here” implies that Rabbi Meir’s understanding of the prophetic character of personal names was learned from Moses’ perception of the importance of using a metal for making the

the time of the late Tannaitic period the verb acquires a more specific meaning, “to expound a Scriptural verse.”

9 Genesis Rabbah 41, 5 (Theodor-Albeck, 409 – 410). See the parallel in Ruth Rabba 1, 2.

10 In the original Aramaic text the wording employs a rare Palestinian Aramaic form: הבאלכון (*havalachon* = *havu balachon*, “you [pl.] take care,” “be mindful”); see S. Lieberman on this word, “Shuv ‘al ketav-yad Leiden shel haYerushalmi,” *Tarbiz* 20 (1950), p. 110 (= idem, *Studies in Palestinian Talmudic Literature*, ed., D. Rosenthal, Jerusalem, 1991, p. 222) [Hebr.].

11 Palestinian Talmud *Rosh Hashanah* 3, 9 (Venice ed. 59a). Cf. the parallel to the first part of this passage in Genesis Rabba 31, 8 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 280 – 281), which, however, does not include mention of Rabbi Meir or the tale of Kidor.



serpent the name of which alludes to the object itself (*naḥash neḥoshet*).<sup>12</sup> The following two sentences, appearing in Palestinian Aramaic, present an extremely laconic illustration of Rabbi Meir's paronomastic practice. This is not a full narrative: we do not know what connection exists between the man named Kidor and Rabbi Meir, nor are we told any circumstances concerning this person. We do not know the nature of the addressees to whom Rabbi Meir gives his warning ("Rabbi Meir said to **them**"). And finally, we are not told of any consequences or results of Rabbi Meir's warning: were people (who?) careful in dealing with Kidor? In what manner? Was there evidence of Kidor's untrustworthiness? In which areas and with what consequences? Clearly, the only purpose of these statements is to illustrate and exemplify Rabbi Meir's custom to "expound names," with all extraneous material deleted. One might assume that the complete information regarding this incident was not transmitted.

In a late Palestinian midrashic work, however, this miniature narrative is fleshed out into a complete story:

אמרו רבותינו: כשהיה ר' מאיר רואה אדם היה למד שמו, ומשמו היה יודע מעשיו. פעם אחת באו אצלו שני תלמידים, והיה שם האחד כידור. אמר ר' מאיר לתלמידיו: הזהרו מכידור זה. אמרו לו: בן תורה הוא. אמר להם: אף על פי כן הזהרו עצמיכם ממנו. לאחר ימים הלכו לבית המרחץ והפקידו בגדיהם אצל כידור. נטלו בגדיהם והלכו. יצאו ולא מצאו. הלכו לבתיהם ולבשו בגדים אחרים. באו לפני ר' מאיר, אמר להם ר' מאיר: למה חלפתם בגדיכם? אמרו לו: הלכנו לבית המרחץ והפקדנו בגדינו אצל כידור ונשלחו. אמר להם: והלא אמרתי לכם הזהרו בכידור זה. אמרו לו: רבינו, בבקשה ממך, מנין היית יודע? אמר להם: משמו, דכתיב, "כי דור תהפוכות המה וגו'". Our teachers have said: When Rabbi Meir would see a man he would learn his name, and from his name he would know his deeds. One time two pupils came to him, and the name of one was Kidor. Rabbi Meir said to his pupils: Beware of this Kidor. They said to him: He is a learned individual (*ben Torah*). He said to them: Nonetheless beware of him. After a time, they went to the bathhouse and left their clothes with Kidor. He took their clothes and left. They went out and didn't find [the clothes]. They went to their homes and wore other clothes. They came before Rabbi Meir, who said to them: Why did you change your clothes? They said to him: We went to the bathhouse and left our clothes with Kidor and he took them. He said to them: Did I not tell you to beware of this Kidor? They said to him: Our teacher, we beg you [tell us] from where did you know this? He said to them: From his name, for it is written: "For they are a perverse generation, children who are untrustworthy."<sup>13</sup>

The Tanḥuma narrative fills in all the lacunae of the Talmudic passage, beginning with an expanded explanation of the first statement: the laconic expression,

12 The phrase "From here R. X would say" is common in Tannaitic literature and is found often in the Palestinian Talmud. It most often indicates a Biblical source which serves as a basis for a teaching, whether of legal or non-legal nature, by a Tannaitic sage. Cf. the following examples: *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Pisha* 6 (ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 21); *Pisha* 17 (65); *Pisha* 18 (71); PT *Berachot* 6, 1 (Ven. ed. 10a); *Ma'aserot* 2, 6 (50a); *Kiddushin* 1, 2 (59d); and cf. also *Tosefta Hagiga* 1, 9.

13 Midrash Tanḥuma to Genesis, Buber ed., par. 30, p. 22.

“Rabbi Meir would expound names,” is explained as Rabbi Meir’s ability to decipher a person’s nature from his name. The explicative tale commences with an introductory formula, “one time.” Rabbi Meir is a teacher of students, and Kidor is among those who come to him. Rabbi Meir’s warning is offered to his other students, but it is countered by the students’ objection that this Kidor is learned. The different views of Kidor’s nature is then put to the test and demonstrated by his unruly prank at the bathhouse (a common one among young boys). The necessity for a change of clothes for the hapless students allows for the inclusion of the triumphant solution by Rabbi Meir through his explanation of the source for his understanding: the appearance of the students in their new apparel triggers the “revelation” of the misdeed and, as a result, the full understanding of Rabbi Meir’s perception of the lad’s character. The verse aptly and correctly describes Kidor as one of the “children in whom there is no trust.”

While it may be that this story, or a version of it, was known to the redactor of the abbreviated anecdote appearing in the Palestinian Talmud, it seems more likely that the tale was generated *ex post facto* as an illustration of that statement, using common plot elements and a simple story describing the lack of trust in Kidor as given in a warning to students by Rabbi Meir. All the enigmas of the Palestinian tradition are given a proper solution: we know to whom Rabbi Meir gave his warning; we are given clear evidence of Kidor’s untrustworthy character; and we follow the amusing events that describe the consequences of not listening to Rabbi Meir’s advice. The tale concludes with Rabbi Meir triumphantly explaining his prescient understanding of Kidor’s nature through his citation of the biblical verse. If didactic lessons were intended by the narrator to be transmitted through this tale, they might be that even learned students may be untrustworthy, and that it is useful to listen to your teacher’s advice.

## The Tale in the Babylonian Talmud

Returning to the tale cited in BT *Yoma*, we find that there, too, the same basic elements of expansion of the brief statements in the Palestinian Talmud are evident, but in a narrative context that differs widely from that of the tale of Kidor in Midrash Tanḥuma. Here, the victims of Kidor’s untrustworthiness are not Rabbi Meir’s **students** but his **colleagues**, and Kidor’s thievery is more clearly and seriously a crime (stealing money deposited with him and not clothes). But a major difference in the Babylonian tale is that Rabbi Meir does **not** warn his colleagues concerning his understanding of Kidor’s character, and their mishap is thus not due to inattentiveness, unlike the students in the Tanḥuma tale. Rabbi Meir seems to be strangely self-serving in protecting his own money, with no similar concern regarding the potential loss of his colleagues’ money. Indeed, his reticence in

divulging his knowledge of Kidor's character seems to be a major issue, and he defends his silence by claiming that while he did suspect Kidor of being untrustworthy, he did not have the right to stigmatize him publicly as a thief. He seems to have assumed that his colleagues might have reached the same conclusion regarding their host by considering his peculiar name ("Why didn't you investigate [his] name?"), but that he had no reason to share with them *his* conclusion.

It cannot be mere coincidence that Rabbi Meir's defensive statement in this tale, explaining why he could not impugn Kidor's trustworthiness publicly, appears almost *verbatim* in a completely different context in the Babylonian Talmud as an explanation for a legal position held by Rabbi Meir:

אימר דאמר ר' מאיר לחששא, לאחזוקינהו מי אמר?

Say [i. e., you may validly claim] that Rabbi Meir said [what he said] regarding a *suspicion* [of untrustworthiness of priests (see below)], [but] did he say it [i. e., may we jump to the conclusion that his statement holds also] as a *presumption* of their [untrustworthiness]?!<sup>14</sup>

The statement in question concerns the possible general disenfranchisement of priests (*kohanim*) from acting in a judicial capacity (one sanctioned explicitly by Scripture [Deuteronomy 21:5]). The immediate context is the credibility of individuals, and in particular a priest, to determine if a (male) first-born "pure" animal (cow, sheep or goat; *bekhor* = first-born) has a blemish that might disqualify it from being offered as a sacrifice in the Temple.<sup>15</sup> Although blemished animals may not be offered as a sacrifice, they are nonetheless considered the priests' due and are to be given by the animal's owner to any priest of his choice, who may then either use it for himself or otherwise derive personal benefit from it. Such blemishes, however, must have occurred naturally (without the intervention by man); any intentionally caused blemish disqualifies the animal for sacrifice or for any priest's use. While someone (usually a shepherd tending the animals) may attest to the fact that a blemish occurred naturally (there being no reason that a shepherd would himself inflict a blemish on an animal in his charge), the Mishnah *Bekhorot* 5, 4 records an opinion that disqualifies shepherds who are priests from providing such testimony due to potential conflict of interest. This opinion is supported by a statement by Rabbi Meir recorded in the same mishnah to the effect that "one who is suspect (= *hashud*) concerning an issue may not act either as judge or witness concerning it."<sup>16</sup> In the limited

14 Babylonian Talmud *Bekhorot* 36a.

15 See the laws concerning the first-born animal in Numbers 18:15–18 and Deut 12:5–6.

16 This statement by Rabbi Meir provides a more general rule, and indeed is found stated as a "general principle" (*kelal*) in Mishnah *Bekhorot* 4, 10. Cf. Tosefta *Bekhorot* 3, 19, where the same principle is reported in the name of Rabbi Judah the Prince (late second century CE) in the context of the testimony of shepherds regarding blemishes in first-born animals.

context of the issue of trustworthiness of testimony regarding blemishes of first-born animals, this would indeed imply that a shepherd-priest, who may be suspect due to conflict of interest, is therefore automatically disqualified from testifying that a blemish occurred naturally. However, in the ensuing Talmudic discussion of this mishnah (*Bekhorot* 35b – 36a), a more general principle of Rabbi Meir is cited, namely: “An individual who is suspect concerning *one* area (of the Torah law) is considered to be suspect concerning *all* aspects of Torah law.”<sup>17</sup> It would follow, then, that the particular suspicion of priests to offer testimony regarding first-borns undermines their general credibility in *all* matters, including the general adjudication of disputes and matters of ritual purity, which, as mentioned above, is specifically ordained by the Torah to be the domain of the priests. In resolving this contradiction, the above distinction is suggested: Rabbi Meir’s statement regarding the shepherd-priests concerns only a *suspicion* (*hashasha*) of their credibility, this being enough to disallow their testimony concerning a blemish on a first-born animal in their charge (due to the potential conflict of interest). This suspicion is not strong enough, however, to establish a permanent status (= *hazakah*) of priests as generally unreliable, as might occur for a more fully founded presumption of wrong-doing.

In light of this parallel legal tradition, we may now understand the genesis of the Babylonian tradition of Rabbi Meir and Kidor. It may be assumed that Rabbi Meir’s particular habit of “reading” and interpreting private names, whether those of biblical characters or of his contemporaries, was known in the Babylonian tradition. It may also be possible that the laconic tradition concerning Rabbi Meir’s “warning” about the untrustworthiness of a man named Kidor (“he said to them: Be careful of him!” [= *habalachon*]), recorded in the Palestinian Talmud, was similarly transmitted in that tradition.<sup>18</sup> But in applying a particular “Babylonian” understanding of a distinction, as attested in a passage in the name of the same Rabbi Meir, between a particular suspicion of untrustworthiness and a general stigmatization of a group of individuals to the very sketchy tradition of Rabbi Meir and Kidor, the Babylonian story-teller created a narrative that would lead in a direction opposite to that of the later Palestinian development of the tale: Rabbi Meir is placed along with colleagues, not students, in a situation where he suspects Kidor and acts personally in accordance with this suspicion, but he does not, indeed cannot, impugn Kidor’s status publicly, even to his fellow travelers.

17 The principle is reported in the name of Rabbi Meir also in BT *Bekhorot* 30a, and is found in PT *Demai* 2, 2 (Venice ed., 22d) as an anonymous Tannaitic statement.

18 It is intriguing to consider the possibility that this rare Palestinian Aramaic phrase (*habalachon*) might have given rise to the (unrelated but phonetically similar) wordings found in the Babylonian tale: *hav lan kisan* (“Give us [back] our purses”) and the strange name of the innkeeper in the sequel, *Bala*.

The integration of legal insights in narrative settings, using them creatively in the production of a literary text, is attested widely in the aggadic narrative, which was created, for the large part, by the scholars of the *beit midrash* (academy) themselves and in the context of the social setting of the academy.<sup>19</sup> The comparison of the Babylonian tale of Rabbi Meir and Kidor to its Palestinian counterpart reveals an additional example of such use of legal norms in aggadic contexts. In this case, the limitation on the stigmatization of an individual who may be suspected of wrongdoing, as determined in the Talmudic discussion concerning Rabbi Meir's opinion in the case of the status of a first-born animal, is applied to the tale of Rabbi Meir's suspicion of Kidor (based solely on his name), with the conclusion that Rabbi Meir could not advertise his suspicion, even to his colleagues.

### The Transmission of the Babylonian Tale: Manuscript Versions

While the conflict between suspicion and stigmatization of individuals explains the motivation for the particular Babylonian version of the Kidor tale, it does not explain other surprising aspects of this tale that appear in the narrative as found in the printed version of the Talmud cited at the beginning of this paper. These include two major additional narrative elements. The first is the subplot relating Rabbi Meir's careful secret depositing of his money in the grave of the inn-keeper's father and the subsequent potential discovery of the hiding place through its revelation in a dream to the inn-keeper by his deceased father. The discovery is thwarted due to the insistence (presumably by all of the rabbis – but see below) that the dream has no significance. Nonetheless, Rabbi Meir takes no chances, keeps vigil during the entire Sabbath day next to the grave to insure that his money is safe, and immediately at the end of the Sabbath takes his money into his safekeeping. The second narrative element is the sequel to the story, where the rabbis reclaim their stolen purses from the innkeeper's wife by subterfuge, leading (inadvertently, one may assume) to her tragic murder by her husband. Not only are these subplots unusual and even jarring in their portrayal of behaviour seemingly unfitting for persons of refined ethics (an almost obsessive concern with personal property and a preclusion to subterfuge and dissembling, wedded to a lack of sensitivity regarding possible repercussions of their actions), but they would seem to be at odds with the more insightful and sensitive behaviour of Rabbi Meir, as we have discovered above, of the limits of the stigmatization of Kidor for his colleagues. In the

19 The literary use of *halakhic* norms in rabbinic *aggadic* tales has been studied and emphasized by Jonah Fraenkel; see idem, *Darkei Haaggadah vehamidrash*, Ramat Gan 1991, pp. 495 – 499; "The *Halakhic* Tale and the *Aggadic* Tale." In: *The Aggadic Narrative: Harmony of Form and Content*. Tel-Aviv 2001, pp. 220 – 235 [Hebr.]; and see also *op. cit.*, p. 248, 371 – 372.

context of these other elements, even Rabbi Meir's defensive statement to his colleagues may be seen in a decidedly negative light, in which we may interpret his statement as a hypocritical appeal to some dubious "care" for Kidor's personal status, as he cynically covers up for his selfish actions! Is such "care" evident in his subsequent dealings with this Kidor? Or is, perhaps, this entire tale a parody of rabbinic interpersonal ethics?

It so happens that our tale may be redeemed from such unappealing suggestions through a comparison of the version appearing in the printed editions with that of manuscripts of the text of the Babylonian Talmud known today.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this comparative study reveals that the story has gone through a fascinating series of stages in its development until it achieved the fuller and longest version appearing in the printed text of the Talmud, whereas the earliest version accords precisely and concisely with the major "turn" of the narrative described above, placing Rabbi Meir's statement of (real) concern for the stigmatization of Kidor as the central aspect of the story.

The number of extant textual witnesses to this passage in tractate *Yoma* is not insignificant: there are three early printed editions that are independent of each other, five complete manuscripts, fragmentary copies of three other manuscripts, besides two medieval anthologies and citations of significant parts of the text by medieval commentators. More important, however, is the fact that these include "text-types" from the three major centers of textual transmission of the Talmud during the medieval period: the Spanish or Sephardi transmission, the Franco-German and Italian, or "Ashkenazi" transmission, and the Yemenite tradition.<sup>21</sup>

20 The earliest and primary source detailing a comparison of the manuscript versions is that of Raphael Nathan Neta Rabinowicz, *Dikdukei Soferim, Yoma* (Munich 1872), pp. 277 – 279. Rabinowicz' notes, which include references to the medieval rabbinic corpus, are an important source of information and comment. Transcripts of the Talmudic manuscripts are available on-line from the Sol and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank of the Saul Lieberman Institute of Talmudic Research. These transcripts have been checked against microfilm copies of the manuscripts.

21 On the differentiation of the text types of the manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud based on linguistic features, see S. Friedman, "The Manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud: A Typology Based upon Orthographic and Linguistic Features." In: M. Bar-Asher (ed.), *Studies in the Hebrew and Jewish Languages Presented to Shelomo Morag*, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 163 – 190 [Hebr.]. Other methods of differentiation are by date and provenance, and by internal textual comparison. While the first two methods give important information and indications of the development and transmission of the Talmudic text, a careful comparison of the narration of the text as attested in the extant witnesses, as discussed here, can provide significant additional evidence of the direction and nature of the transmission. Although the Yemenite manuscripts were copied only during the seventeenth century and later, they often preserve important testimony of early Babylonian/Eastern text types. However, the Yemenite tradition, both written and oral, must be used judiciously. On the relationship of the Yemenite manuscript tradition in the context of the typology of Babylonian Talmudic manuscripts, see M. Morgenstern, *Studies in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Based upon Early Eastern Manu-*

The date of the composition of the European manuscripts cannot usually be determined precisely; they range from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. It is important to note, however, that the date of the production of a manuscript or citation does not necessarily provide the date of the particular wording of the version, since copyists and commentators may have copied from much earlier versions. Therefore, the determination of a development over time of the text can best be achieved through a critical comparison of each text with the others, relying on literary and stylistic phenomena.

The following table displays the English translations of five separate versions of the tale of Kidor as they appear in the major extant textual witnesses. (The versions and their sources are given in Appendix I to this paper.)<sup>22</sup>

The most immediate detail, and in some ways the most significant, is the complete absence in all the manuscript versions except version V of the description of the murder of the innkeeper's wife and the reference to the "latter water" (washing of the hands after the meal) and its repercussions. Version IV refers to the ruse of the rabbis in finding a "sign" through which they succeed in retrieving their stolen purses, but no mention is made there of the "latter water" or the murder. Regarding the incident leading up to the murder, a development of the theme of the story concerning the remedy for retrieval may be observed: While version I lacks mention of any sequel except for the determination that Rabbi Meir's colleagues, Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yossi, learned their lesson and therefore did not take lodgings in Bala's inn, version II reports the demand by these rabbis that Rabbi Meir provide them with a remedy and states that Rabbi Meir did so (did he take responsibility for his silence and repay them from his money, or did he somehow make sure that they received their money back from the innkeeper? we cannot know), and version III refers obliquely to the fact that they – all the rabbis together – "acted like in that event (some other incident)" and thus were able to retrieve their purses.<sup>23</sup> Version IV also refers to "another"

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*scripts*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011, chapter 2, pp. 7–53, and especially pp. 32–35.

- 22 In the translations I have changed the literal idioms of the Aramaic; thus the reverential third person used by Rabbi Meir's colleagues in addressing him has been changed to the second person, and the self-referential third person used by Kidor's father in the dream has been changed to the first person. Similarly, I have added the phrase "He said to him/them," omitted at times in the Aramaic narrative, for the sake of clarity.
- 23 The indication in the Talmudic narrative of "that [other] tale (or incident)" without incorporating the tale itself in the Talmudic text appears in several places: In *'Avoda Zara* 18b an apparently known tale concerning Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir, is alluded to; in *Sanhedrin* 44b there appears an allusion to "the tale concerning Ba'aya the tax-collector"; and in *Ta'anit* 8a a tale concerning "a rat and a well" is alluded to. In the cases where the tale is not specified in the Talmudic text, a version may be cited by Rashi; not always is Rashi's source known. A version of the tale concerning Ba'aya mentioned in BT *Sanhedrin* 44b and cited by Rashi appears in the Palestinian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 6, 9 (Ven. ed., 23c) and *Hagigah* 2, 2







(Continued)

Version I	Version II	Version III	Version IV	Version V
			The next day he said to R. Meir: I saw thus and such in a dream. He said to him: A dream on Friday night is insignificant.	The next day he said to R. Meir: I saw thus and such in a dream. He said to him: A dream on Friday night is insignificant.
			R. Meir went and watched over his purse the entire day; in the evening he brought his purse.	R. Meir went and watched over his purse the entire day; in the evening he took his purse and came.
The next day they said to him: Give us our purses. He said to them: There was no such thing.	The next day they said to him: Give us our purses. He said to them: There was no such thing.	The next day they said to him: Give us our purses. He said to them: There was no such thing.	The next day they said to him: Give us our purses. He said to them: There was no such thing.	The next day they said to him: Give us our purses. He said to them: There was no such thing.
They said to R. Meir: What is with you? He said to them: I didn't give him anything. They said to him: What [verse] did you expound?	They said to R. Meir: Why didn't you give him [your purse]? They said to him: What [verse] did you expound?	They said to R. Meir: Why didn't you give him your purse?	They said to R. Meir: Why didn't you give him your purse?	R. Meir said to them: Why didn't you investigate [the] name?
He said to them: "For a generation [ki dor] of perversion are they; children with no trust in them."	He said to them: Because he told me his name was Kidor, and I said, "For a generation [ki dor] of perversion are they; children with no trust in them."	He said to them: His name is Kidor, and it is written: "For a generation [ki dor] of perversion are they."	He said to them: His name is Kidor, and it is written: "For a generation [ki dor] of perversion are they."	

*(Continued)*

Version I	Version II	Version III	Version IV	Version V
They said to him: You should have told us! [He said to them:] Given that I suspected [him], [dare] I also impugn him?	They said to him: Why didn't you tell us? [He said to them:] Given that I suspected [him], [dare] I also impugn him?	They said to him: Why didn't you tell us? [He said to them:] Given that I suspected [him], [dare] I also impugn him?	They said to him: Why didn't you tell us? [He said to them:] Given that I suspected [him], [dare] I also impugn him?	They said to him: Why didn't you tell us? He said to them: Given that I suspected [him], [dare] I also impugn him?
	They said to him: You should provide us a remedy!	They said to him: You should provide us a remedy!		
	He provided (lit., "did") for them a remedy.	They did to him as in that other incident;	They did to him as in that other [incident]. They lured him and brought him into a tavern.	They lured him and brought him into a tavern; they gave him wine to drink.
		they retrieved their purses.	They saw lentils on his lip. They went and gave [that] sign to his wife, and took their purses and came.	They saw lentils on his lip. They went and gave [that] sign to his wife, and took their purses and came. He went and killed his wife. This is [in accordance with] what we have taught: The 'first water' caused one to eat pork; the 'latter water' killed a person.
From then on they too would investigate.	From then on they too would investigate.	From then on they too would investigate.	From then on they too would investigate a name.	From then on they too would investigate a name.

(Continued)

Version I	Version II	Version III	Version IV	Version V
They arrived at a certain inn. They said to him: What is your name? He said to them: Bala.	One day they were on the way [and] looked for an inn. They said to him: What is your name? He said to them: Bala.	They arrived at a certain inn. They asked him: What is your name? He said to them: Bala.	They arrived at a certain inn. They said to him: What is your name? He said to them: Bala.	When they arrived at a certain inn, they said to him: What is your name? He said to them: Bala.
They said: One may conclude that he is not virtuous, as it is written: "Then I said: To destruction [labalah] with adultery! They go on with the same fornications and hers!"	They said: [One may conclude that he is not virtuous, as it is written:] "Then I said: To destruction [labalah] with adultery!"	They did not enter, as it is written: "Then I said: To destruction [labalah] with adultery!"	They did not enter, as it is written: "Then I said: To destruction [labalah] with adultery!"	They did not enter, as it is written: "Then I said: To destruction [labalah] with adultery!"

(“that”) [incident], but what should have been the following word (*ma’aseh* = event, story) seems to have been mistakenly deleted due to its graphic similarity with the word at the beginning of the subsequent tale: *mashchu* = they lured him [into a tavern]. In this version, the redactor seems to use the “other incident” as an example of how these rabbis succeeded in retrieving their money; there is here evidence of a conflation of two separate narratives.<sup>24</sup> Finally, version V deletes mention of “another” narrative altogether, incorporating the story of the tavern meal into the present tale. Thus, a gradual development of the sequel of the narrative can be posited, from a report that some remedy was effected, to an indication that the remedy was “like that story” (some otherwise known tale), to an explicit detailing of the (“that”?) method of the remedy in version IV, and finally to the incorporation of the “tavern” narrative as a sequel to the tale, ending in the mention of the murder of the inn-keeper’s wife.

Versions IV and V differ from the others also in their inclusion of the other major addition to our narrative, the “graveyard” scene. Indeed, versions I, II, and III do not set the time of the incident as occurring on the Sabbath, but rather over one night’s stay (“the next day...”). It is only with the inclusion of the “excuse” that “Friday night dreams have no meaning” in versions IV and V, that we understand that the rabbis arrived at the inn on Friday and departed Sunday morning, necessitating Rabbi Meir’s Sabbath graveside vigil.<sup>25</sup> It is significant that in the manuscript witnesses, it is only with Rabbi Meir and not with his colleagues that the landlord discusses his dream, which Rabbi Meir then explains away. This makes more sense than the version in the printed edition, since the other rabbis would have no motive for the statement, whereas Rabbi Meir obviously is interested in having the landlord disregard the dream.

It may thus be assumed that the earliest version did not include either additional scene. Indeed, version I provides a basic narrative that leads to Rabbi Meir’s explanation of his actions as the culmination of the tale and emphasizes its centrality. The narrator tells us of Rabbi Meir’s decision not to give his purse to

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(77d), whereas the other tales are not found in the classical rabbinic literature but are cited by medieval commentators. It is difficult to decide if these citations accurately reflect an ancient tradition alluded to in the Talmudic text, or whether the tales cited by the commentators are later developments. Similarly here, the inclusion of the narrative of the sequel in versions IV and V would seem to be the result of a later interpolation into the Talmudic text; see below.

24 The end of the “tavern” incident in two text witnesses of version IV is: “they took their purses *and came* [or *brought*].” (MS Oxford does not have this additional reading.) The readings here are *ואתו* or *ואיתו*, which may be a remnant of the reading in version III: “they *brought* [= *איתו*] their purses”; this would indicate a conflation of two readings. (A similar reading appears in a fragment of this passage in the Cairo genizah, MS JTS Rab. 1623, folio 180v: *איתו*.)

25 This is explicitly explained by Rashi in his comment to the Talmudic text *ad loc.*, and is incorporated in the tale in the text of the *’Or Zaru’a* and in the Arabic translation of the tale found in *Hibur Yafeh mehayeshu’ah* (see Appendix II).

Kidor (but does not explain it!) and leaves the reader, along with his colleagues, in suspense concerning Rabbi Meir's motive until after the thieving denial of Kidor the following morning. They then learn of Rabbi Meir's "expounding" of Kidor's name,<sup>26</sup> to which they respond quite naturally, "You should have told us!" At this point, the narrator incorporates the principle that Rabbi Meir could not and should not have stigmatized Kidor. Finally, the colleagues show that they have learned their lesson and do not enter another inn, based on an "examination" of the innkeeper's name. This fits precisely with our suggestion above that the original Babylonian narrator has utilized the principle of a distinction between suspicion and stigmatization, attributed elsewhere in Talmudic tradition to Rabbi Meir, as the fulcrum and centerpiece of his narrative of Rabbi Meir's "exposition of names," providing a very different "solution" to the early rabbinic tradition of Rabbi Meir and Kidor. Rabbi Meir's understanding of Kidor's character, although in the end proven to be accurate, was only a "suspicion" and thus not established enough for a decrimal of Kidor as a thief to others. Learning is achieved through example and practice, not through Rabbi Meir's preaching. Thus, the sequel about the innkeeper Bala is an important part of the tale, providing a necessary complement to Rabbi Meir's refusal to share his insinuating information with his colleagues: While Rabbi Meir could not besmirch Kidor's name in public, his ability to correctly expound Scripture as a method of determining a person's character from his or her personal names could be, and was, learned and copied by others.<sup>27</sup>

## The "Other" Tradition and the "Latter Water"

Although we have posited that the sequel to the tale of Rabbi Meir and Kidor in versions IV and V, containing the method of the retrieval of the money, is an addition to the original narrative, its origin can also be traced back to early rabbinic narrative traditions. A statement appears in the Palestinian Talmud tractate of *Berakhot* (dealing, among other issues, with the benedictions before and after meals) concerning the dire consequences of omitting either the ritual washing of hands before a meal (*mayim rishonim*) or the similar washing of hands after a meal (*mayim aḥaronim*). The first is said to have caused some to

26 This technique is similar to that used in the Tanhuma narrative of Rabbi Meir and his students, where the narrator delays Rabbi Meir's explanation of his "exposition" of Kidor's name until the end of the narrative.

27 On the ability of the sages to find the spiritual source of even mundane matters in their reading and interpretation of Scripture as a recurrent theme in the rabbinic *aggadah*, see J. Fraenkel, "Bible Verses Quoted in Tales of the Sages." In: J. Heinemann and D. Noy (eds.), *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*. Jerusalem 1971, pp. 80 – 99.

unwittingly have eaten forbidden pork, while the latter was known to have led either to the divorce of a wife, or, as an alternate opinion, to the murder of three individuals (we are told nothing more).

אמר ר' יעקב בר אידו: על הראשונים נאכל בשר חזיר; [...] תני: מים שלפני המזון רשות, ושללאחר המזון חובה על השניים יצאה אשה מביתה. ויש אומ' שנהרגו עליה שלש נפשות.

It is taught: Water [for washing the hands] before the meal is optional, and [water for washing the hands] after the meal is obligatory. R. Yaakov b. Idi said: Due to the "first water" pork was eaten. Due to the "second water" a woman left her house; some say that three individuals were killed due to it.<sup>28</sup>

As in the laconic narrative of Rabbi Meir and Kidor in the Palestinian Talmud, here, too, in the later (Palestinian) Tanḥuma literature the statement reappears with accompanying stories exemplifying the two tragic circumstances.

כך שנו רבותינו: נטילת ידים לפני המזון רשות, לאחר המזון חובה. מעשה היה בשעת השמד בחנוני ישראל שהיה מבשל בשר טהור ובשר חזיר ומוכר, שלא ירגישו בו שהוא יהודי. וכך היה מנהגו: כל מי שנכנס לחנות שלו ואינו נוטל ידיו היה יודע שהוא עובד כוכבים ונותן לפניו בשר חזיר, וכל מי שהיה נוטל ידיו ומברך יודע שהוא יהודי ומאכילו בשר טהור. פעם אחת נכנס יהודי לאכול שם ולא נטל את ידיו. היה סבור שהוא עובד כוכבים, נתן לפניו בשר חזיר. אכל ולא בירך. בא לעשות עמו חשבון על הפת ועל הבשר (ובשר חזיר נמכר ביוקר). אמר לו: "יש לי עליך כך וכך מן בשר שאכלת, שהחתיכה שווה עשר מנה." אמר לו: "אתמול נתת אותה לי בשמונה, והיום אתה רוצה עשרה?" אמר לו: "זו של חזיר היא שאכלת." כיון אמר לו: "תפח!" שאמר לו כך עמדו לו שערתיו ונבהל ונפחד. אמר לו בצניעה: "יהודי אני ונתת לי בשר חזיר כשראיתי שאכלת בלא נטילת ידים ובלא ברכה הייתי סבור שאתה עובד כוכבים." מיכאן אמרו חכמים: !רוחך מים הראשונים האכילו בשר חזיר, מים אחרונים הרגו את הנפש.

מעשה באדם אחד שאכל קטנית ולא נטל ידיו. ירד לשוק וידיו מטונפות מן הקטנית. ראה אותו חבירו, הלך ואמר לאשתו: אמר לך בעליך סימן שאכל עכשיו קטנית; שגרי לו אותו טבעת. לאחר שעה בא בעלה, אמר לה: היכן הטבעת? אמרה לו: פלוגי בא בסימנין שלך ונתתיה לו. נתמלא חימה, עמד והרגה. לפיכך מי שאינו נוטל את ידיו אחר המזון כאילו הורג את הנפש.

Our teachers have taught the following: Washing the hands before the meal is optional, [and] after the meal is obligatory.

A tale [is told] concerning the time of *shemad* (religious persecution) about a Jewish storeowner who would cook *kosher* food and pork and sell [both] so that it would not be known that he was Jewish. And such was his custom: Anyone who would enter his shop and would not wash his hands [before the meal] – he knew that he was a gentile and would place in front of him pork; but anyone who would wash his hands [before eating bread at the beginning of the meal] and would say the blessing – he knew that he was a Jew and would give him *kosher* food. One time a Jew entered to eat and did not wash his hands. He surmised that he was a gentile and gave him pork. He ate and did not say the blessing [after the meal]. He came to reckon the bill for the bread and meat (and pork was more expensive). He [the owner] said to him: "Your bill comes to such-and-such for the meat, for the portion costs ten *manot*." He said to him: "Yesterday you gave it to me for eight [*manot*] and today you want ten?" He said to him: "This portion that you ate is pork." When he told him this his hair stood on end and he became alarmed and afraid.

28 PT *Berakhot* 8, 2 (Venice ed., 12a) and *Ḥalah* 2, 3 (58c).

He said to him secretly: "I am a Jew and you gave me pork?!" He said: "May you perish! When I saw that you ate without washing your hands and without a blessing I surmised that you were a gentile!" From this [incident] the Sages said: The "first water" caused one to eat pork; the "last water" killed someone.

A tale [is told] concerning a man who ate lentils and did not wash his hands [afterwards]. He went to the market with his hands soiled from the lentils. A fellow saw him and said to his wife: "Your husband sent a sign for you – he ate lentils today. Give me that ring." An hour later her husband came and told her: "Where is the ring?" She said to him: "So-and-so came with a sign from you, and I gave it to him." He became furious and killed her. Therefore, one who does not wash his hands after the meal is as if he killed a person.<sup>29</sup>

Both stories are about anonymous figures and do not mention sages. The tales contain very simple plots (similar to the plot concerning Kidor in the Tanḥuma tradition), and it may be assumed that both were composed as *exempla* to the abbreviated reference by R. Yaakov bar Idi (a Palestinian sage of the latter half of the third century) as transmitted in the Palestinian Talmud. And as in the case of the tradition of Rabbi Meir and Kidor, it is doubtful whether these narratives are identical to those referred in the Palestinian Talmud. Rather, it may be posited that the original traditions concerning the consequences of delinquency of washing of the hands before and after meals had not been transmitted accurately or not at all, and that these later narratives took their place or were somehow a development of the earlier traditions.

Nonetheless, a further trace of these traditions appears in the Babylonian Talmud, in statements by two *nehotai*,<sup>30</sup> scholars who made it their business to transmit Palestinian traditions, of law and lore, to the Babylonian circles of scholars. This is related in the tractate *Hulin* of the Babylonian Talmud:

כי אתא רב דימי אמר: מים ראשונים האכילו בשר חזיר; אחרונים הוציאו אשה מבעלה. כי אתא רבין אמר: מים אפקה, – ראשונים האכילו בשר נבלה; אחרונים הרגו את הנפש. אמ' רב נחמן בר יצחק: וסימניך: אתא רב דימי קטלה. – רבין

When Rav Dimi came (from the Land of Israel to Babylonia) he said: The "first water" caused pork to be eaten; the "last water" caused a woman to leave her husband. When Rabin came (from the Land of Israel to Babylonia) he said: The "first water" caused meat of a cadaver to be eaten; the "last water" caused a person to be killed. Rav Nahman b. Isaac said: A mnemonic sign [to remember the tradents named in this tradition] is, "Rav Dimi came and threw her out, [and] Rabin killed her."<sup>31</sup>

Rav Dimi and Rabin, two Babylonian *nehotai* of the first half of the fourth century, transmit what is essentially the same tradition found in the Palestinian Talmud in the name of the late third-century Palestinian sage, Rabbi Yaakov bar Idi. These tradi-

29 Midrash Tanḥuma *Balaq*, par. 15 (ed. Buber, par. 24, p. 146) = Numbers Rabbah 20, 21.

30 Lit., "descenders," since travel from the Land of Israel to Babylonia was considered a "descent."

31 BT *Hulin* 106a.

tions are corroborated by the statement of Rav Naḥman bar Isaac (of the mid-fourth century) who gave here, as was his wont in other instances, a mnemonic device for the correct transmission of the two parallel variants of the story by Rav Dimi and Ravin.<sup>32</sup> Nothing more is told of these tales in the Babylonian Talmud. It may be assumed that the narratives were not repeated in detail; otherwise one might have expected a more detailed transmission by the *nehotai*.

Thus, the very simple exemplifying tales found in the Midrash Tanḥuma may have been composed, as we suggested in the case of the Tanḥuma Kidor tradition, *ex post facto* as an attempt to flesh out the elliptic comment in the Palestinian Talmud noting the two unfortunate events, of the consumption of non-kosher food and divorce or death, resulting from delinquency regarding hand-washing before and after the meal. At some time during the later transmission of the text of the Babylonian Talmud, the second of these tales, concerning the “latter water,” was appended onto the entirely independent tale of Rabbi Meir and Kidor: first, presumably, as an outside reference to the type of method used by the rabbis in that tale to retrieve their money without detailing precisely how they may have gone about it (version III of the Kidor tale), and ultimately incorporated, in part (version IV) and in full (version V), as a sequel to the Kidor narrative, in the final case including the embarrassing result of the murder of the inn-keeper’s wife, transposed directly from the exemplifying tale as found in Midrash Tanḥuma.<sup>33</sup>

In this transmission process, we can differentiate between the style of the interpolation in versions II and III and the more elaborate development in versions IV and V. The narrator of version II was apparently bothered by the lack of responsibility ascribed to Rabbi Meir in the original version. Although not necessary for the main point of that version (indirect study of a person’s character without involving public defamation), the appeal of Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Yossi to Rabbi Meir for help in getting their money back ties up loose ends of the plot. Did these rabbis indeed lose their money? Did Rabbi Meir take any responsibility for his silence? At this point no specific knowledge of another tale

32 Rav Naḥman bar Isaac is known to have been particularly careful to preserve the exact names of the tradents of transmissions and was accustomed to creating various mnemonics for that purpose; see BT *Yebamot* 21a, *Ketubot* 6a, and elsewhere.

33 It may be that the two tales reported in the Tanḥuma were known and conflated in their later application to the sequel of the Kidor narrative in the Babylonian Talmud. The first Tanḥuma tale (exemplifying the consequences of not washing one’s hand before a meal) describes a man eating in a *ḥanut* (usually in earlier texts a tavern, but here a diner), whereas the second tale (exemplifying the consequences of not washing one’s hands after a meal) describes the use of the food eaten at home as a “sign” used in conversation with the man’s wife. In the sequel to the Kidor tale in versions IV and V, Kidor has eaten at home and not washed his hands, he is then lured into a *ḥanuta*, a tavern, and the leftover food on his face becomes the sign given to the wife for the retrieval of the money.



need be assumed. But by the time of version III, there is some “other incident” that is known and is cited obliquely as an example of how the money was retrieved; this may be the Tanḥuma narrative above. Version IV provides an application of that narrative to the present one; it may have originated as a marginal comment, precisely as in MS Munich 95 (see Appendix I). Only in version V did the marginal comment become a true sequel to the Babylonian tale. In the process, the context of the “other incident,” that of the “last water” that caused someone to get killed, was included here.

Once we consider versions IV and V as later amplifications to the sequel of the original tale in which narrators enjoy including the lurid details of another incident (including cunning observation, deception, winning lies, and vengeful murder) ultimately creating a new scene for the Kidor story, we can understand the inclusion in these versions of another scene in the tale itself. While the inclusion of the incident describing Rabbi Meir's hiding of his purse in the graveyard is unnecessary for the essence of the tale as we have described it above (where, as we have noted, the emphasis lies on Rabbi Meir's reticence to publicly stigmatize Kidor) and, in fact, portrays Rabbi Meir in a manner unbefitting the thrust of the original narrative, its inclusion reveals a narrator who is primarily interested in telling a compelling narrative using scenes of secret hiding places in graveyards and revelatory dreams from the grave whose real import is covered up by a cunning response, thus just barely thwarting Kidor's discovery of Rabbi Meir's own ruse. These poetics differ greatly from the spare narrative of the Talmud, where melodramatic scenes are not employed, and all elements of a tale are utilized for the major didactic purpose of the narrative.

### Conclusion: Early or Late Transmission?

In this study we have utilized the medieval manuscript traditions of the Babylonian Talmud, along with a comparison between Palestinian and Babylonian textual traditions, to trace the development of the motifs and narratives connected to the ancient method of “expounding names” attributed to Rabbi Meir and, specifically, the tradition concerning his suspicion of one named Kidor.<sup>34</sup> While the manuscript versions of the tractate are not numerous, it so happens that those that have survived portray different stages in the development of this narrative. As is the case with almost the entire rabbinic corpus, all manuscript

34 It is interesting to consider that the original kernel of the story utilizes a name which is similar to the Greek word *kudour*, meaning “glorious, esteemed.” Might Rabbi Meir's original insight be itself a pun on this word, where, using insights culled from the phonetics of the Hebrew Bible, he finds out that “Mr. Awesome” turns out to be “Mr. Flawsome”?

evidence derives from the medieval period; specifically, while the earliest version seems to have been preserved in the eastern Yemenite tradition, the accretions onto this version are attested in European manuscripts in both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic circles of transmission.<sup>35</sup> It is tempting to suggest that this later development of the Talmudic narrative took place specifically during the European transmission of the Talmud. However, due to equally serendipitous circumstances (detailed below in Appendix II), we can safely say that already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century **both** earlier and late traditions of the Kidor tale were known and transmitted in the very same geographic area, in the Ashkenazic communities of Worms and Mainz. On the one hand, the renowned Talmudic commentator Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac), living and studying in the Rhine valley communities of Mainz and Worms in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, cites parts of the text **appearing only in version V** in his commentary to *Yoma ad loc.*, and, in addition, in his commentary to the passage in the Babylonian Talmudic tractate of *Hulin* mentioning the repercussions of delinquency in using the “last water,” he refers specifically to the “tale of Kidor in the final chapter of tractate *Yoma*” as the tradition referred to by the phrase that “[due to] the latter water someone was killed.”<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, in an early commentary to *Hulin* attributed to Rabbenu Gershom but most probably composed by a student of his in the first part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>37</sup> it is the **Tanḥuma tradition** that is cited as an exemplification of the tradition (mentioned in the Talmud there) of one killed due to laxity in washing hands after the meal (the “latter water”). Had this commentator known of the appended tradition of the sequel to the Kidor story in tractate *Yoma* as attested in version V, he would have undoubtedly referred to it as an inner-textual Talmudic reference, as did Rashi, instead of appealing to the Tanḥuma tradition. Thus, it turns out that both earlier (before version V) and later versions of the Kidor tale in the Babylonian Talmud were already extant in 11<sup>th</sup> century German/French academies. It is probable, then, that the manuscripts that we have studied reflect more ancient stages of the transmission history of this tale, originating already in the Orient.<sup>38</sup>

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35 See Appendix I.

36 A variant of Version V, including the sequel and the “graveyard” scene, is also cited in the commentary of Rabbi Elyakim b. Meshulam to *Yoma*, composed in Mainz during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century work of Rabbi Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, *’Or Zaru’a*, who studied in the Rhineland and in Paris and was thus an heir to the earlier Ashkenazic traditions and texts of the Rhineland. See Appendix II.

37 Scholars have demonstrated that this commentary, while indeed an early Ashkenazic work, was not penned by Rabbenu Gershom, but rather by one of his students, perhaps Rabbi Eliezer ben Isaac (“Hagadol”), of the first part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. See the references in Appendix II.

38 See Friedman, “The Manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud” concerning the provenance of the London and Munich manuscripts of *Yoma*, and cf. Appendix I.

How these traditions were transmitted to the European centers and through which paths the transmissions traveled is not possible to determine. It is intriguing that in the space of less than one hundred years different traditions are known in early Ashkenaz. The study of these issues in the context of the later transmission history of the Talmudic text is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, it may be worthwhile to consider the types of narrative and their putative connections to various centers, as evidenced, at least partially, by the provenance of the manuscripts (see the details in Appendix I). I therefore attempt here a suggestion which at present cannot be more than speculative, but which may provide directions for future research in the transmission of Talmudic texts and the evolution of Talmudic *aggadah*.

We begin by summarizing our findings: Version I, which I consider to be the earliest and most original version, presents a concise tale that deals with a moral dilemma of Rabbi Meir regarding the question of sharing his intuition regarding the possibly untrustworthy character of Kidor. Like other such tales, we have seen how it may have evolved from an early Palestinian tradition (as found in the Palestinian Talmud), through the introduction of a separate Babylonian teaching concerning Rabbi Meir's attested distinction between the entertaining of a suspicion and the establishment of a permanent negative legal status.<sup>39</sup> The combination of these two elements leads to an interesting and original tale, which is preserved in the Yemenite manuscript. Version II enlarges this tale through consideration of a relatively minor element, the request for a "remedy" for Rabbi Meir's colleagues; this may be seen as a natural evolution of the narrative (possibly created during the early oral transmission of the Talmudic text). It is only with version III that reference is made, in the context of this "remedy," to another narrative, which we may tentatively identify with that found in Midrash Tanḥuma, a late (6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century) Palestinian midrashic work, known and transmitted in Byzantine Palestine and elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> This referenced tale becomes explicit in versions IV and V, where that narrative is spliced into the present one in such a way that in its final form there is no reference at all to any outside source. It is precisely in these versions that another scene is added to the narrative (the graveyard scene); both together provide a high degree of drama, although the ramifications of the actions of the rabbis do not sit comfortably with the ethical element indicated by the original tale.

39 The fact that this teaching is found in the Babylonian Talmud (in BT *Bekhorot* 36a) in a conversation recorded between Rav Papa and his teacher Abaye, Babylonian sages of the fourth century, provides a *terminus a quo* for the creation of the Kidor narrative in the Babylonian Talmud.

40 On the Palestinian Byzantine provenance of Midrash Tanḥuma and its later dissemination and evolution, see M. Bregman, *The Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu Literature*. New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2003.

As we have seen, this more evolved tradition is already cited by commentators of the second half of the eleventh century living in the Rhineland communities, while consideration of the codicological evidence<sup>41</sup> suggests that this later tradition is connected to Italy<sup>42</sup> as well as later Ashkenaz and Spain; the earlier versions are attested in both eastern (Yemenite) and early Ashkenazic and Spanish witnesses. It is therefore possible that versions IV and V (and perhaps already version III) reflect a “Palestinian” transmission of the Babylonian Talmud, reaching Ashkenaz through Italy,<sup>43</sup> and that precisely while “traveling” through a Palestinian milieu, new narrative material culled from the late Palestinian Midrash Tanḥuma was referred to and appended to the text, appearing perhaps initially as marginal emendations and additions in written documents, and only later included in the body of the text. It is then possible to suggest that this transmission history reflects a cultural milieu in which a different approach to hagiography and the ethical aspects of the Talmudic aggadic tales may be noticed, one that prizes plot and drama over ethical coherence.

To conclude, the present study has been able: 1) to trace early Palestinian traditions as they were both retold in later Palestinian texts, and in their journey eastward, as they were incorporated in the Babylonian Talmudic text; 2) to show how inter-textual legal traditions in the Babylonian Talmud influenced the creation of narrative in that work; and 3) to determine variations in narrative and poetics in the Talmudic tale as it developed in later transmissions. In following the lines of transmission of the traditions found in the intriguing tale of Rabbi Meir and Kidor, we have also been able to restore the inherent ethical quality of the early rabbinic tradition, which does not condone even implicit or indirect responsibility for dissembling and its dire consequences. Later transmitters of this tale, working in a different cultural milieu, were not as careful, however, and they are seen to in-

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41 See Appendix I.

42 The evidence of version V in the work of Rabbi Nissim ben Jacob, who lived in Kairouan (in present-day Tunisia) in the first half of the eleventh century (see Appendix II), may also be related to an Italian recension that was current in his community.

43 The existence of lines of transmission connecting Palestinian Jewish culture and traditions and the Italian and Ashkenazic Jewish cultural centers during the late Byzantine and early medieval periods has been posited, especially in the realms of liturgy, language, and custom, by several scholars, starting with S.J. Rappaport in the nineteenth century. See especially A. Grossman, “Ties Between Ashkenazi Jewry and the Jewry of Eretz Israel in the Eleventh Century.” *Shalem* 3 (1979), 57 – 92; idem, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz: Their Lives, Leadership and Works (900 – 1096)*. Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>2001, pp. 424 – 435, and the note on p. 448 [Hebr.]; I.M. Ta-Shma, *Early Franco-German Ritual and Custom*. Jerusalem 1999<sup>3</sup>, pp. 98 – 103 [Hebr.]. Of special interest is the determination, according to Grossman, that the connection between the Ashkenazic communities and the Babylonian center experienced a change during the mid-eleventh century. It is tempting to suggest that the different versions attested in the Rhineland community are somehow related to new lines of transmission of the Babylonian Talmud occurring during this century.

corporate dramatic and even lurid elements in order to embellish the original story, even as these come at the expense of both narrative and ethical coherence.

## Appendix I: The Manuscript Sources of the Narrative (Babylonian Talmud)

Listed here are the Aramaic texts of the versions of the Babylonian Talmudic narrative in *Yoma* 83b discussed in this paper, based largely on the transcriptions of the Sol and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank of the Saul Lieberman Institute of Talmudic Research and checked against the microfilms of the manuscripts; these include a list of the textual witnesses underlying each version. In most cases, the version is based on more than one textual witness, and what is presented is an eclectic text deriving from a comparison of the witnesses; significant variants and textual idiosyncracies are mentioned in the notes to each version.

The versions are not actually separate recensions of the text, and some of the variants between them are insignificant and arbitrary. Nonetheless, a progression in the development of the narrative can be discerned, as discussed in this paper. This development does not fit neatly with geographic and/or chronological considerations. This is mainly due to the wide dissemination of the text of the Talmud from early times, both in oral and written form, and also to the importance ascribed to the Talmudic text by those studying it, which led scribes and scholars alike to compile variant readings in the search for a “correct” text and to incorporate those readings, often sporadically, into their “new” text. That said, it is nonetheless significant that the earliest version appears in a Yemenite text, which often (but not always) preserves Eastern Babylonian readings.<sup>44</sup>

In my comments to each version I point out significant textual developments, tracing the changes more or less linearly from version I through version V. An important additional witness to the guided evolution of the narrative will be the marginal additions to the text of Munich codex Heb. 95 (Version III).

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<sup>44</sup> On the quality of the Yemenite transmission of the text of the Babylonian Talmud and its problems, see the discussion in Morgenstern, *Studies in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, chapter 2, pp. 7 – 53, and especially pp. 32 – 35.

## Version I

Jewish Theological Seminary Library, Rab. 218 (EMC 270) – Yemen, 17<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>45</sup>  
 Ḥolon, Judah Naḥum Collection, 259/19, folio 27 – Yemen, [?]<sup>46</sup>

ר' יהודה ור' מאיר ור' יוסי הוה קאזלי באורחא. מטא להווא אושפיזא.  
 אמרו ליה מה שמך. אמ' להו כידור.  
 ר' יהודה ור' יוסי אשלימו ליה כיסיהו; ר' מאיר לא אשלים ליה מידי.  
 למחר אמרו ליה הב לן כיסן. אמ' להו לא היו דברים מעולם.  
 אמרו ליה לר' מאיר מר מאי. אמ' להו אנא לא אשלימי מידי.  
 [אמרו ליה] מאי דרשית. אמ' להו "כי דור תהפוכות המה בנים לא אמן במ."  
 [אמרו ליה] איבעי ליה למר למימר לן. אמ' להו אימר דאמר אנא חששא אחזוקי נמי.  
 מיכאן ואילך אינהו נמי דייקי.  
 מטא להווא אושפיזא. אמרו ליה מה שמך. אמר להו בלא.  
 אמרו שמע מינה לא מעלי, דכת', "ואמר לבלה ניאפים, עתה יזנו תזנותיה והיא."

This word is properly translated “lodging,” or “inn.” The narrator naturally assumes that the inn is owned/managed by an innkeeper and therefore does not refer directly to him in the story (whether to Kidor at the beginning of the narrative or to Bala at its end).

In this version and in version II, the verse appears in full as it should, since the derivation of Kidor’s character is specifically from the latter half of the verse: “children in whom there is no trust.”

The final *aleph* of אנא serves also as the elided prepositional prefix to חששא, which should read אהששא = “concerning the suspicion.”

In this narrative, the derivation of Kidor’s character from Scripture is introduced initially by Rabbi Meir in his answer to his colleagues’ question, “What [verse] do you expound?” and appears nowhere else. Similarly, the verb דייקי appears only in the sequel, as a description of the “investigation” and care taken by the two rabbis.

45 This manuscript is classified by Shamma Friedman, based on its orthographic characteristics, as a member of the Yemenite typological group; see Friedman, “The Manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud”, p. 185.

46 The Ḥolon manuscript is fragmentary, the text readable only from the final two lines. Regarding these Yemenite manuscripts, see S. Morag, *Babylonian Aramaic: The Yemenite Tradition*, Jerusalem 1988 [Hebr.], p. 55 and p. 57 (= S. Morag, “Concerning the Background of the Tradition of Babylonian Aramaic of the Yemenite Community.” In: S. Morag and I. Ben-Ami (eds.), *Studies in Geniza and Sephardi Heritage Presented to Shelomo Dov Goitein*. Jerusalem 1981, pp. 150 – 152).

## Version II

Munich, Bavarian State Library, cod. Heb. 6 – Spain, 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>47</sup>

ר' מאיר ור' יהודה ור' יוסי הוו קאזלי באורחא. מוטו ההוא דוכתא; בעו אושפיזא.  
 אמרי ליה מאי שמך. אמ' להו כידור.  
 ר' יהודה ור' יוסי אשלימו ליה כיסיהו. ר' מאיר לא אשלים ליה; אמ', "כי דור תהפכות המה בנים לא אמן במ."  
 למחר אמרו ליה הב לן כיסן. אמ' להו לא היו דברים מעולם.  
 אמרו ליה לר' מאיר מר מאי טעמא לא אשלים ליה.  
 אמ' להו כיון דאמ' לי דכידור שמיה; אמינא "כי דור תהפכות המה בנים לא אמן במ."  
 אמרי ליה מאי טעמא לא אמ' לן מר. אמ' להו אימור דאמרי אנא מיחש ליה אחזוקי נמי לא.  
 גיעביד לן תקנתא. עבד להו תקנתא.  
 מכאן ואילך אינהו גמי הוו בדקי.  
 יומא חד הוו קאזלי באורחא; בעו אושפיזא.  
 אמרו ליה מה שמך. אמ' להו בלה.  
 [אמרו שמע מינה לא מעלי דכת'] "ואמ' לבלה גיאופים."

The inclusion of the Scriptural explanation is superfluous here; it is as an explanation of Rabbi Meir's motivation for not depositing his purse with Kidor. As mentioned in the paper, the narrative in version I more properly delays the discovery of Rabbi Meir's motivation to later in the plot. (See above, version I.)

– The word is roughly synonymous with the verb דייקי in version I.

– The words are omitted in the Munich manuscript due to a homœoteleuton (אמר... ואמ'). This explains the absence of the word 'דכת', which appears in all other texts, and provides further evidence of the closeness of version II to version I. (The approximate phrase also appears in Hebrew in the *editio princeps* [Venice], but it is not clear if this was copied from another text or was an independent explanatory addition.)

## Version III

Munich, Bavarian State Library, cod. Heb. 95 – Ashkenaz, 14<sup>th</sup> c.

Bazzano, Archivio Storico Comunale di Bazzano, ASCBA Fr. ebr. 19 – Spain, 13<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>48</sup>

47 This manuscript is classified by Shamma Friedman, based on its orthographical characteristics, as a member of the Spanish typological group; see Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

48 While the page, used as endpaper for an archival document from the sixteenth century, is almost undamaged, in the photograph (and transcript) of the manuscript only part of the text is visible, with the beginnings of the lines concealed by a fold in the sheet. Concerning this page and its place of origin in the Bazzano archives (Bazzano is a town midway between Modena and Bologna), see M. Perani, "Frammenti di manoscritti ebraici medievali nell'Archivio Storico Comunale di Bazzano (Bologna)," *La Bibliofilia* 96 (1994), p. 142. See also *idem*, "385 Printed Books of the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, Bound with Medieval Hebrew

Jewish Theological Seminary Library, Rab. 1623/2 (EMC 271), fol. 180v – Yemen, c. 16<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>49</sup>

ר' מאיר ור' יהודה ור' יוסי הוו קא אזלי באורחא. מטו להווא אושפיזא.  
 אמרו ליה מה שמך. אמ' להו כידור.  
 ור' יהודה ור' יוסי אשלימו ליה כיסיהון. ר' מאיר לא אשלים ליה כיסיה.  
 למחר אמרו ליה הב לן כיסן. אמ' להו לא היו דברים מעולם.  
 אמרו ליה לר' מאיר מאי טעמא לא אשלים ליה מר כיסיה.  
 אמ' להו כידור שמיה, וכת', "כי דור תהפוכות המה."  
 [אמרו ליה] מאי טעמא לא אמ' לן מר. אמר להו אימר דאמרי אנא למיחש ליה, אחזוקי מי אמרי.  
 ליעביד לן מר תקנתא. עבדו ליה כדהווא מעשה. אתיהו לכיסיהו.  
 מכאן ואילך אינהו נמי מבדקי  
 מטו להווא אושפיזא. אמרו ליה מה שמך. אמ' להו בלה.  
 לא עיילי, דכת', "ואמר להלה ניאופים."

The text is based mostly on the Munich manuscript, since the two other witnesses are only partially preserved (see the notes below). The Munich and Bazzano manuscripts contain additional marginal texts in a second hand; see the discussion below.

It is in this version that a narrated event is alluded to (כדהווא מעשה) but not specified in detail; only the result is mentioned: עבדו ליה = "they retrieved (lit., "brought"<sup>50</sup>) their purses." The phrase ליה אתיהו = "they did to him [i. e., Kidor]" is reminiscent of the similar phrase in version II: עבד להו (= "he [Rabbi Meir] did to them [his colleagues]"), but with a significant narrative difference.

The phrase is lexically different from that of versions I and II – לא עיילי – "They did not go in." The phrase is lexically different from that of versions I and II – לא מעלי – "He is not virtuous"), although the verbs are phonetically similar.

Manuscripts in the Estense Library in Modena." in: A. Lehnardt (ed.), *"Genizat Germania": Hebrew and Aramaic Binding Fragments from Germany in Context*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010, pp. 217 – 230; and see the references to the "Italian Geniza" above, note 1.

49 This manuscript is very fragmentary, and only a few lines are extant from the end of the narrative. However, happily the word מעשה has been preserved in this manuscript, and it is reasonably certain that these lines, which do **not** include the interpolated scene (found in versions IV and V) describing the way that the rabbis retrieved their money, are identical with the text in the Munich manuscript. On the manuscript, see Morag, *loc. cit.*, p. 55, n. 111.

50 On אתיהו as a variant for אייתיהו (with contraction of the diphthong ay); see M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, s.v. אר'י, Afel #2, p. 178, and cf. E. Y. Kutscher, "The Hermopolis Papyri." In: *idem, Hebrew and Aramaic Studies*. Jerusalem 1977, p. 57 and note 21; S. Morag, "Notes Concerning the Diphthongs in Babylonian Aramaic." In: M. Bar-Asher et al. (eds.), *Hebrew Language Studies Presented to Professor Zeev Ben-Hayyim*. Jerusalem 1983, p. 353 [Hebr.].



## Marginal Additions to Version III

The marginal additions in the Munich and Bazzano manuscripts are written in a second hand. Almost all of these additions appear in the texts of versions IV and V and clearly are culled from a manuscript of that type. The most important marginal addition in the context of this paper, however, appears precisely at the mention of “that incident,” and it relates succinctly narrative similar to that appearing in the Midrash Tanḥuma, but in a form different from that version and the version found in versions IV and V:

דההוא גברא דאפקי' כיסיה לחבריה. למחר א"ל הב לי כיסאי. א"ל לא היו דברי' מעול'. חזא טלפחי' אפומי', אזל לביתיה [צריך לומר: לדביתהו]; אמ' ליה [צריך לומר: לה] הב כיסא דאפקידי לבעליך, דהוא אמ' לי סימנא דהאי ליליא אכל טלפחין. ויהבה ליה. ועבדו ליה הכי, ואתיהו לכיסיהו.

[As in that incident] of that man who deposited his purse with his fellow. The following day he said to him: “Give me my purse.” He said to him: “There were no such things.” He saw lentils on his mouth. He went to his wife; he said to her: “Give me the purse that I deposited with your husband, for he told me a sign that this night he ate lentils.” And she gave it to him. And they did the same to him and retrieved (lit., “brought”) their purses.

This narrative cites “the other incident,” and ends with the statement “and so they did and retrieved their purses,” which repeats the similar phrase of the original manuscript. Here, then, we have a marginal specification of the “other narrative,” one depicting a ruse using a sign based on the food seen on the mouth of the thief as the basis for understanding how the rabbis procured the “remedy” and retrieved their money. This story has similarities to the tale found in the Midrash Tanḥuma, although no mention is made here of the “latter water” or of the murder of the wife. Moreover, in this narrative, the ruse is used in order to retrieve stolen money, as in the tale of Kidōr, and not, as in the Tanḥuma narrative, as a ruse by a thief. In a later marginal comment in MS Munich 95, however, the murder and the accompanying lesson are cited as a marginal addition. This, as is the case with the above additions, must have been culled from a text similar to version V.

## Version IV

London, British Library, Harley 5508 (Margoliouth cat. No. 400) – Italy [?], c. 12<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>51</sup>

51 The London manuscript is classified by S. Friedman, based on its orthographical characteristics, as a member of the “Mediterranean” typological group, which combines aspects of the other textual types, and may reflect a “Palestinian” transmission of the Babylonian Talmud; see Friedman, *loc. cit.*, p. 185, and M. Morgenstern, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Although the London manuscript has been classified as of Spanish provenance (see M. Krupp, “Manuscripts of the

R. Isaac b. Moshe, *'Or Zaru'a, Hilekhot Netilat Yadayim*, par. 72 (ed. Krotoschin 1862) – Ashkenaz, 13<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>52</sup>

ר' מאיר [ור' יהודה] ור' יוסי הוו קא אזלי באורחא. מטו לההוא אושפיזא.  
 ר' מאיר הוה דייק בשמא; ר' יהודה ור' יוסי לא הוו דייקי בשמא.  
 אמרו ליה מה שמך. א' להו כידור.  
 ר' יהודה ור' יוסי אשלימו ליה כסייהו. ר' מאיר לא אשלים ליה כסיה;  
 אזל וקבריה בקיברא דאביו דההוא גברא ברישא.  
 אתחזי ליה בחילמא, תא שקיל כיסא דמנח ליה ברישיה דההוא גברא.  
 למחר אמר ליה לר' מאיר הכי והכי חזאי בחילמא.  
 אמר ליה חילמא דבי שימשי בטילין אינון.  
 אזל ר' מאיר, נטריה לכיסיה כולי יומא. לאורתא אייתי לכיסיה.  
 למחר אמרו ליה הב לן כיסן. אמ' להו לא היו דברים מעולם.  
 אמרו ליה לר' מאיר מאי טעמא לא אשלים ליה מר כסיה.  
 אמר להו כידור שמיה, וכתוב, "כי דור תהפוכות המה".  
 [אמרו ליה] ומאי טעמא לא אמר לן מר. אמר להו אימור דאמרי אנא למיחש ליה אחזוקי מי אמרי.  
 עבדו ליה כי ההוא [מעשה]  
 משכחו ועיילו להחנותא; חזו טלפחי אשפמיה.  
 אזלו ויהבו סימנא לאיתתיה, ושקלוה לכיסיהו ואתו.  
 מיכאן ואילך אינהו נמי הוו דייקי בשמא.  
 מטו לההוא אושפיזא. אמרו ליה מה שמך. א' להו בלה.  
 לא עיילו, דכת', "ואמר לבלה ניאופים."

This statement is interpolated – ר' מאיר הוה דייק בשמא ר' יהודה ור' יוסי לא הוו דייקי בשמא here after the rabbis have arrived at Kidor's inn and provides the principle which guides Rabbi Meir in his interaction with Kidor. The phrase reappears at the end of the narrative: מכאן ואילך אינהו נמי הוו דייקי בשמא, providing a framework for the story and its central theme, exemplifying how Rabbi Meir, and later his colleagues, would "investigate names." This emphasis is not found in the earlier versions.

The interpolation of the incident of the graveyard and the dream. – לאורתא אייתי לכיסיה ... אזל וקבריה

The phrase is missing in the text of the *'Or Zaru'a*. Comparison with the text of version III makes it clear that the word מעשה should be added here; it was mistakenly omitted due to the graphic similarity with the following word משכחו.

Babylonian Talmud." In: S. Safrai (ed.), *The Literature of the Sages. First Part: Oral Tora, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates*. Assen et al.: van Gorcum et al., 1987 (Compendium Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2), p. 353, evidence points to its origin in Italy or Ashkenaz; see Friedman, *ibid.*, p. 179 and notes 111 and 112.

52 The text in the *'Or Zaru'a* has many affinities to that of MS London, but it also includes at the end of the narrative mention of the wife's murder and the law concerning the "first" and "last" water, missing in the London manuscript. However, the text of the *'Or Zaru'a* also includes explanatory material by the commentator (such as the specification that the deposit of the rabbis' purses into the hands of Kidor occurred on a Friday afternoon: במעלי יומא דשבתא).

ותאו ושקלוה לכיסיהו ("and they took their purses and came") – The addition of the final word, ותאו, which is peculiar (to where did they come?), is reminiscent of the phrase in version III, אתיהו לכיסיהו.

## Version V

Oxford University Bodleian Library, Opp. Add. fol. 23 (Neubauer catalogue, no. 366) – Spain, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>53</sup>

Spanish printed edition (Guadalajara), c. 1480

Constantinople printed edition, c. 1509

Venice printed edition, 1520

R. Jacob ibn Habib, *Ein Ya'akov, editio princeps*, Saloniki 1516

*Yalqut Shim'oni, Ha'azinu*, par. 985<sup>54</sup>

ר' מאיר ור' יהודה ור' יוסי הוו קא אזלי באורחא.  
 ר' מאיר הוה דייק בשמא; ר' יהודה ור' יוסי לא הוו דייקי בשמא.  
 כי מטו לההוא דוכתא, בעו אושפיזא. אמר ליה מה שמך. אמ' להו כידור.  
 אמר ר' מאיר שמע מינה אדם רשע הוא, דכתיב, "כי דור תהפוכות המה."  
 ר' יהודה ור' יוסי אשלימו ליה כיסייהו; ר' מאיר לא אשלים ליה כיסיהו.  
 אזל אותביה בכדא, וקבריה בקברא דאבוה דההוא גברא ברישיה.  
 איתחזי ליה בחילמא, תא שקיל כיסא דמנח ברישיה דההוא גברא.  
 למחר אתא לקמיה דר' מאיר; אמר ליה הכי איתחזי לי בחלמא.  
 אמר ליה חילמי דבי שמשו בטלין אינון.  
 אזל ר' מאיר ונטריה כולי יומא. לאורתא שקליה לכיסיהו ואתא.  
 למחר אמרו ליה הב לן כיסין. אמר להו לא היו דברים מעולם.  
 אמר להו ר' מאיר אמאי לא תבדקו בשמא.  
 אמרו ליה ואמאי לא אמרת לן מר.  
 אמר להו אימר דאמרי אנא חששא, אחזוקי מי אמרי.  
 משכוחו ואעיילוה לחנותא; אשקויה חמרא. חזו טלפחי אשפמיה.  
 אזלו ויהבו סימנא לדביתהו, ושקלוה לכיסיהו.  
 אזל איהו וקטלה לאיתתיה. היינו דתנן, מים ראשנים האכילו בשר חזיר; מים אחרונים הרגו את הנפש.  
 לבסוף הוו דייקי בשמא.  
 כי מטו לביתיה דגברא דשמיה בלה, לא עיילי; דכתיב, "ואמר לבלה נאופים."

The phrase appears here before the arrival at the inn (unlike version IV), and describes a general custom. As in version IV, the phrase is repeated at the end of the narrative, and thus the custom of "investigating a name" becomes the framework of the story.

<sup>53</sup> The tractates of the Babylonian Talmud in this manuscript have been copied from different manuscript traditions. Concerning the provenance of some of the tractates, and on the manuscript as a whole, see Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 179 – 180.

<sup>54</sup> The text of *Yalqut Shim'oni* is based on the edition of A. Hyman, Mossad Harav Kuk, Jerusalem 1991, *Devarim* (vol. 2), p. 644. The edition is based on a comparison of the Oxford manuscript and first printed editions. The text is closer in some passages to version IV.

אמר ר' מאיר שמע מינה אדם רשע הוא דכתיב כי דור תהפוכות המה ("Rabbi Meir said [to himself]: One may conclude that he is a wicked person, for it is written, etc.") – This is the only place where Rabbi Meir's "investigation of the name" of Kidor is made explicit. It is mentioned here parenthetically as an aside, and thus becomes a more incidental narrative element than in the previous versions. See below for variant readings (in the comment to *בשמה לא תבדקו* – אמר להו אמאי לא תבדקו בשמה).

ואתא ... אזל אותביה – The interpolation of the incident of the graveyard and the dream, as in version IV.

איתביה בכדא = "he [Rabbi Meir] placed it in a jar" – An addition to the narrative in version IV.

בטלין אינון ("they are insignificant") – This phrase appears in all the textual witnesses (including those of version IV) except the Venice *editio princeps*, where another similar phrase appears in its stead: *לית בהו מששא*, lit., "there is no substance to them." This phrase (which is common in the Babylonian Talmud; see *Berachot* 59a, *Yebamot* 102b, *Baba Qama* 70a) also appears in Rashi's commentary as a citation in a *lemma* at this place and may thus have been used as a correction to the Talmudic text by the editors of the Venice edition based on that commentary; it is possibly an early variant.

אמר להו ר' מאיר אמאי לא תבדקו בשמה ("R. Meir said to them: Why didn't you investigate the name?") – This question by Rabbi Meir to his colleagues is unique to version V and takes the place of the "discovery" of Rabbi Meir's intuition concerning Kidor's name appearing at this point in all other versions. Thus, the reader is expected to assume that the significance of the "investigation of the name" of Kidor and the particular Scriptural comment was immediately understood by Rabbi Meir's colleagues, who then ask him, "Why didn't you tell us?" This may be the reason that the version in *Ein Ya'akov* and the Spanish print add the reading: "Rabbi Meir said to them: One may conclude that he is a wicked person," so that the reader may know that the colleagues had already heard of Rabbi Meir's intuition and should have absorbed the lesson. Of course, this conflicts with the continuation of the narrative where the rabbis ask Rabbi Meir why he did not confide in them and is clearly an erroneous reading.

אשקויה חמרא ("they gave him wine to drink") – In most witnesses these words are included (but are missing in the Venice print and therefore do not appear in subsequent editions of the Talmud). This narrative element is fitting, since a *חנותא* in Babylonian Aramaic is a tavern for drinking.

חזו טלפחי אשפמיה – In some witnesses (MS Oxford 366, *Ein Ya'akov*, *Yalqut Shim'oni*, the Spanish early print) the word *אשפמיה* = "on his upper lip" appears as *בדיקניה* = "in his beard (or chin)."

## Summary

We can delineate the following progression in the evolution of the narrative:

Version I preserves the simplest plot, as we have discussed in this paper.

Version II is almost identical with version I except for the addition concerning the demand for a “remedy.” It cannot be determined that this remedy necessarily included a monetary compensation, and if so, from whom.

Version III transfers the action of Rabbi Meir in providing a remedy for his colleagues (עבדו להו תקנתא) into one involving (one may assume) all the rabbis and directed at Kidor: עבדו ליה כדהווא מעשה. The alluded incident allowed for the retrieval of the money, but this incident is not specified; it may refer to the story found in the Tanḥuma concerning the theft of the ring or a similar plot. In any case, the marginal addition in the Munich manuscript refers to such a similar plot and then adds as a resumptive repetition, “They [the rabbis] did thus to him [Kidor] and they retrieved their purses” – with the last words copying the words of the original manuscript version. A further marginal text supplies the additional incident concerning the wife-killing and its relation to “the last water,” applying it to the current narrative.

Version IV introduces several new elements, changing significantly the plot: 1) the additional scene depicting Rabbi Meir's disposal of his purse in the graveyard and Kidor's dream presupposes that the entire incident occurred over the Sabbath, whereas clearly in the earlier versions it occurred over a weekday night (in versions I – III the word למחר = “the next day” refers to the day directly after the one upon which the rabbis deposited their purses with Kidor); 2) the explanatory interpolation, noting that upon arriving at the inn Rabbi Meir “would [usually?] investigate the name” (as one might check out accommodations before signing in to a hotel) but the other rabbis would not do so, provides a framework for the entire narrative that is lacking in the previous versions: it is repeated at the end of the narrative, changing the focus of the tale from a provocative and new method “discovered” by Rabbi Meir through his Scriptural intuition into a portrayal of a “tried and true” method for checking out inn-keepers; 3) the description of the false report to Kidor's wife from their observation of his dirty mouth is now unambiguously attributed to the rabbis in their attempt to retrieve their money, but no mention is made of the wife's murder or of a delinquency in washing hands after a meal.

Version V continues and enlarges the changes found in version IV: the method of “the investigation of names” is mentioned at the beginning of the narrative without any connection to the incident of the inn (**before** the mention of the arrival of the rabbis at Kidor's inn), so that the discovery of Kidor's untrustworthy name is only an example of a more general useful travel custom. This is emphasized in the middle of the narrative when the first reaction to the

discovery of the theft is Rabbi Meir's admonishment to his colleagues: "Why didn't you investigate his name?", to which they can only lamely reply, "Why didn't **you** tell us [of your understanding of his name]?" The narrative indeed comes back to this issue when it concludes that "finally they [also] would investigate names." Indeed, the surprising revelation by Rabbi Meir to his colleagues of his intuition regarding Kidor's character as deduced from Scripture, which in all other versions is provided in his reply to the query by his colleagues how his money was saved from theft, is omitted at this point in version V, and is rather mentioned much earlier in the narrative, immediately when Kidor's name becomes known; it is thus only one example of an important and supposedly well-known custom. Finally and most significantly for the present study, the narrator omits any oblique reference to "another" incident, incorporating the "lentils" incident as part and parcel of the narrative of the rabbis, and explicitly includes the murder and the issue of the final hand-washing as a lesson to be learnt (specifically) from this story. The use of the term דתנן, = "as we have recited [in a Mishnah]", is surprising, since it is used in the Babylonian Talmud exclusively as a marker for the citation from the authoritative Mishnah of Rabbi Judah the Prince (where this statement does not appear).<sup>55</sup> Its erroneous use in the narrative is an additional indication of the spuriousness of this passage in the present context. Other idiosyncratic readings appear in some of the manuscripts of this version, such as the placing by Rabbi Meir of his purse in a jar before burying it, and the use of the word דביתהו for "his [Kidor's] wife" (a common term in Babylonian Aramaic), despite the use of the parallel term איתתיה in the following sentence.<sup>56</sup>

55 The error is corrected in the text of the 'Or Zaru'a as well as in the marginal addition in MS Munich 95 (דתניא, used for any Tannaitic statement), but all other textual witnesses to these versions have this term.

56 Certain wordings appear **only** in the Venice *editio princeps* and have thus become the common text of all subsequent editions of the Talmud. One obvious mistake is the use of the plural in describing Kidor's revelation of his dream and the interpretation (אמר להו = "he said to them" and אמרי ליה = "they said to him"). It makes no narrative sense that the dream is related to all the rabbis; the import is precisely that Kidor relates the dream to Rabbi Meir who cunningly (and falsely) denies the significance of the dream, since he alone fully understands its significance. (Indeed, in other witnesses of this version, including the Oxford manuscript, it explicitly states at this point: "He [Kidor] came before Rabbi Meir and said to him...") Other interpolations appear at the end of the narrative but are missing in all other textual witnesses and are the result of spurious textual emendations of the Venetian printers: לא עיילי [אמרי שמע מינה רשע הוא] – this is imprecise, since Bala is not a "wicked person" but a licentious one, as indicated by the verse cited from Ezekiel, כלומר, כדנא, לי עדינה, כמו 'אחרי בלותי היתה לי עדנה', – the comment explaining the linguistic usage in the verse is unnecessary. See also concerning the phrase משהו בהו, above.

## Appendix II: Evidence of Different Versions of the Tale in Early Ashkenazic Commentaries to the Babylonian Talmud

The early medieval commentator of the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Solomon b. Isaac ("Rashi"; lived in Mainz and Worms in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century), cites portions of the aggada of Kidor in the *lemmata* to his commentary to tractate *Yoma* 83b of the Babylonian Talmud. From these it can be determined that the text before Rashi was that of version V, as is evident in the following transcription:

ערב שבת היה והפקידו אצלו – בשמו של בעל הבית אם נאה אם כעור. אשלימו ליה כיסייהו – דייק בשמא מתוך שאדם במנוחה מהרהר ורואה חלומות, ומתכוון – של ערבי שבתות. לית בהו מששא – כיסם. דבי שמשי בעליך אמר – ראו עדשים על שפמו. יהבו סימנא לדביתהו – היה לדחותו שלא ילך ויטלנו. חזו טלפחי אשפמיה פונדק ישראל היה – שחתנו לנו כיסנו, וזה לך סימן שאכלתם היום עדשים. מים ראשונים האכילו בשר חזיר מוכר לישראל דברים המותרים ומאכילם ומוכר לגוים בשר חזיר מבושל. בא ישראל לפונדק וראהו שלא נטל זו היה אשתו של זה, שאלו נטל מים – ידיו כשהסב לאכול ונתן לפניו בשר חזיר. מים אחרונים הרגו את הנפש אחרונים דרך הנוטלים ידים לקנח את שפמם בידיים שוטפות ולא היו עדשי נראין.

Moreover, in his commentary to the passage from tractate *Hulin* 106a concerning the "first" and "last" water, which refers obliquely to the incidents of eating non-kosher food and murder, Rashi connects the reference to murder in the passage explicitly to the tale about Kidor in *Yoma*:

שהיה חנוני ישראל מוכר בשר שחוטא לישראל ומבשל ומאכילם, וכשהעובד כוכבים בא – האכילו בשר חזיר בחנותו מאכילו נבלות. ובא יהודי אחד לאכול ולא נטל ידיו, וכסבור זה שעובד כוכבים הוא, והאכילו בשר חזיר. בפרק בתרא דיומא בעובדא דכידור איכא למאן דאמר קטלה ואיכא – הוציאו אשה מבעלה והרגו את הנפש למאן דאמר לא קטלה אלא אפקה.

... Causes a woman to be divorced from her husband and killed a person – In the final chapter of *Yoma*, in the tale of Kidor, there are those who claim that he (Kidor) killed her and there are those who claim that he did not kill her but divorced her.

There is therefore no doubt that Rashi's text of *Yoma* was similar to version V where the "last water" incident is mentioned.<sup>57</sup> However, in the commentary to this same passage in *Hulin* by an earlier scholar of the same area, attributed to Rabbenu Gershom of Mainz,<sup>58</sup> the commentator refers to an incident similar to that in the Midrash Tanhuma<sup>59</sup> and does not refer to the Kidor tale:

57 Passages from version V are also cited by Rashi's older contemporary, R. Eliakim b. Meshulam Halevi, who was active during the latter half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in the same area, in his commentary to *Yoma*; see the edition of D. Genachowski, Jerusalem 1964, pp. 256 – 257, and cf. the introduction, p. 25. It is also noteworthy that the North African rabbinic scholar, Rabbenu Nissim b. Jacob, who lived and worked in Kairouan in the first half of the eleventh century, also cites elements of version V of the Kidor story in his work, written in Judeo-Arabic, *Hibur Yafeh Mehayeshu'a*; see the scholarly Hebrew translation by H.Z. Hirschberg, *Hibur Yafeh Mehayeshu'a*, Jerusalem 1954, ch. 23, pp. 63 – 64.

58 Scholars have determined that this commentary in its present form was not composed by

כלומר ההוא דישב לשלחן ולא נטל ידיו, וכסבור דעובד כוכבים הוה, – מים ראשונים האכילו בשר חזיר  
 דההוא דאפקיד כסא לאינתתיה, אכל עדשים ויצא – והביאו לפניו בשר חזיר. אחרונים הוציאו אשה מבעלה  
 לשוק בדלא נטל ידיו מים אחרונים. והיה רשע אחר שראה כשנתן הבעל הכיס לאשתו; ובא לאשה ואמר לה: תני  
 לי הכיס שנתן לך בעליך. אמרה לו: תן לי סימן. נתן לה שאכל עדשים. וכשבא לביתו וסיפרה לו הדברים  
 וגירשה.

... The “last water” caused a woman to be divorced from her husband – For [it is told that] someone deposited a purse [of money] with his wife, ate lentils and went out to the marketplace without washing his hands after the meal. There was a wicked person who saw the husband giving the purse to his wife and said to her: Give me the purse that your husband gave you. She said to him: Give me a sign. He gave her [a sign] that [her husband] ate lentils. And when he [the husband] came home and she told him these things he divorced her.

We may conclude that the *Yoma* text known to this commentator, who lived in the same geographic area and approximately at the same time as Rashi, did **not** include the addition of version V concerning the latter hand-washing. It may, however, been that of version IV (or earlier), which does not include a reference to the murder and does not connect the story to delinquency in hand-washing.

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Rabenu Gershom but rather by his students. The commentary to *Hulin* has been attributed to his student, Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol b. Isaac (Mainz, early 11<sup>th</sup> century); see A. Epstein, “Der Gerschom Meor ha-Golah zugeschriebene Talmud-Commentar.” *Festschrift M. Steinschneider*, Leipzig 1896, pp. 115 – 143, translated into Hebrew by Ruth Tveig, *Neti 'ot* 6 (1990), pp. 105 – 133; and cf. I. Ta-Shma, “Al Perush Rabenu Gershom Meor ha-Golah laTalmud.” *Kiryat Sefer* 53 (1978 – 1979), pp. 356 – 365, and especially concerning the commentary to *Hulin*, pp. 362 – 363. Since we noted above that R. Eliakim’s Talmudic text did include version V of the Kidor story, this provides additional proof that R. Eliakim, who was also a student of Rabben Gershom, was not responsible for the redaction of this commentary, as indeed was determined by Genachowski, Ta-Shema, and others (cf. the above references).

- 59 In the comment to the first part of the passage in *Hulin*, concerning the eating of pork, this commentator, as well as Rashi in his commentary, refers to the first story found in Midrash Tanḥuma. The Midrash Tanḥuma was well-known in Ashkenaz and cited often. Nonetheless, it is telling that Rashi refers to the Kidor story of *Yoma* 83b, and it can be expected that the commentator of the “Rabben Gershom” commentary would have done the same had his text of *Yoma* included the reference to the murder as in version V.



## Judaizing a Gentile Biblical Character through Fictive Biographical Reports: The Case of Bityah, Pharaoh's Daughter, Moses' Mother, according to Rabbinic Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

On several points, the text [Exod 2] is open for interpretation or is unclear [...] How long did it [the baby] stay there until the daughter of Pharaoh found it? Where did Pharaoh's daughter and her servants go and how and why was the baby fetched (Exod 2.5)? How could Pharaoh's daughter see that Moses was a Hebrew child (Exod 2.6)? It is mentioned that the child grew and that his mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2.10ab), but how long did Moses' mother nurse him and how old was Moses at that time? Why was it not possible for an Egyptian woman to nurse him (Exod 2.7c)? These are questions which readers in subsequent generations have tried to answer in their commentaries and rewritings.

Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten<sup>2</sup>

The biblical scene of the Finding of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:5 – 6) is frequently represented in didactic religious images in Jewish and Christian art, from frescoes to illuminated manuscripts to European art and Haggadot. The iconography of this scene raises the following issues: (1) Is Moses in an ark or a basket? (2) The type of hand gesture of Pharaoh's daughter; (3) Who enters the Nile to fetch Moses? (4) The number and the gender of the "handmaids"; (5) What role, if any, is assigned to the river Nile? (6) The presence or absence of Egyptian artifacts.

Rivka Ulmer<sup>3</sup>

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1 I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Günter Stemberger from the University of Vienna and the anonymous reviewers who read a draft of this paper for all of their interesting suggestions, as well as the editors of this volume for inviting me to participate in it. The subject of this paper was presented in the Symposium *Narratologie, Hermeneutik und Midrasch*, which took place in Vienna, 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011. This work was done under the auspices of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science Project *Lengua y literatura del Judaísmo Clásico: Rabínico y Medieval* (FFI2010 – 15005) and was written thanks to support from a contract with the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, "Ramón y Cajal Programme".

2 Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, "The Birth of Moses in Egypt according to the "Book of Jubilees" (Jub. 47.1 – 9)." In: Anthony Hilhorst and George H. van Kooten (eds.), *Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic. Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 43 – 65, at 47 – 48.

3 Rivka Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2009 (Studia Judaica 52), p. 297.

## Introduction

The Bible leaves room for imagination. This idea has been supported by the many questions raised about the biblical text over time, like those made by Jacques T.A.G. M. van Ruiten and Rivka Ulmer about Moses' infancy. Completing the blanks, filling voids, resolving inconsistencies, or harmonizing conflicting references in the Tanakh were tasks often undertaken in later interpretations. In the retellings of the biblical scenes, the characters taking part in them acquired fresh qualities or defects, new family relationships were established, and extraordinary data fleshed out their personality, physical appearance, and sometimes even their identity (giving a name, a new name or an additional one). These portrayals were particularly promoted in rabbinic literature through the Sages' outstanding ability to relate biblical texts to each other, to connect traditions, and to implement the hermeneutical resources at their disposal in order to illuminate some teaching, exemplify a specific interpretation, justify an opinion, or simply show off their erudition. But, at the same time, the influence of inherited ideas and motifs, like those cultivated in the Second Temple literature, may have combined with the questions already emerging about the biblical text itself. The same can be said about the Rabbis' contemporary issues and fears, especially those arising from their own context or their status as Jews, as noted by Joshua Levinson.

When cultures feel threatened, they begin to tell tales. Sometimes these are retellings that strengthen the dominant fictions and sometimes they are new or revised narratives. Through these narratives, the imagined community guards its borders and defines for itself who is inside, who is outside, and why. If the Bible and Second Temple literature contain various and conflicting models of identity (covenantal, biological, historical, territorial, tribal), in the period following the destruction of the Second Temple, this profusion was replaced by two dominant paradigms: the genealogical model of the sons of Jacob, and the covenantal model of Israel. According to the former paradigm, inside and outside are established according to biological descent; according to the latter, identity is established by the acceptance of a certain institutionalized belief-system.<sup>4</sup>

Both the literary and iconographic versions of the biblical episodes reveal that topics and characters related to Moses had special relevance during the times of the Second Temple and Classical Judaism and continued to garner attention long afterwards.<sup>5</sup> The focus of this paper is, indeed, to analyse one of the characters connected with Moses' babyhood from this point of view; i. e., to show that the Sages not only tried to respond to unresolved matters in the Tanakh scenes, but

<sup>4</sup> Joshua Levinson, "Bodies and Bo(a)rders: Emerging Fictions of Identity in Late Antiquity." *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000) pp. 343 – 372, at 344.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., the cases analysed by Ulmer (*Egyptian Cultural Icons*, pp. 312 – 317 and pp. 320 – 321): Poussin's and Sebastien Bourdon's "The Finding of Moses" and "The Finding of Moses" (c. 1570) by Veronese.

also tried to explain the behaviour of this character in light of the Rabbis' own concerns and values. Moreover, some of the features that formed this character's new image and roles appeared in different rabbinic traditions, both those already known from the Greco-Roman period as well as those appearing in a midrashic or talmudic text for the first time. The subject in question is the representation of Pharaoh's daughter, who rescued the infant Moses in the basket of reeds (Exod 2), as Bityah, a name mentioned in a genealogical list in the first book of Chronicles (4:18). From this identification, the rabbinic accounts offer precise biographical details that unite a gentile (Egyptian) woman with the Jewish world, "rationalizing" her close relationship with a Hebrew child. Therefore, in addition to the fact that her new profile clarifies some of the unanswered questions about Moses' life, and that she could have been a literary or religious paradigm of a link between the gentile sphere and the Jewish one, other reasons exist to explain the interest in Bityah, Pharaoh's daughter and Moses' mother: her characterization is a good example of how biographical reports are helpful tools for retelling and updating the Tanakh stories, and how a specific identity was persistently maintained – with a fair amount of agreement among the interpretations – in the extensive and multifaceted rabbinic literature. In other words, in spite of the diversity of the contexts and points of view of the Sages,<sup>6</sup> a certain continuity can be perceived concerning some features in the representations of Bityah.

The rabbinic works that allude to this character are, for the most part, aggadic *midrashim* and the Babylonian Talmud. Although it is extremely difficult to date these compositions with precision, since they mix old materials (even from pre-rabbinic times) with newer ones, these texts were probably redacted between the fourth and seventh-eighth centuries. However, references found in works by earlier authors (like Philo and Josephus) and in later rabbinic texts are essential for perceiving, despite the differences and variances in the sources, a continuity regarding the credentials of this biblical Pharaoh's daughter and her characterization in Classical Judaism. Bearing in mind the data in rabbinic sources, this article presents the main themes and ideas that helped shape the diverse facets of the character of Bityah. However, some introductory questions must be addressed first. Since the association of Exodus 2 with 1 Chronicles 4 supports a new rabbinic identity, the starting point of this study will be the information contained in the biblical text about Bityah and "Pharaoh's daughter" and the rabbinic explanations that relate the name and the epithet to baby Moses. Moreover, the versions from the Second Temple period regarding the episode where

6 In the words of Chaim Milikowsky: "Thus when I say I want to determine 'what the rabbis mean,' I refer only to what some rabbis mean." ("Midrash as Fiction and Midrash as History: What Did the Rabbis Mean?" In: Jo-Ann A. Brant, Charles W. Hendrick, and Chris Shea (eds.), *Ancient Fiction. The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2005, pp. 117 – 127, at 117).

Pharaoh's daughter saves Moses will be considered in order to weigh their influence or lack thereof on later traditions.

## Preliminary Matters

### a. Relating 1 Chr 4:17 – 18 to the Episode in Exod 2

The first step in clarifying the rabbinic argumentation on which the identification of Bityah as Moses' mother is sustained is to consider the biblical references to both this name and "Pharaoh's daughter," as well as the connection between them. The title "Pharaoh's daughter" appears in several verses, and from the context it seems that the appellation was applied to three distinct characters related to the people of Israel at different points in the biblical history. According to the Tanakh chronology, it is possible to distinguish among the "Pharaoh's daughter" who saved Moses from dying in the Nile (Exod 2:5.7 – 9), the wife of Mered (1 Chr 4:18), and the Egyptian princess who married King Solomon (1 Kgs 3:1; 9:24; 11:1; 2 Chr 8:11); i. e., a first "Pharaoh's daughter" during the period of enslavement in Egypt, a second from the pre-monarchical era<sup>7</sup>, and a third during the time of Israel's greatest splendour.<sup>8</sup>

Of these three women, only the name of the wife of Mered is known: she was called Bityah. The passage mentions her in the genealogical list of the descendents of Judah (1 Chr 4:1 – 23), which includes her husband (v. 18). According to this list, Mered was the son of Ezra (v. 17), somehow related to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh (v. 15),<sup>9</sup> and one of the two scouts who, conforming to Num 13 – 14, encouraged the people to go into the promised land and whom God rewarded for this. In addition to the complications implicit in the genealogical list, the verse that talks explicitly about Bityah and the verse before it contain some textual problems:<sup>10</sup>

7 Steiner has tried to prove that this "Pharaoh's daughter" was a historical character; cf. Richard C. Steiner, "*Bitiê-Yâ*, daughter of Pharaoh [1 Chr 4,19], and *Bint(i)-'Anat*, daughter of Ramesses II." *Biblica* 79/3 (1998), pp. 394 – 408.

8 For a study of the Hebrew Bible texts, cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Solomon and the Daughter of Pharaoh: Intermarriage, Conversion, and the Impurity of Women." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 16 – 17 (1984 – 1985), pp. 23 – 37; Tal Davidovich, "Emphasizing the Daughter of Pharaoh." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24/1 (2010), pp. 71 – 40.

9 According to Steiner's historical analysis, "the precise relationship between Ezra and Caleb is uncertain, but it is unlikely that Ezra is from the generation prior to Caleb, since he is listed later." (Steiner, "Daughter of Pharaoh", p. 402).

10 Scholars have taken an interest in the genealogy of Judah; cf. Gary N. Knoppers, "Inter-marriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120/1 (2001), pp. 15 – 30, at 17.

And the sons of Ezra: Jether, Mered, Ephraim, and Jalon. And she conceived Miriam, Shammai and Ishbah, the father of Eshtemoa. And his wife, *Hayehudiyyah* ('the Jewess') bore Jered, the father of Gedor, Heber, the father of Socho, and Jekuthiel, the father of Zanoah. And these are the sons of Bityah the daughter of Pharaoh, which Mered took. (1 Chr 4:17 – 18)

The simple comparison between the Masoretic version and the Septuagint shows important variations that have a direct impact on the interpretation of the passage. The verb in verse 17 – 'conceived' (וַתַּהַר) – refers only to a woman in the Masoretic Text, and from the context the easiest deduction leads to Bityah. However, in the Septuagint the subject of the sentence is a man: "Jether begot (ἐγέννησεν Ιεθερ)," says the text.<sup>11</sup> The second remarkable difference between them affects the appellative given to "his wife" at the beginning of verse 18: "the Jewess" according to the MT and "Adia" in the Septuagint. Despite the clear Egyptian origin of the princess, the term *yehudiyyah* seems to imply that Pharaoh's daughter is a Jewess. It is difficult to explain the nature of this character with so few and such confusing data. Indeed, there are some who have gone so far as to consider the possibility that these are two different women, one an Egyptian and the other a Jew.<sup>12</sup> In spite of the Septuagint reading and despite the suggestions given by scholars to explicate the Masoretic version, the Sages surely knew of a Hebrew text of this nature, especially considering that Bityah is also a "Pharaoh's daughter" in the rabbinic literature;<sup>13</sup> i. e., at least the name had already appeared somehow allied to *yehudiyyah* in the rabbinic versions.

However, in the rabbinic texts her name is much more than a mere mention in a genealogical list,<sup>14</sup> for the Rabbis identified her through their allegoric inter-

11 Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (eds.), *Septuaginta. Edition altera*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006, p. 760.

12 Note a on verse 18 of the pertinent section of the BHS (Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1997<sup>5</sup>) suggests: "And Mered had two wives: an Egyptian wife and a Jewish one." And cf. Knoppers, "The Genealogy of Judah", p. 21, n. 32.

13 Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College 1939, pp. 181 – 182; "Bithiah." In: Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica. Second Edition*. Vol. III. Detroit, Jerusalem: Thomson Gale, Keter Publishing House, 2007, p. 729; Miguel Pérez-Fernández and Concepción Castillo-Castillo, *Tradiciones populares judías y musulmanas: Adán, Abraham, Moisés*. Estella: Verbo Divino, 2009, pp. 141 – 144; Nyasha Junior, "Bithiah." In: *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*. Vol. IV. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012, p. 71.

14 Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews II: From Joseph to the Exodus*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1910, pp. 480 – 481; Margaret Jacobi, "Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh – Names which Became Legends." In: Sybil Sheridan (ed.), *Hear Our Voice. Women in the British Rabbinate*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998, pp. 109 – 119, at 109; Tamar Kadari, "Daughter of Pharaoh: Midrash and Aggadah." In: Paula Hyman (ed.), *Jewish Women. A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. url: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/daughter-of-pharaoh-midrash-and-aggadah>.

pretations of the genealogy with the two other daughters of Pharaoh who appear in the Bible: one, Moses' saviour and the other, Solomon's wife. Thus, these Egyptian princesses who are given so little definition in the biblical text, in Exodus and in Kings respectively, lose their anonymity in the Sages' interpretations. This does not mean that the idea of a "Pharaoh's daughter" married to someone named Mered from the tribe of Judah is dismissed, but rather that the character of Mered is also given a new identity, as will be seen below. As stated by Isaac Kalimi, "the various dissimilarities between Chronicles and the books of the Torah and Former Prophets provided excellent opportunity for midrashic expounding."<sup>15</sup>

The rabbinic texts develop the most distinctive facets of these two daughters of Pharaoh named Bityah. The description of the Bityah of Moses concurs with regard to her great gesture towards the future guide of Israel, and her characterization is appropriately positive. The Bityah of Solomon, on the other hand, is included among the women he married who followed foreign gods (1 Kgs 11:1) and is presented as an obstacle to the good relationship between the king (and even the people of Israel) and his God.<sup>16</sup> Although this study will focus only on the adoptive mother of Moses, it is important to recognise that the origin of the identification of Bityah with "Pharaoh's daughter" – whoever that character was – is found in 1 Chr 4:18.<sup>17</sup>

The rabbinic interpretation was not based on an implicit syllogism which simply turned all Egyptian princesses into Bityah. Rather they revealed the source of such identification. Leviticus Rabbah says: "R. Simon in the name of Joshua ben Levi and R. Hama, father of R. Hoshaiah, in the name of Rab [said]: The book of Chronicles was given only to be interpreted" (1:3).<sup>18</sup> 1 Chr 4:18 is then quoted, followed by an explanation in which Bityah is given the role, among others, of Moses' adoptive mother. The Babylonian Talmud also contains a similar assertion preceding the same verse: "R. Simeon ben Pazzi began [his exposition] with [the book] of Chronicles, saying: All your words are one<sup>19</sup> and we know how to interpret them" (ל

15 Isaac Kalimi, "Biblical Text in Rabbinic Context: The Book of Chronicles in the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash." In: Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (eds.), *Midrash and the Exegetical Mind. Proceedings of the 2008 and 2009 SBL Midrash Sessions*. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010 (Judaism in Context 10), pp. 21 – 39, at 28.

16 Cf. e.g. Jacobi, "Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh", p. 111; Lorena Miralles-Maciá, "Salomón, la hija del Faraón y la dedicación del Templo de Jerusalén. La versión de Levítico Rabbá 12,5." In: Alberto Quiroga (ed.), *Hierà kai lógoi. Estudios de literatura y de religión en la Antigüedad Tardía*. Zaragoza: Pórtico, 2011, pp. 13 – 31 (for Leviticus Rabbah 12:5; parallels and other citations).

17 Cf. Kalimi, "Biblical Text in Rabbinic Context", p. 30.

18 Mordecai Margulies (ed.), *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah. A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts and Genizah Fragments with Variants and Notes*. New York: The Maxwell Abbell Publication Fund, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993 (Orig. Publ.: Jerusalem, 1953 – 1960), pp. 7 – 8. The same assertion is transmitted in Ruth Rabbah 2:1.

19 i. e., all the names in the genealogical list in 1 Chr 4:18 refer to Moses.

ואנו יודעין לדורשן; דברייך אחד הם, bMegillah 13a). From this premise, it can be assumed that both the name Bityah and the other characters referred to in the verse were, indeed, given to “do *derash*.” In the words of Chaim Milikowsky:

Midrashic literature contains countless storyline additions to the biblical narrative, and the rabbis could and did demarcate between midrashic plot-additions whose function was to present God’s word and historical-literal reconstruction of past events. In our modern terms, then, these midrashic plot-additions are indeed fiction, though perhaps a better term, based upon Plato’s usage, would be “creative mythology.”<sup>20</sup>

#### b. Characterization of Pharaoh’s daughter as Moses’ mother

bSanhedrin 31b says that the Babylonian amora Mar Ukba was written to and addressed in Aramaic with the following greeting: “To him whose lustre is like that of the son of Bityah, shalom!” (לדזיו ליה כבר בתייה, שלום!). The passage does not offer more information in this regard, but in this context it clearly appears to have been a sign of respect. Behind this greeting lies a certain tradition. On the one hand, a person’s “lustre,” according to Qoh 8:1, is the reflection of his wisdom: “Who is like the wise person? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.” On the other hand, in 1 Chr 4:18 Bityah is Pharaoh’s daughter, whom the rabbinic interpretation identifies as the mother of Moses. Therefore, the manner in which Mar Ukba is greeted is far more than a mere gesture of recognising him as a Sage, since he is compared to the very character who received the Torah on Mount Sinai; in other words: “To him whose wisdom is like that of Moses, shalom!”

The importance of this passage lies in the fact that Bityah was recognised by the rabbi as a character who intervened in an episode from Moses’ infancy, thus acquiring the status of mother. Presumably, this is the result of reading Exod 2 in light of a tradition that, besides incorporating – purely – rabbinic details, in certain respects may even date back to the representations of “Pharaoh’s daughter” by Second Temple writers. This does not mean to say that the rabbinic characterization of this “Pharaoh’s daughter” clearly depends on Philo, Josephus or other related authors, but this literature could have nourished the rabbinic interpretations or, rather, shared materials.<sup>21</sup> In the Hellenistic retellings of the

20 Milikowsky, “Midrash as Fiction and History”, p. 127; cf. pp. 124 – 125 as well.

21 In the sense pointed out by Fraade: “Rather, I wish to highlight aspects of Second Temple scriptural interpretation that help to historically contextualize rabbinic midrash socially, culturally, and intellectually.” (Steven D. Fraade, *Legal Fictions. Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011 (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 147), p. 403). On the Hellenistic Jewish midrash, Siegert says: “There are... numerous re-written biblical stories and various com-



story, the authors contribute innovations to a plot well known to a Jewish audience, establishing a dialogue with the biblical tradition, but at the same time responding to a specific context, genre, or even a desire to delight the public with new versions of old tales:

Hellenistic Jews took great pleasure in retelling biblical tales. They did so with frequency, with variety, and with gusto. The practice took a multitude of forms: history, tragedy, epic, romance, exegesis, or indeed a combination and transformation of genres. Inventiveness was highly prized.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously, the purposes of the Judeo-Hellenistic writers and those of the rabbis were very different, if only because of the centuries and socio-political circumstances separating the two periods. However, it seems that in some way, the rabbis also tried to answer the same questions posed by the previous generations. Consequently, the information contained in some works from post-biblical times, where the Egyptian princess plays a special role in the development of the plot and her profile is better depicted, is important to consider.

In his *Exagoge*, Ezekiel the Tragedian, a Jewish author probably from the second century BCE with connections to the Alexandrian community,<sup>23</sup> presents a dramatic retelling of the story of Moses based on Exod 1 – 15. This adaptation, as it has come down to us, begins with a monologue from Moses, where he gives relevant first-person accounts of his childhood and youth.<sup>24</sup> Three features regarding “Pharaoh’s daughter” are very interesting in the context of this study, because they differ from the biblical text and agree with later interpretations, like those in some rabbinic accounts. (a) Ezekiel’s text is much more specific than the Bible about the princess’s intention in going to the Nile: “Pharaoh’s daughter” not only “went down to bathe in the river” (κατέβη δὲ ἡ θυγάτηρ Φαραω λούσασθαι ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν; LXX Exod 2:5), but she also “went down to cleanse her

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mentaries on and expansions of biblical texts, in Greek, that may help explain the emergence of Rabbinic midrash” (Folker Siegert, “Hellenistic Jewish Midrash, I: Beginnings.” In: Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Midrash*. Vol. I. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005, pp. 199 – 220, at 199).

22 Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greek and Romans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 182.

23 Although this seems to be the most accepted hypothesis about the date, there is no agreement among scholars, cf. Howard Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983, p. 6; R. G. Robertson, “Ezekiel the Tragedian. A New Translation and Introduction.” In: James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. II. London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1985, pp. 803 – 819, at 803 – 804; Jo-Ann A. Brant, “Mimesis and Dramatic Art in Ezekiel the Tragedian’s *Exagoge*.” In: Jo-Ann A. Brant et al., *Ancient Fiction*, pp. 129 – 147, at 130.

24 The verses were preserved by Clement of Alexandria (second-third cent. CE) in his *Stromata* (I.23) and Eusebius of Caesarea (third-fourth cent. CE) in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (IX.28; citing from Polyhistor).



youthful flesh with ablutions” (κατήλθε λουτροῖς χρῶτα φαιδρῶναι νεόν; Ezekiel v. 20).<sup>25</sup> Although other readings of the text are perfectly possible,<sup>26</sup> it seems that the dramatist saw some kind of ritual “washings” (λουτροῖς) in her bath. (b) In the next verse Ezekiel refers to Moses’ rescue in these terms: “Seeing me directly and holding me,<sup>27</sup> she took me up” (ἰδοῦσα δ’ εὐθὺς καὶ λαβοῦσ’ ἀνείτο). It is Pharaoh’s daughter alone who saves baby Moses instead of one of her slaves like in the biblical version (Exod 2:5).<sup>28</sup> This variation is also found in later representations of the scene, including allusions in some rabbinic texts and one of the images in the synagogue of Dura Europos.<sup>29</sup> (c) The third extraordinary detail has to do with Moses’ Egyptian lifestyle during his boyhood. Ezekiel says that the princess gave him everything he needed for a royal upbringing and education, literally “as if I were from her own womb” (ὥς ἀπὸ σπλάγγνων ἐὼν; v. 38), that is, as if she were Moses’ mother. The expression is more shocking and powerful than that of the Hebrew or Greek versions in Exod 2:10.

Another Jewish author, Artapanus, a historian from Alexandria at the turn of the third to the second century BCE,<sup>30</sup> offers his particular vision of Pharaoh’s daughter in *On the Jews*. He reports some biographical aspects of her in his fiction about Moses’ life.<sup>31</sup> (a) Artapanus refers to her as Merris, betrothed to a certain Chenephres, sovereign over the regions beyond Memphis. (b) Being “barren” (στεῖραν), she “adopted” (ὕποβαλέσθαι) a child of one of the Jews and called him Moses.<sup>32</sup> (c) The author even indicates the place of her inhumation, Meroë, a location named after her, where she was venerated no less than Isis.<sup>33</sup>

25 Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.28.20; Ken M. Penner and Ian W. Scott, *Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian (Fragments)*. Edition 1.1. No pages. In: Ian W. Scott, Ken M. Penner, and David M. Miller (eds.), *The Online Critical Pseudepigrapha*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2007. url: <http://ocp.tyndale.ca/exagoge-of-ezekiel-the-tragedian>.

26 Robertson (“Ezekiel the Tragedian”, p. 809) translates in the main text: “came down to bathe her limbs, as was her wont”, but in note k says: “came down to cleanse her flesh with washings.” Ulmer (*Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 305) collects both translations.

27 In the Jubilees version, the princess heard Moses’ crying (47:5b), differing from the biblical text; cf. van Ruiten, “The Birth of Moses”, p. 52.

28 For another variation from the biblical text cf. Josephus (*Antiquities* II 5 § 224), who says that the princess sent swimmers.

29 Joseph Gutmann, “Illustrated Midrash in the Dura Synagogue Painting: A New Dimension for the Study of Judaism.” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983) pp. 91 – 104, at 93 – 95; Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 305.

30 For the problems of dating and localization cf. J. J. Collins, “Artapanus.” In: Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. II, pp. 889 – 903, at 890 – 891; Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greek and Romans*, p. 201.

31 This rewriting was transmitted in one of the fragments collected by Eusebius, citing again from Polyhistor (*Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.27), and in a briefer parallel version by Clement (*Stromata* I.23). Cf. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greek and Romans*, pp. 204 – 206.

32 For the Greek text, *Praeparatio Evangelica* fragment 3.3; Ken M. Penner and Ian W. Scott, *Artapanus (Fragments)*. Edition 1.0. No pages. In: Ian W. Scott et al. (eds.), *The Online Critical Pseudepigrapha*. 2006. url: <http://ocp.tyndale.ca/artapanus-fragments>.

However, the most famous examples from the post-biblical period are probably the literary biographical reports of this Egyptian woman offered by Philo of Alexandria in his *Life of Moses* (I 4 – 5 § 12 – 19) and by Flavius Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (II 5 – 9 § 224 – 236).<sup>34</sup> Both Philo and Josephus incorporated new features in their portrayals of the princess, completing some of the gaps in the sparse biblical description. In these accounts, the influences of or the agreements with the former *opera* are evident in some aspects.

Philo introduces the princess, describing her personal and emotional circumstances. He says that Pharaoh had “a daughter ... beloved and only” (θυγάτηρ ... ἀγαπητή και μόνη), who, despite having been married for a long time, had not given birth (a motif found before in Artapanus) and wished to have a male child to inherit the kingdom. He also adds that this situation resulted in her being “ever downcast and groaning” (κατηφοῦσαν δὲ αἰεὶ καὶ στένουσαν), and that the very day that she was going to save Moses, she felt especially depressed, which is why she decided to go to the river, although this was not her custom.<sup>35</sup> Once there, she spotted the baby Moses “when she was about to engage in ablutions and lustrations” (λουτροῖς καὶ περιρραντηρίοις χρῆσθαι μέλλουσας). The expression is along the same lines as Ezekiel’s verse, and even the same substantive, λουτροῖς, is used. As an interpretative possibility, this phrase suggests that the princess was taking part in some kind of purification ritual.<sup>36</sup> The text continues to recreate Exod 2:6 as follows: when she saw Moses’ attributes, “her soul turned to a maternal feeling as for her own child” (ἤδη τῆς ψυχῆς τετραμμένης αὐτῇ πρὸς μητρῶον πάθος ὡς ἐπὶ γνησίῳ παιδί). Later, Philo recounts that, because of the great love she professed for him, she even pretended to be pregnant in order to pass him off as her biological son; so again the idea is similar to that in the *Exagoge*.

For his part, Josephus agrees with some aspects of Philo’s account: the princess’s lack of children and her desire to make Moses Pharaoh’s heir. The reference to the fake pregnancy does not appear in Josephus’ history; instead, he includes an episode at the royal court in which Pharaoh takes his Hebrew grandson on his

33 *Praeparatio Evangelica* fragment 3.15 – 16. About the connection between Isis and Merris, cf. Collins, “Artapanus”, p. 898 note e and 900 note γ.

34 Greek texts from the Loeb Classical Library edition: F. H. Colson (ed.), *Philo in Ten Volumes*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1959, vol. VI; H. St. J. Thackeray (ed.), *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities: Books I – IV*. Vol. IV. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1967.

35 In another tradition it is said that she went to the river as she had seen in a dream (Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 9:15).

36 Especially if we consider the meaning of the word περιρραντηρίοις: “utensil for besprinkling; vessels for lustral water” (Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement*. Revised and Augmented Throughout by H. S. Jones. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 1385).

lap and playfully puts the crown on his head.<sup>37</sup> The child takes it off, throws it to the ground and steps on it, which the scribe interprets as a bad omen. Before Pharaoh can retaliate, the princess manages to save Moses a second time. One of the most surprising pieces of information that Josephus includes, as in Artapanus' work, is the princess's name.<sup>38</sup> However, in this case she is referred to as Thermutis, a name very similar to that given her in the *Book of Jubilees* (47:5), where Pharaoh's daughter is called Tharmuth. Indeed, in *Jubilees*, contrary to their anonymity in the biblical version (with Moses as the only exception), the characters are identified by name, and not only by family ties.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is significant that in three of the post-biblical rewritings of Moses' story, Pharaoh's daughter has a proper name. The post-biblical authors were clearly concerned about sketching a more delineated profile of the princess.

The attribution of the authorship of Moses' name to Pharaoh's daughter is also found in the biblical text. Using a popular Hebrew etymological derivation, Exodus explains that Pharaoh's daughter "called his name Moses (*Moshe*), and she said: Because I drew him out (*meshitihu*) of the water" (2:10). However, Philo and Josephus prefer an Egyptian origin of the name over the Hebrew one. According to Philo, "Because he had been taken from the water, she gave him the name Moses derived from its etymology (ἐτύμως), for the Egyptians call water by the name of *moy*" (τὸ γὰρ ὕδωρ μὴν ὀνομάζουσιν Αἰγύπτιοι). Josephus goes even further in understanding it as a compound name, "For the Egyptians call water *moy* and *éses* the saved ones" (τὸ γὰρ ὕδωρ μὴν Αἰγύπτιοι καλοῦσιν, ἐσῆς δὲ τοὺς σωθέντας). The authors seem to have made the princess very aware of the need to preserve Moses' identity in order to successfully pass him off as her own child.

This modification actually better fits the maternal relationship she has established with an obviously Hebrew baby, as she states: "He is one of the children of the Hebrews" (Exod 2:6).<sup>40</sup> It seems almost certain that these and subsequent

37 The story of the crown appears later in the rabbinic literature (Exodus Rabbah 1:26).

38 Cf. Louis H. Feldman, *Flavius Josephus. Translation and Commentary. Vol. III: Judean Antiquities I – IV*. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000, p. 195, n. 625; Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 308; Pérez-Fernández and Castillo-Castillo, *Tradiciones populares*, pp. 142 – 143; Kurt Schubert, "Jewish Art in Late Antiquity: an Example of Jewish Identity." In: Katrin Kogman-Appel and Mati Meyer (eds.), *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elisabeth) Revel-Neher*. Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 39 – 51; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 528, and idem, *A Walk Through Jubilees. Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of its Creation*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012 (Supplements of the Journal for the Study of Judaism 156), p. 193.

39 Moses' father is called Amram, Moses' mother Jochebed, Miriam is his sister, according to the genealogy in Exod 6:14 – 25; Num 26:59. But the name of Pharaoh's daughter, Tharmuth, is not found in the biblical text; cf. van Ruiten, "The Birth of Moses", pp. 53 – 54.

40 According to some traditions, he was circumcised (Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 9:15; bSotah 12; Exodus Rabbah 1:20; etc.).

generations tried to find a good reason to explain what made her rescue and adopt a Hebrew child against her father's decree of casting the sons of the Hebrews into the Nile (Exod 1:22). Was it only because of her compassion (Exod 2:6), because she was "barren" (Artapanus), or thanks to Moses' beauty (*Antiquities* II 5 § 224)? What motivated her to do it?

When composing their retellings of the story, the post-biblical authors may have asked themselves these and other questions about the princess, according to what is deduced from the preceding accounts: Who was she? Why did she go to the river? Did her bath represent some kind of purification practice? Why did she save a Hebrew child? What was her motivation for such behaviour? Was her action part of God's plan? How did she manage it to pass him off as her own child? What was the exact affiliation between them?

### **Bityah, Pharaoh's Daughter and Moses' Mother in Rabbinic Tradition**

The previous sections have shown, first of all, how Pharaoh's daughter from Exod 2 was identified as Bityah in rabbinic literature, and secondly how, in their retelling of Moses' story, the Second Temple period authors responded to some of the unclear details about her in the biblical text. References to this character in rabbinic traditions provide other details. From the Sages' accounts, it is possible to group the information according to the following important aspects of her profile: a) Bityah as Moses' adoptive or biological mother, b) Bityah as Mered's wife, c) Bityah as a proselyte, d) Bityah as Moses' rescuer, e) Bityah's illness, f) Bityah, the firstborn, and g) Bityah's reward. The traditions around these matters are not transmitted in any particular rewriting of the story – as in the case of Ezekiel, Artapanus, Philo and Josephus – but the materials consist of scattered mentions in the rabbinic texts from diverse periods, authors and even origins. Thus, there is no official rabbinic adaptation of Bityah's life story, only rabbinic versions of some facets of her profile. However, despite the variations and amplifications, a certain continuity – besides her name – can be detected regarding some of the motifs distributed among different sources that may have had precedents in earlier periods and parallels in other forms of representation such as artistic ones.

## a. Bityah, Moses' adoptive or biological mother?

One of the most controversial issues in these fictional interpretations of the story of Moses<sup>41</sup> concerns the exact relationship between him as a baby and Bityah. Although in the biblical episode Pharaoh's daughter assumes the maternal role of an adoptive mother, the Rabbis went further, supporting their opinions with the information in 1 Chronicles. The very difficulty in identifying the names mentioned in 1 Chr 4:18 gave free rein to the rabbis when it came to determining whether "the Jewess" and Bityah were really the same person (as in the MT version) or whether, on the contrary, they were two different women.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the Sages did not always share the same opinion on this matter, since "the Jewess" was Jochebed or Bityah depending upon the accounts. For example, in the case of Leviticus Rabbah, seen above, after the assertion of R. Simon and R. Hama about the goal of the book of Chronicles ("to be interpreted"), there is an explanation with respect to who the characters in the chronistic list are. Regarding the "Jewess" it is said:

*And his wife Hayehudiyyah* (1 Chr 4:18) [refers to] Jochebed. Was she really of the tribe of Judah? But, was she not of the tribe of Levi? Why then was her name called 'the Jewess' (*hayehudiyyah*)? Because she established Jews (*yehudim*) in the world. (Leviticus Rabbah 1:3; ed. Margulies, p. 8)

While in Exod 2:1 the character who plays the role of Moses' mother is anonymous,<sup>43</sup> in other biblical passages she is called Jochebed, in accordance with the name that appears in the genealogy in Exod 6 (v. 20) and in the census of the Levites in Num 26 (v. 59). Based on this tradition,<sup>44</sup> the amoraic interpretation accepts her as "the Jewess" in 1 Chr 4:18. The reference to "Jews" here is not to the tribe of Judah nor to the inhabitants of Judea, but to Jews by religion. Therefore, although she was from the tribe of Levi (Exod 2:1; Num 26:59), she is considered the mother of these people.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, it is inferred from the context that Bityah was the daughter of Pharaoh in Exod 2. And at the end of the discussion of this verse, other *amora'im*, R. Tanḥuma in the name of R. Joshua ben Qarḥah and R. Menahmiah in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi, remark in the commentary on "These are the sons of Bityah" that she treated the child as her own son and, for that reason, Moses bore the name she gave him:

41 "Fictive" in the sense used by Milikowsky ("Midrash as Fiction and History", p. 127); cf. above.

42 Already the LXX version distinguished between two different characters in this genealogical list.

43 The verse says: "A man of the house of Levi went and took [to wife] a daughter of the house of Levi."

44 Developed in the Second Temple writings, like in Jubilees, as seen above.

45 Cf. "Jochebed. In the Aggadāh." In: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. XI, pp. 360 – 361.

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said to Moses: By your life, of all the names you have been called, I shall call you by just the name which Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, did: *She called his name Moses* (Exod 2:10). [Therefore,] *Yhwh called unto Moses.*" (Leviticus Rabbah 1:3; ed. Margulies, pp. 12 – 13).<sup>46</sup>

This opinion, in which two different people play a maternal role for Moses, is nothing new in Judaism. The tradition may go back to the Second Temple period retellings of the story, as seen above. Neither is the role of Pharaoh's daughter as Moses' tutor an innovation. However, the Rabbis' identification of Pharaoh's daughter with Bityah is novel, as is the divine preference of her over the biological mother, based on what is said about the child's name.

Within this same context of interpreting the verse, two passages from the Babylonian Talmud take on the question of the kinship between Moses and Pharaoh's daughter. In the first one, bSanhedrin 19b, the Palestinian amora R. Johanan tries to clarify the confusion about the distribution of roles between the two women. When explaining the verb "to bear", he says:

But was he (Moses) indeed born of Bityah and not rather of Jochebed? But Jochebed 'bore' (ילדה), and Bityah 'reared' him (גידלה), and that is why he is known by his name (Moses). (bSanh 19b)

The talmudic text agrees with the midrashic one but focusses on the specific tie with Moses. According to bSanhedrin, Jochebed was his biological mother, but Bityah raised him, acting as his official guardian and acquiring the obligations and rights of a biological mother. However, in contrast to the interpretation in the midrash, the second talmudic text, bMegillah 13a, presents the opinion of R. Simeon ben Pazzi, who refers *hayehudiyyah* to Bityah and not to Jochebed, because of the princess's relationship with Moses:

*Bore?* But she only brought him up!<sup>47</sup> This tells you that if anyone 'brings up' (המגדל) an orphan boy or girl in his house, the Scripture accounts it<sup>48</sup> as if he 'had begotten' him (כאילו ילדו). (bMegillah 13a)

Accordingly, beyond the identification of Bityah as "the Jewess", the text raises the Egyptian princess to the status of Moses' natural mother. In this respect, the tie established between Pharaoh's daughter and the Hebrew child in the rabbinic interpretation mirrors the way in which the Second Temple authors read Exod 2.

46 The later parallel in Exodus Rabbah 1:26 adds that it is precisely by this name that she is known "throughout the Torah" (cf. also Kallah Rabbati 3:23). Targum 1Chr 4:18 says that Bityah gave Moses all the names mentioned in the verse. According to Exodus Rabbah 1:18, "His astrologers had told him: The mother of Israel's saviour is already pregnant with him, but we do not know whether he is an Israelite or an Egyptian."

47 In Aramaic.

48 Lit.: "Raises it."

Far from settling the issue, the matter about the mother of Moses continued to be a point of interest in later rabbinic tradition. In fact, one final passage from a midrash merits attention. The commentary in Exodus Rabbah 1:30 on Exod 2:14 (“Who made you a prince and a judge over us?”) once again takes up the topic of Moses’ mother.<sup>49</sup> The verse belongs to the episode when Moses intervenes in a quarrel between two Hebrews. In the biblical story, the guilty party simply questions his authority to mediate the dispute. However, in the midrash, different reasons are given to explain why he is not qualified to judge this event: his age, his status, and his origins.<sup>50</sup> Turning to the third of these arguments, “the Sages said that they said to him: Are you not the son of Jochebed? Why do they call you the son of Bityah?” According to these words, the Hebrews know that Moses is the son of a Hebrew woman, despite the fact that he is a member of the Egyptian royalty. In their eyes, he cannot claim to assert his authority based on family ties. In any case, not even this text denies the existence of a close maternal relationship between Moses and Pharaoh’s daughter, since the Hebrews themselves are aware that he is known and recognised as “the son of Bityah” in the rabbinic version of this incident.

#### b. Bityah, Mered-Caleb’s wife

In accordance with one rabbinic tradition, Bityah enjoyed another special connection to the people of Israel, thanks to her relationship to the Mered whom Bityah married according to 1 Chr 4:18 (“These are the sons of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered took”). Once again, this conception is supported by the premise that “the book of Chronicles was given only to be interpreted” (Leviticus Rabbah 1:3). In this respect, the name of Mered is given a new identity. It no longer refers to a descendent of Caleb, but rather *mered* is considered an appellative for Caleb himself, a character from the desert period. Such tradition is transmitted both in a Palestinian text (Leviticus Rabbah 1:3) and in the Babylonian versions in the Talmud (bMegillah 13a and bSanhedrin 19b), but in all the cases, the explanation is attributed to Palestinian amoraic authorship. In these sources, Mered is understood to be a participle of the verb *mrd*,

49 Avigdor Shinan (ed.), *Midrash Shemot Rabbah, Chapters I – XIV. A Critical Edition Based on a Jerusalem Manuscript with Variants, Commentary and Introduction*. Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1984, p. 91.

50 R. Judah states that they argued that he was too young (the age of twenty is mentioned). But, according to R. Nehemiah’s opinion, it appears that the reason is that, despite having already turned forty (the age at which intellectual maturity is reached), he was not qualified to fill this role (perhaps because his status was below that of the Hebrews?).



'rebel', and from this reading, rabbinic commentary links Caleb to Bityah. Attributing the interpretation to R. Abba b. Kahana, the midrashic version says:<sup>51</sup>

This 'rebelled' (*marad*) against the counsel of the spies, and she (Bityah) 'rebelled' (*mardah*) against the counsel of her father (to murder all the children of the Israelites).<sup>52</sup> Let him who 'rebelled' (*mored*) come to take in marriage her who 'rebelled' (*moredet*)!<sup>53</sup> (Leviticus Rabbah 1:3; ed. Margulies, pp. 10 – 11)

Caleb was one of the scouts sent by Moses to inspect Canaan (Num 13). Going against the general opinion of this group, who think that moving into the land is dangerous, Caleb encourages the people to go into it and conquer it (Num 13:30). Having fulfilled the divine will, he is rewarded by God, who assures him that he and his descendents will have their share of the promised land (Num 14:24.30). Caleb, therefore, belongs to the desert generation and thus fits the rabbinic construction of Bityah as far as the chronological setting is concerned. According to rabbinic reasoning, Caleb rebelled against the counsel of the spies,<sup>54</sup> and Bityah rebelled against her father's order to murder the Hebrew children, both of them fulfilling the divine plan.

The version in bMegillah presents another explanation for her rebellion. The text specifies that Bityah "rebelled against the idols of her father's house" (מרדה בגלולי בית אביה).<sup>55</sup> Did she perhaps embrace in some way the religion of the Hebrews? From the rabbinic point of view, did washing herself in the river bring her close to "Judaism"? The next section will discuss this aspect of her rabbinic personality.

In contrast to the opinion of R. Abba b. Kahana, the same passage in Leviticus Rabbah puts forth another argument supporting a marriage between Caleb and Bityah in the mouth of R. Judah b. Simon:<sup>56</sup>

This (Caleb) 'delivered' (*hitsil*) the flock and she (Bityah) 'delivered' (*hitsilah*) the shepherd. Let him who 'delivered' the flock take in marriage her who 'delivered' the shepherd! (Leviticus Rabbah 1:3; ed. Margulies, p. 11)

This account alludes to the two episodes in which these characters intervened in history to preserve the future of Israel: with his act, Caleb delivered the people (the flock) from divine anger (Num 13 – 14) and Bityah delivered the future guide

51 This is not the case with the Babylonian passages.

52 The same argument is found in Targum 1 Chr 4:18.

53 In bMegillah, the "Holy One, blessed be He", is the author of the exhortation.

54 The Septuagint includes the same idea in its version of Num 32:12: instead of the gentile "the Kenezite" (הקניזי), the Septuagint presents ὁ διασχωρισμένος (the separate, the set apart). The rabbinic interpretation also accentuates this fact, but based on the name of Jephunneh: "He (Caleb) was a son who 'turned' (פנה) against the counsel of the spies" (bSotah 11b).

55 The same interpretation is found in Tanhuma Shemot 7.

56 This argument does not appear in the talmudic parallels.



(shepherd) of Israel, Moses, from a certain death (Exod 2). The destiny of Israel was mainly in the hands of Pharaoh's daughter. Consequently, Bityah does not just become Moses' mother, as seen in the earlier section, but also the wife of one of the only two characters from the desert generation (the other being Joshua) who, after the forty-year Exodus, were able to go into the promised land as a reward for the stance they took.

### c. Bityah, the proselyte?

The accounts cited above establish a connection between Pharaoh's daughter and the people of Israel through her maternal relationship to Moses and her marriage to Caleb, but none of these texts specify whether Bityah simply remained a gentile who sympathised with a Hebrew baby and an Israelite husband, or whether she became a proselyte by undergoing an explicit process of conversion. However, it is possible to deduce that the Rabbis not only linked Pharaoh's daughter to Israel through new family ties, but also attributed to her the attitudes of someone who went beyond professing maternal or conjugal love. In fact, in Philo's retelling of the story, for example, it is already possible to detect signs of her potential willingness to abandon her parental beliefs, stating that the princess saw Moses when she was "about to engage in ablutions and lustrations."

As Levinson emphasizes, one of the paradigms to determine who is inside and who is outside the community in rabbinic Judaism is the "covenantal model," i. e. "the acceptance of a certain institutionalized belief-system."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the rabbinic literature includes information about the ways of showing affection for Judaism, which Shaye J. D. Cohen catalogues according to these criteria:

- (1) admiring some aspect of Judaism; (2) acknowledging the power of the god of the Jews or incorporating him into the pagan pantheon; (3) benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews; (4) practicing some or many of the rituals of the Jews; (5) venerating the god of the Jews and denying or ignoring the pagan gods; (6) joining the Jewish community; (7) converting to Judaism and "becoming a Jew."<sup>58</sup>

This "belief system", which could be deduced from the behaviour of those supposed to accept it (fully or partially), is reflected in fictional characters as well, as can be seen in the rabbinic accounts about Bityah. In these texts, there is no description of a step-by-step detailed conversion ceremony,<sup>59</sup> which would explicitly indicate Bityah's

<sup>57</sup> Levinson, "Bodies and Bo(a)rders", p. 344.

<sup>58</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew." *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), pp. 13 – 33, at 14 – 15.

<sup>59</sup> Like the ritual in *Gerim* 1:1 and *bYebamot* 47ab. Cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990), pp. 177 – 203 and the biblio-

acceptance of the new religion. However, besides “benefiting the Jews” with Moses’ salvation, a remarkable act, her bath, is particularly associated with this process: “Immersion... became the ritual that for men supplemented circumcision, and for women replaced it.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in the passage already cited from bMegillah 13a, R. Simon ben Pazzi justifies calling her “the Jewess” because of her repudiation of idolatry, while R. Johanan explains it by her action of bathing in the river, “denying” (in the words of Cohen) “the pagan gods:”

Why was she (Bityah) called ‘the Jewess’ (*Hayehudiyyah*)? Because she repudiated idolatry, (על שום שכפרה בעבודה זרה), as it is written: *And the daughter of Pharaoh went down to bathe (לרחוץ) in the river* (Exod 2:5). And said R. Johanan: – Because she went down to ‘cleanse’ herself from the idols of her father’s house (בית מגילולי בית אביה). (bMegillah 13a)

The terms used in the text to describe the scene are characteristic of the religious sphere: ‘*abodah zarah*’ (the specific expression referring to ‘idolatry’), the verbs *kpr* (‘deny, repudiate,’ and ‘apostatise’) and *rh̥ts* (‘wash, bathe’, with the connotations of ‘purify, cleanse’ and even ‘do ablutions’). Therefore, according to the rabbinic interpretation, the princess is “the Jewess” because she turned away from the beliefs of her father through a ritual bath, supposedly accepting the religion of Israel. Clearly, the conduct described here is not typical of the time Israel was in Egypt, where, at most, it is possible to speak of an adhesion to Hebraism. However, it is not surprising that the image of the princess was brought up to date, since the same occurs with other biblical characters in the Sages’ interpretations.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, this is not a problem of anachronism, but rather the projection of rabbinic models and values onto key characters in the history of Israel.<sup>62</sup>

The scene is illuminated by the commentary on Exod 2:5 found in bSotah (and its parallel in Exodus Rabbah 1:23). Although the name of Bityah does not appear here (only a reference to Pharaoh’s daughter), the connection with bMegillah 13a is clear in the interpretation itself as well as in its authorship (in both cases, attributed to R. Johanan). The passage in bSotah 12b offers an explanation of each of the four sentences in Exod 2:5 and “rewrites” the biblical story in-

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graphy under note 1; Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger within your Gates. Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 132 – 154; Menachem Finkelstein, *Conversion. Halakhah and Practice*. Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006, pp. 298 – 333.

60 Cohen, “Ceremony”, p. 194.

61 Cf. e. g. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, pp. 174 – 208; Lorena Miralles-Maciá, “Conversion and Midrash: On Proselytes and Sympathisers with Judaism in Leviticus Rabbah.” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011), pp. 58 – 82.

62 Furthermore, the biblical “Hebrews” are often referred to as “Jews.” One example closely aligned with this episode from Exod 2 is the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan version: “the children of the Jews,” “a Jewish wet nurse,” “his Jewish brothers” (vv. 6 – 7.11).

roducing new elements. This section presents the first three sentences (the fourth will be discussed in the following section).

- (a) [Regarding] *And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to 'cleanse' (lit. bathe) herself in the river* (Exod 2:5), said R. Johanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: – [The text] teaches that she went down to 'cleanse' herself of her father's idols, thus it says: *When the Lord shall have 'cleansed' the filth (= idolatry) of the daughters of Zion etc.* (Isa 4:4).<sup>63</sup>
- (b) [About] *And her handmaids 'walked' along (holkhot)*, said R. Johanan: – 'Walk' (*halikhah*) is actually an expression [referred to] 'death,' thus it says: *Behold I am 'going' (holekh) to 'die'* (Gen 25:32). (c) *And she saw the ark among the reeds.* When they saw that she wished to rescue Moses, they said to her: "Mistress, normally [when] a king of flesh and blood makes a decree, though everybody else does not obey it, [at least] his children and the members of his household obey it; but you transgress your father's decree!" [In that moment] Gabriel came and beat them to the ground. (bSotah 12b)

Although the text (and its midrashic parallel) does not mention the term 'idolatry' (as in bMegillah), the embrace of Judaism is made even more explicit when it contrasts the princess's decision to save Moses with the interference of her handmaids, who remind her of Pharaoh's decree. In the Bible (Exod 2), Moses' salvation comes about by divine plan; the princess simply acts as a means to achieve it, without questioning the legality of her decision or its moral or family consequences. However, the rabbinic fiction indicates a clear religious predisposition even before she spots Moses among the reeds and wants to rescue him: she went down to bathe in the river to "cleanse herself" of her father's idols. In contrast with the biblical passage, where the divine plan slowly unfolds, here Gabriel intervenes directly, ending the lives of those who wish to interfere.<sup>64</sup>

The words of her companions are very significant, since they contain much more than a warning. With the *mashal* introduced by the *formulae* מנהגו של עולם ('custom of the world'; i. e. 'normally') and מלך בשר ודם ('king of flesh and blood'), it seems that these young ladies were instructing the princess as if they were rabbis. Certainly, in this example, the "human king" is identified with Pharaoh who ordered the extermination of the Hebrew children and to whom, at least, his own family must be obedient. But his daughter decides to save Moses, transgressing her (human) father's decree. However, once Gabriel appears on the scene, the allegorical reading acquires another meaning, underscoring an antithetical comparison<sup>65</sup> between Pharaoh (the "king") and God (the King). Therefore, Bityah is His daughter ("the Jewess"), who observes her Father's

<sup>63</sup> Isa 4:4, not found in the Exodus Rabbah passage.

<sup>64</sup> According to Exodus Rabbah 1:24, Gabriel is also responsible for Moses' cries: he makes him cry so that the princess will realize that he is there.

<sup>65</sup> David Stern, *Parables in Midrash. Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1994<sup>2</sup>, pp. 22 – 23.

decree (the Torah) and in view of the accusation of her disobedience (when that is not really the case!), Gabriel ends the lives of the handmaids.

Another account regarding her connection with Judaism is worth discussing. Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:5<sup>66</sup> contains an explanation about Deut 28:6 (“Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out”). According to the Palestinian amora R. Judah b. Simon, the verse applies to Moses, alluding to Bityah in the commentary on “come in” and to Reuben in the commentary on “go out.” Regarding Bityah, the text suggests that through Moses’ influence she came into contact with Judaism:

*When you come in* [means that,] when Moses came into the world, he brought near [to God] those who were far away from Him, [referring to] Bityah, Pharaoh’s daughter. (Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:5; ed. Lieberman, p. 109)

This type of “bringing near” can be interpreted as an invitation to conversion.<sup>67</sup> One example of this is found in a revealing passage from Leviticus Rabbah 2:9, transmitted in different manuscripts,<sup>68</sup> which is an addition from a later work, Seder Eliyahu Rabbah (ch. 7). The section contains an episode where the *tanna* Simeon ben Gamaliel runs into someone who asks him why the gentiles descend to Gehinnom. His response is based on the following *baraita*: “My son, thus have the Sages taught in the *Mishnah*: “When a would-be proselyte comes to accept Judaism (גר שבא להתגייר), a hand should be stretched out towards him to bring him beneath the wings of the *Shekhinah*.”<sup>69</sup> From that time onwards, proselytes of every generation (גירי הדור) warn their own generation.”<sup>70</sup> This idea is directly related to the case of Bityah in another late rabbinic composition, the Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 48 (Warsaw 1852): “Pharaoh’s daughter deserved to be taken in beneath the wings of the *Shekhinah*.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, Moses stretches out his hand to Bityah, a potential proselyte, to take refuge with God.

66 Saul Lieberman (ed.), *Midrash Devarim Rabbah*. Jerusalem <sup>3</sup>1974. And its parallels in Midrash Tannaim 33:1 (David Hoffmann (ed.), *Midrash Tannaim al Sefer Devarim*. Berlin 1908 – 1909, p. 208); Pesikta de-Rav Kahana supplement 1 (Bernard Mandelbaum (ed.), *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America 1962, p. 441).

67 Cf. Numbers Rabbah 3:2.

68 Chaim Milikowsky and Margarete Schlüter (eds.), *Wayyiqra Rabba*. Bar Ilan University. url: <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/midrash/VR/editionData.htm>. In his edition, Margulies includes the passage in the main text, despite not finding it in the base Ms. for his work.

69 The image is not new; the case of Ruth is especially remarkable, because “under whose wings” she “came to seek refuge” (Ruth 2:12).

70 Proselytes have the same mission to introduce the Torah to gentiles and thus prevent them from descending to Gehinnom.

71 Targum of Chronicles, which was finished in the post-talmudic period although with very old material, contains one more account, parallel to Leviticus Rabbah 1:3, bMegillah 13a, and bSanhedrin 19b (with respect to the exegesis of the names, the identification of Bityah as Moses’ mother, her marriage to Mered-Caleb, etc.). However, with respect to this issue, it explicitly states that “[Bityah] converted to Judaism (אתגיירת).” Cf. Alexander Sperber (ed.),

Although, as deduced from the aforementioned accounts, only the later rabbinic texts openly speak of a clear conversion, in amoraic times the Sages may have seen this biblical character as a proselyte or at least as someone close to Judaism, as shown by the phenomenon of the “God-fearers” – those who sympathised with Jewish conceptions, customs, or practices on both sides: the Jewish and the gentile.<sup>72</sup> In fact, in the commentary on 1 Chr 4:18 (“These are the sons of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh”) in *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3, R. Joshua of Sikhnin in the name of R. Levi explains her name in these terms:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Bityah (read: *Bat Yah*), the daughter of Pharaoh: “Moses was not your son, but you called him your son. Neither are you My daughter, but I will call you My daughter (*bitty*).” (*Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3; ed. Margulies, p. 10)

Using the technique of the *notarikon*, “Bityah” (בִּיתָיָה) is divided into two words that acquire a new meaning: “daughter of YH” (בַּת יְהוָה). Therefore, as in so many other occasions, this is not a superfluous choice of name, but rather an epithet that corresponds to a certain circumstance – in this case, to a religious orientation (just as “Moses” corresponds to the way in which he was rescued). According to the rabbinic conception, God rewards Bityah, considering her to be his own daughter, just as she had done with Moses.<sup>73</sup> But, how should this expression be understood? Looking at the context and the data provided by other accounts about the princess, *bit-yah* can be considered a synonym for someone who in some way professes Judaism. Levinson suggests about the God-fearers:

The “plot of affiliation” is an attempt to create a mythical biography for the Godfearers, to give them a name and to tell their story so as to neutralize their alterity and assert narrative control over them and their threatening liminality.<sup>74</sup>

The question is, hence, to what degree did the rabbis from the amoraic period connect Pharaoh’s daughter, a fictional character, to their religion?

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*The Bible in Aramaic. Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts IV: The Hagiographa.* Leiden: Brill, 1968, p. 7.

72 Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press 1978, pp. 42 – 43, 51; Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1987, pp. 256 – 257; Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary”, pp. 31 – 33; Louis H. Feldman, “Proselytism by Jews in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Centuries.” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 24 (1993), pp. 1 – 58, at 11 – 13, 24, 41, 46 – 48, 50 – 53; Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion. Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994, pp. 131 – 132; Finkelstein, *Conversion*, pp. 368 – 381.

73 Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 48 (Warsaw 1852) reads: “Deserved ... to be called the daughter of the Omnipresent (בְּתוּרָא שֶׁל מְקוֹרָא).”

74 Levinson, “Bodies and Bo(a)rders”, pp. 361 – 362.

## d. Bityah saving Moses

Some of the questions that have attracted much attention about the episode of Moses' rescue are, as Ulmer and van Ruiten have respectively pointed out, "who enters the Nile to fetch Moses?"<sup>75</sup> and "how ... was the baby fetched ...?"<sup>76</sup> The biblical text responds to the first query with the statement that the princess "sent her *handmaid* to fetch it" (Exod 2:5), while the second remains unanswered. However, in certain retellings of the story and references to the scene, another significant alternative is presented (sometimes coexisting with the Tanakh version). In these readings, the character who fetches Moses is not one of her handmaids, but Pharaoh's daughter herself. This interpretation may go back to Hellenistic times, as the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian shows: "Seeing me directly and holding me, *she* (the princess) took me up." Accordingly, this conception of Moses' salvation, in which the princess's role gains prominence in the development of the plot, is already found in post-biblical literature, although the way she rescues the baby is not indicated.

It is from the rabbinic period that different accounts report a tradition that explains this particular version by a miraculous deed: Pharaoh's daughter not only saved Moses by herself, but she also achieved it by means of stretching out her hand as long as needed in order to hold him. In the commentary on "and she sent her handmaid to fetch it" in bSotah 12b,<sup>77</sup> the text includes and justifies both traditions, i. e. that from the Torah and this one. The talmudic text presents a discussion in which two *tannaim*, R. Nehemiah and R. Judah, argue about whether to read the term אַמָּה as 'amah ('handmaid') or as 'ammah ('forearm') in Exod 2:5.<sup>78</sup>

[In relation to] *And she sent 'her handmaid' to fetch it*, R. Judah and R. Nehemiah [differ]. One said: 'Her hand' and the other said: 'Her handmaid.' [According to] him who said 'her hand', it is so because it is written 'ammatah, while he who said 'her handmaid,' it is so because it is not written yadah ('her hand'). [According to] him who said 'her handmaid', it was stated: "Gabriel came and beat them to the ground! He left her one [handmaid], because it is not appropriate for a king's daughter to be alone." But [according to] him who said 'her hand', the text [should say] yadah. It teaches us that [her arm] 'became lengthened' (*de-'ishtarbab 'ishtarbube*); for a master has said: "You find it so both with the arm of Pharaoh's daughter and with the teeth of the wicked, as it is written: You have 'broken' (*shibbarta*) the teeth of the wicked", but Resh Lakish said: "Read not *shibbarta* but *sheribabtah* ('you have lengthened')."<sup>79</sup> (bSotah 12b)

75 Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 297.

76 Van Ruiten, "The Birth of Moses", p. 48.

77 The passage transmitted in its parallel in Exodus Rabbah 1:23 as well.

78 Jacobi, "Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh", p. 116; Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 310; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, pp. 528 – 530 and idem, *A Walk Through Jubilees*, pp. 193 – 194.

79 In this respect, cf. bMegillah 15b.

R. Nehemiah's interpretation maintains the version of the biblical story in Exod 2, in which the princess sends her handmaid to save Moses after spotting him among the reeds. The rabbi's argument is supported by the fact that, when her handmaids reprove the princess, Gabriel kills all of them, with the exception of the one responsible for bringing the child to her.<sup>80</sup> For R. Judah, on the other hand, it was Pharaoh's daughter herself who rescued the Hebrew child by stretching out her hand: "And she lengthened her 'forearm' to take him up." The fact that *yadah*, the most common term used to refer to 'hand, arm', does not appear, but rather *'ammatah* ('her forearm') indicates an exaggerated lengthening of her limb.<sup>81</sup>

This image of the Egyptian princess stretching out her arm to reach Moses is not an isolated interpretation ascribed only to R. Judah, but also a tradition that appears in the aggadic material in the version of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, as well as in later rabbinic literature. In fact, the targumic text, which moreover identifies Pharaoh's daughter with Bityah,<sup>82</sup> presents the Aramaic term *garmida* ('arm'), in accordance with R. Judah's opinion.<sup>83</sup> And the same idea is found in the Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, which uses *yad*: "And she saw a baby crying<sup>84</sup> and sent out her hand" (וראתה את הנער בוכה ושלחה ידה).<sup>85</sup> Therefore, Pharaoh's daughter, usually known in the rabbinic "fictions" as Bityah, saved Moses without any intermediary.<sup>86</sup> According to this tradition, the miracle that was performed by the princess fits in the context of the passage and is articulated perfectly with the other fantastic events included in these aggadic descriptions, such as Gabriel's intervention against the handmaids (as reported in bSotah) and Bityah's healing of her illness by touching the basket (as told in the targumic and Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer versions, which speak of a skin disease).<sup>87</sup>

80 This explains the change in Exod 2:5 from plural ("the *handmaids* walked along the river shore") to singular ("she sent her *handmaid* to fetch it"). Cf. Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 310.

81 According to Tanḥuma Shemot 7, ונתמתחה ידה שנמשכה ידה ונתמתחה.

82 According to Tanḥuma Shemot 7, ביתיה ברתייה דפרעה, so in the Ms., but not in the *editio princeps*; cf. Alejandro Díez-Macho (ed.), *Biblia polyglotta Matritensis IV. Targum Palaestinense in Pentateuchum. Additur Targum Pseudojonatan eiusque hispanica versio. Exodus*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1980, p. 7, n. 3.

83 Neofiti and Onkelos maintain the same word as the Hebrew text (אמהתה / אמהתה), which can be read as "handmaid" and "forearm" in such a way that both meanings fit the context well, especially considering the account in bSotah (and Exodus Rabbah parallel) that supports the two interpretations.

84 E.g. in the Jubilees version.

85 § 47 in Higger's edition (Michael Higger (ed.), "Pirke Rabbi Eliezer." *Horeb* 8 (1944), pp. 82 – 119); § 48 in the Warsaw 1852 edition.

86 The Higger edition of the Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer does not include the name of the princess, but it does appear in the Warsaw 1852 edition (§ 48): בתייה בת פרעה.

87 Cf. next section.



Some of these traditions were apparently popular, not only in rabbinic circles, but also in other contexts like the synagogue, where a wider audience had access to them.

The interest in Moses' babyhood – and especially in this scene – is supported by the coexistence of innovative features from post-biblical times alongside the Tanakh version. However, from the accounts preserved, the “miracle of stretching out the arm” can apparently only be dated back to the rabbinic period (although the representation of the princess saving Moses by herself is some centuries older).

The most ancient witness to this episode is probably represented in an image on the west wall of the Dura Europos synagogue (from the third century), located in present-day Syria. In the illustration, Pharaoh's daughter appears nude in the water holding the baby Moses with her left arm around him.<sup>88</sup> It appears that her arm is longer than expected, so the representation may be related to the “outstretched arm” referred to in rabbinic and targumic texts. Scholars have usually recognized, in fact, a connection between the mural and the literary retellings of Moses' infancy,<sup>89</sup> in spite of the controversial origin of the influences on the Dura Europos community, as Gutmann expounds:

Did the Dura congregation rely on older Hellenistic aggadot or did they utilize contemporary targumic-midrashic aggadot familiar to them from sermons? Furthermore, did the rabbis know and borrow from books with Hellenistic aggadot... or are we dealing with separate and independent literary traditions, which simply arrived at similar interpretations of biblical texts?<sup>90</sup>

The questions about the Dura Europos frescos have not yet been definitively answered, but it is clear that the alternative motif of the princess saving Moses goes back to Hellenistic times<sup>91</sup> and that “the outstretched arm” theme is included in records from the rabbinic period. Nevertheless, chronologically speaking, the scene from Dura is the oldest representation of this version, which dates from amoraic times (third century). Although in bSotah 12b, the discussion on Exod 2:5 is attributed to two *tannaim* (second century), the words of R. Judah

88 Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 172 – 183; the description of the scene in Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*. Washington DC: Dambarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990, p. 29, the image is number 192 (on the west wall on the right); Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, fig. 35.

89 E.g. Geza Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*. Leiden: Brill 1975 (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 8), p. 90; Gutmann, “Illustrated Midrash”, pp. 93 – 95; Bezalel Narkiss, *The Golden Haggadah*. London: The British Library, Clifford Press Ltd. 1997, pp.59 – 60; Jacobi, “Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh”, p. 118; Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, pp. 301 ff.

90 Gutmann, “Illustrated Midrash”, pp. 94 – 95.

91 Ulmer (*Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 302) observes a “possible secondary influence” in the Hellenistic-Jewish interpretations, such as those in Ezekiel and in Philo.



– who maintains that the princess saved Moses – are documented for the first time in this talmudic text. It is possible, for that reason, that the story circulated as a popular tradition beyond rabbinic circles.<sup>92</sup>

#### e. Bityah's illness

The biblical story in Exod 2 says that the princess went down to bathe in the river, but does not suggest any reason to explain why she did so. Could she not cleanse herself in her palace? Was this because of a particular circumstance? The desire to find reasons to elucidate this fact in the context of the episode was nothing new in rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, centuries before, the Judeo-Hellenistic authors had already offered their particular ideas with regard to the need for this bath, relating the motivation to her mood (depression, purification intentions). The rabbinic texts provide a specific reason as well, showing that this was not a whim of fate, but rather a predesigned divine plan in which significant elements played a role to fulfil it. The assertion in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* presents this conception and lays out God's master plan explicitly: "All was foreseen in front of the Holy One" (§ 48).

Regarding her physical condition, a tradition transmitted in midrashic and targumic sources ascribes the reason for her bath to a skin disease. Indeed, in the aforementioned passage from *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, it is said that "she was a leper and could not bathe in hot water." Along the same line, the aggadic material in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan describes the scene in the following way:<sup>93</sup>

The word of Yhwh had thrown down ulcerous sores and inflammations of the flesh upon the land of Egypt. And Bityah, Pharaoh's daughter, went down to cool off in the river, while her handmaids walked along the river shore. And she saw the ark in the middle of the papyrus and stretched out her arm and caught it. And in the act she was cured of the ulcer and the inflammation. (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan at Exod 2:5; ed. Díez-Macho, *Exodus*, p. 7)

Her physical affliction is related to the rationale for her bathing as much as her touching the basket is to her healing. Consequently, while she had been suffering

92 "The targumic view was so much part of common tradition that the artist responsible for the scene depicting Moses' infancy in the synagogue of Dura-Europos substituted it for the Exodus account" (Vermes, *Post-Biblical*, p. 90). On the representation of biblical scenes in ancient synagogues, cf. Günter Stemberger, *Das klassische Judentum. Kultur und Geschichte der rabbinischen Zeit*. Munich: Beck, 2011, pp. 230 – 234.

93 The relationship between the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has been extensively discussed by scholars; cf. e. g. Rachel Adelman, *The return of the repressed: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009, p. 6 and the bibliography in n. 17. For the coincidences between these works cf. Miguel Pérez-Fernández, *Los capítulos de Rabbi Eliezer. Versión crítica, introducción y notas*. Valencia: Inst. S. Jerónimo para la investigación bíblica, 1984 (Biblioteca Midrásica 1), pp. 31 – 36.

from the symptoms of being an Egyptian (as if it were a psychosomatic manifestation of her real illness, her “Egyptianness”), as Moses’ saviour she enjoys the benefits of favouring Israel. The ark is the catalyst for this change, which implies a complete and total transformation.<sup>94</sup> So, rather than a mere restoration to health, it seems that her miraculous cure emphasizes her new condition, reflected in her own body (she no longer has the stigmata of her Egyptian origin). In this sense, this interpretation fits well with the other versions connected with the reason for her purification (as inferred even from Judeo-Hellenistic times) as well as her rejection of “the idols of her father’s house” (e. g. bMegillah 13a).

Moreover, Bityah’s leprosy may be related to the motif of the nudity of Pharaoh’s daughter. From the texts it can be deduced that she immersed herself in the river naked in order to cool off and palliate her skin problems.<sup>95</sup> The image of the naked princess in the water appears, in fact, in the same representation that shows her saving Moses on the west wall of the Dura Europos synagogue.<sup>96</sup> Regardless of the inspiration for such a depiction,<sup>97</sup> “the erotic nudity in the synagogue painting,” as Warren G. Moon has suggested, “seems to have meant that Pharaoh’s daughter was *not* – or at least *not yet* – a Jew.”<sup>98</sup> The nakedness of the princess contrasts with the attire of the Jewish women on the shore (i. e. Moses’ biological mother and sister). This nudity, then, can be understood as a physical manifestation of her “Egyptianness,” just like the skin disease mentioned in the aggadic sources.

Many questions remain open about the relationship between the third century Dura Europos images and the targumic-midrashic retelling of the story. But if these accounts were considered part of the same tradition, it would at least confirm that from amoraic times onwards one of the topics about Bityah consisted of recovering her health by gaining her “Jewishness.”

94 The same idea is in Exodus Rabbah 1:23 (on Exod 2:5): “Pharaoh’s daughter was leprous (מצורית), therefore she went down to bathe, but as soon as she touched the basket, she became healed. For this reason, she took pity on Moses and loved him extraordinarily.” (Shinan (ed.), *Midrash Shemot Rabbah*, p. 76).

95 Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons*, p. 305.

96 Schubert, *Jewish Art*, p. 46.

97 Many scholars from different fields have tried to find archetypes for the mural scenes (Graeco-Roman influences, rabbinic interpretations, etc.); cf. Annabel J. Wharton, “Good and Bad Images from the Synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, Subtexts, Intertexts.” *Art History* 17/1 (1994), pp. 1 – 25, at 7 – 9; Warren G. Moon, “Nudity and Narrative: Observations on the Frescoes from the Dura Synagogue.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60/4 (1992), pp. 587 – 658, especially the first pages of his article. Moon (p. 596) proposes the representations of Aphrodite as the model for Pharaoh’s daughter in Dura Europos.

98 Moon, “Nudity and Narrative”, p. 596.

## f. Bityah, the firstborn

Another tradition regarding Pharaoh's daughter is transmitted in the rabbinic reports that explain why her life was preserved during the events narrated in Exod 11 – 12. In these texts, the princess is distinguished as a firstborn who, thanks to Moses' intervention, escapes the deadly fate of the last plague in Egypt. From this rabbinic conception, female Egyptian firstborns are included among those who suffered the consequences of this curse.<sup>99</sup>

The first of the pertinent passages that include this fictive biographical aspect belongs to Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (7:7), of which a parallel is found in Pesikta Rabbati (17).<sup>100</sup> In both works, the account is attributed to the Palestinian amora R. Abun, who said in the name of R. Judah ben Pazzi:

Bityah, Pharaoh's daughter, was a firstborn (בכורה). Then, by what merit was she saved? Through Moses' prayer, as it is written: *She perceived 'that [the] good [child]'* (כי טוב) *was her profit: her lamp did not go out by 'night'* (Prov 31:18). It is written *layil*, as the custom is to say:<sup>101</sup> *It was a 'night' (ליל) of watching for the Lord* (Exod 12:42). (Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 7:7; ed. Mandelbaum, 129)

The scene is especially interesting, because Moses is presented as Bityah's intercessor before God, in a gesture of reciprocity. The midrash interprets the rescue of Moses in light of Bityah's salvation, and this, in turn, is connected with the episode of the death of the Egyptian firstborns. To understand how all of these elements are articulated, it is necessary to consider the arguments on which the rabbinic explanation is based. 1) The Bible speaks of the "firstborn son" (בכור) of men (from the highest social stratum to the servant class) and of beasts (Exod 11:5; 12:12.29), so that the text seems to be alluding only to males. The midrash, on the other hand, extends primogeniture to both genders in such a way that Pharaoh's daughter is also included in this category.<sup>102</sup> 2) The amoraic reading of Prov 31:18, which applies the verse to Bityah,<sup>103</sup> recognises in the expression *kitov* a mention of Moses, of whom it is said in Exod 2:2 "that he was good" (כי טוב).<sup>104</sup> 3) According to the midrash, Pharaoh's daughter survives the death of the

99 Cf. Louis H. Feldman, "The Plague of the First-Born Egyptians in Rabbinic Tradition, Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus." *Revue Biblique* 109/3 (2002), pp. 403 – 421, at 405.

100 Rivka Ulmer (ed.), *Pesikta Rabbati. A Synoptic Edition of Pesikta Rabbati Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps I*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997 (Studies in the History of Judaism), pp. 370 – 371 § 14. Also in Midrash to Psalms 136:6 (Solomon Buber (ed.), *Midrasch Tehillim*. Vilnius 1891 (repr. Jerusalem 1966), p. 520).

101 Lit.: "This is what people say", introducing a popular saying, which in this case is the biblical verse.

102 The masculine forms are also generic.

103 In the Bible this is one of the verses that describe the ideal woman (Prov 31:10 – 31).

104 In the Tanakh, טוב meaning 'beautiful, goodly.'

firstborn because “her lamp did not go out by night.” In this frame of reference the image is used allegorically to allude to the preservation of her life.<sup>105</sup> The interpretation is based on the word *layil*, which appears instead of the expected form *laylah*,<sup>106</sup> thus linking the verse to the episode of the tenth plague.<sup>107</sup>

The version in Exodus Rabbah 18:3, which relates Exod 12:29 to Prov 31:18, presents the report about Bityah’s primogeniture in the same context as the above passage, but the arguments used are even more elaborate:

Another interpretation [of] *And it came to pass at midnight* (Exod 12:29). It is written: *She perceived that her ‘profit’ (sahrah) was good: her lamp did not go out by night* etc. (Prov 31:18). You will find that the Scripture has said: For there was not a house where there was not one dead (Exod 12:30). How [was this possible]? [If] you counted all the drops that an Egyptian ejaculated<sup>108</sup> in every woman, being the first drop the firstborn, you would find that all his children would die, as it is said: *And He smote all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham* (Ps 78:51), [referring to] the first drop.<sup>109</sup> Even firstborn girls would be dead, with the exception of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, who has a good ‘intercessor’; that is<sup>110</sup> Moses, as it is said: *And she saw that he was ‘good’* (Exod 2:2).<sup>111</sup> For this reason said Solomon:<sup>112</sup> *She perceived that her ‘shield’ (soherah) was ‘good’* (Prov 31:18). *She stood up while it was still night* (Prov 31:15). Which night was [referred to]? *And it came to pass at midnight* (Exod 12:29). (Exodus Rabbah 18:3; ed. Mirkin, p. 212)<sup>113</sup>

The passage sets out the reasons why the firstborn girls in Egypt were included. From Exod 12:30 it is deduced that there was a death in every Egyptian house, since all the children were firstborns. This fate was determined by the first drop of each ejaculation (“the firstfruits of their strength”); if they died, it was because their mothers had extramarital sexual relations with different lovers, making them all count as firstborns. This quota also includes the daughters, since some households may have been inhabited only by women.

Consequently, Bityah, as the firstborn of her mother, would also have suffered the same fate, had it not been for the intervention of Moses. The rabbinic interpretation of the term סכרה as *soherah* (in this case a synonym for פרקליט,

105 For Jacobi (“Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh”, p. 116), Bityah’s lamp “was saved not only for that night, but for all time.”

106 The MT presents a *qere-ketiv* (בליל / בלילה); cf. BHS. The *ketiv* in Prov 31:18 is compared with the construct state found in Exod 12:42.

107 Exod 12:42 influences the story of the Passover celebration, which takes place on the night of the death of the firstborns of Egypt.

108 Lit.: “Made go out.”

109 Cf. Mekhilta Pisha 13.

110 פרקליט from the Greek παρακλητος (‘intercessor’) is linked to the midrashic interpretation of סכרה as *soherah*, instead of *sahrah* (from *sahar* with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person fem. suffix).

111 In the midrash, the subject is Bityah; in the MT, Jochebed.

112 To whom authorship of the Proverbs is attributed.

113 Moshe A. Mirkin (ed.), *Midrash Rabbah V: Shemot Rabbah I*. Tel Aviv: Yavneh 1986.

‘intercessor’) underlines the role that he plays on behalf of the princess, as well as emphasizing Bityah’s capacity to perceive an implicit *do-ut-des* commitment when saving him (Exod 2:2). Accordingly, in these fictions her life was preserved (“stood up”) the night that the plague occurred in spite of her primogeniture.

#### g. Bityah’s reward

According to the accounts presented in the previous sections, Bityah’s gesture towards Moses is rewarded in different ways in rabbinic sources: there is a divine recognition of her action, God adopts her as his own daughter, she develops a family relationship with key characters from the Tanakh (Moses, Caleb, etc.), she recovers her health, her life is preserved, etc. In addition, the texts from the rabbinic period identify, especially in the later works, other types of rewards that have a direct bearing on the traditions relating to her fictive life stories, which imply a much more transcendent dimension. Such a recompense, which is not specified in the biblical narrative, can be justified as a reward to the princess for saving a Hebrew – or rather a Jewish – child from a certain death.

The passage cited above from *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 48 is particularly interesting. There, Bityah clearly recognises Moses’ moral quality in this statement:

She said: ‘This boy is righteous (צדיק),’ and she saved his life. Whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. And whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world.<sup>114</sup>

Her gesture is understood as an act of justice and as such implies a particular compensation. At this point, the manuscripts present different readings. In the Warsaw edition (1852) it reads: “For that reason, Pharaoh’s daughter deserved to be brought beneath the wings of *Shekhinah* and be called ‘daughter of the Omnipresent’ (*bitto shel Maqom*),”<sup>115</sup> i. e. Bityah was brought into the bosom of the people of Israel as someone very close to Judaism, a proselyte, and enjoyed the divine promises.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the argument presented in the Higger edition (§ 47) is quite novel when compared with the information transmitted by older accounts: “(Bityah) was deserving of life in this world and life in the world to come” (זכתה לחיי העה"ז ולחיי העה"ב). Without going into theological considerations about this duality, it can be deduced that this refers to an eternal reward. In reality, as the later mishnaic addition affirms,<sup>117</sup> this is the fate that awaits the

114 Cf. Sanhedrin 4:5.

115 *Bitto shel Maqom* may be understood as a synonym for the princess’s name: *Bit-Yah*.

116 In this respect, it is related to the account in *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3.

117 For a discussion about whether the idea is from the Second Temple Times or a later rabbinic interpretation, cf. Israel J. Yuval, “All Israel Have a Portion in the World to Come.” In:

true Israel, formed entirely by the righteous: “All Israel has a share in the world to come (לעולם הבא), as it is said: *Then will all your people be righteous (צדיקים), and they will inherit the land forever (לעולם)...* (Isa 60:21)” (Sanhedrin 10:1).<sup>118</sup> In effect then, the two versions of the Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer express the same idea, although in different ways.

Other forms of rewarding Bityah, which would be worthy of a more in-depth study, are derived from the rabbinic recognition of her exceptional nature. In fact, her name is included on the list of those who entered Paradise alive.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, she is granted a superior existence, which can be understood as extending her days,<sup>120</sup> but more than anything allows her to participate in a higher life: “I (God) shall take your daughter (Pharaoh’s daughter), and make her the inheritor of the Garden of Eden” (ואוריש לה ג'ע').<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusions

The Bible includes meagre information about Pharaoh’s daughter who rescued Moses from the water. However, it is not surprising that interest in this character subsequently increased, considering that with this act she not only saved Moses, but all the people of Israel as well. Already in Second Temple times, far more detailed descriptions of the princess appeared in the Judeo-Hellenistic retellings of Exod 2, which offer a more defined profile of her (with respect to her behaviour, personality, actions, feelings, physical condition and even her name). The rabbinic sources, however, do not offer a version in the style of authors like

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Fabian E. Udoh (ed.), *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008, pp. 114 – 138, at 115 – 116; and for the textual problems cf. p. 138, n. 8.

118 Baruch A. Levine, “The Four Private Persons Who Lost Their Share in the World to Come: The Judgment of m. Sanh. 10:2.” In: Nili S. Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams (eds.), *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2009, pp. 487 – 508, at 488.

119 Derekh Eretz Zutta 1:18; Kallah Rabbati 3:23 and others; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews I*, p. 73, n. 67; Jacobi, “Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh”, p. 110; Kadari, *Daughter of Pharaoh: Midrash and Aggadah*, at the end.

120 As it is said in *Kallah Rabbati* 3:23; Michael Higger (ed.), *Massektot Kallah*. New York 1936.

121 As illustrated in Exodus Rabbah 20:4 (Mirkin, p. 235). Midrash to Proverbs 31:15 (Solomon Buber (ed.), *Midrasch Mishle*. Vilnius 1893 (repr. Jerusalem 1964), p. 111) states that she was a gentile who became a Jew and “entered the Garden of Eden alive” (ויבנסה בחייה לגן עדן). The text belongs to the *Midrash Eshet Hayil*, as reproduced in the *Ma’agarim* of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. However, it does not appear in Visotzky’s edition (B. L. Visotzky (ed.), *Midrash Mishle. A critical Edition Based on Vatican Ms. Ebr. 44, With Variant Readings from All Known Manuscripts and Early Editions, and With an Introduction, References and a Short Commentary*. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America 1990, p. 192).

Philo or Josephus; indeed, there is no specific rabbinic adaptation of her life story, but only isolated data that witness diverse aspects of her portrayal (or rather portrayals), based mainly on the identification of the princess with the name Bityah (from 1 Chr 4:18). But this fact does not mean that the Sages used only their creativity and did not draw on post-biblical traditions as well as on the surrounding culture. Indeed, there are noteworthy parallels – or rather coincidences – between the rabbinic texts and other accounts.

Despite the diversity of the sources and the idiosyncrasy of each text, it is significant that most of the accounts were transmitted in the aggadic *midrashim* and the Babylonian Talmud. But more meaningful is the fact that many of the references to Bityah are attributable to Palestinian amoraic authorship. It thus seems that the rabbis from this period were especially interested in redefining the identity of Pharaoh's daughter in order to give her the place she deserved in their reconstruction of the biblical history, emphasizing how she who had been outside became inside, and why who was inside and who outside was important.<sup>122</sup>

These "creative biographical reports" responded not only to the unresolved questions in the biblical text, but also explained the attitude of Pharaoh's daughter towards Moses – and other biblical characters – in light of rabbinic standards and concerns. Thereby, the Egyptian princess turned into Bityah through a literary process of "judaization," in which her fictive credentials brought Pharaoh's daughter closer to Judaism in all of her facets (by family, biological and religious ties).

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122 Levinson, "Bodies and Bo(a)rders", p. 344.





## **“That is what is written” – Retrospective Revelation of the Meaning of a Verse in Aggadic Midrash**

When analyzing Aggadic Midrash together with theologians, as I have often done in recent years, one finds two recurring reactions among these scholars. There are those who are simply elated, delighted by the diversity of the interpretations and by the brilliantly ingenious and profound humor of the Midrash. Many of them enjoy the freedom that becomes possible even amidst the strict literalism of Jewish tradition, and they may even prefer this approach to the one of historical-critical exegesis. But there are others who are quite put off, maintaining that what the rabbis are doing has nothing to do with the literal meaning of the biblical text, and they ask if a procedure like this is even permissible.

Of course both of these reactions are justified: Aggadic Midrash is extremely profound, humorous, and subtle, and Aggadic Midrash is different from historic contextualization. At the same time, Aggadic Midrash gives rise to interpretations that have absolutely no connection to the literal meaning of the biblical text (assuming that there is such a thing).

In the following contribution, I shall focus on the literary means the rabbinic authors used to succeed in ascertaining their message from the written text – or to inscribe their message into it. In going about this, we ought to develop our own criteria, not merely try to verify the hermeneutic rules passed down by the rabbinic authors themselves. What we want is a glimpse behind the scenes of rabbinic work and a close-up look into their other approaches and strategies. For example, when the rabbinic authors begin their exegeses by juxtaposing two scriptural verses – as in the famous and much discussed form of the *Petiha*<sup>1</sup> – the reader (if not acquainted with the whole discourse from the beginning) is exposed to a certain feeling of perplexity,<sup>2</sup> which is to say he or she is put off in

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1 Cf. Arnold Goldberg, “Hermeneutische Präsupposition und Struktur der *Petiha*.” In: Margarete Schlüter and Peter Schäfer (eds.), *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung. Gesammelte Schriften II*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1999, pp. 303 – 346.

2 Cf. Peter Schäfer, “Die *Petiha* – ein Proömium?” *Kairos* (Neue Folge) 12 (1970), pp. 216 – 219, p. 218. On the form of the *Petiha* cf. Doris Lenhard, *Die Rabbinische Homilie. Ein formalanalytischer Index*. Frankfurt/M.: Gesellschaft zur Förderung Judaistischer Studien, 1998, pp. 31 –

precisely the way I referred to above: What sort of connection could there possibly be between these two verses? What might the authors be aiming at? But once one has comprehended the line of argumentation developed from this juxtaposition, one fails to understand how the verse could be interpreted in any way other than the one introduced by the rabbis. The precondition for understanding rabbinic exegesis is, thus, to understand it.

In order to illustrate how this works, we will read a very well-known text: the beginning of the Midrash Genesis Rabba. The English translation is based on that of Jacob Neusner.<sup>3</sup> The numbering in the text is my own, whereby I have elaborated six argumentation steps to which I will repeatedly refer.

We will read this passage twice: once, with a presumably unbiased perspective; we will simply describe the text and consider the logic of the argumentation. The second time, we will scrutinize the text within the framework of rabbinic thinking. Thereafter, we will hopefully be able to state more precisely how this “works” and what the authors are doing.

(1)	
<i>In the beginning God created</i> (Gen 1:1). Rabbi Oshaiah commenced: <i>Then I was beside him like a confidant (אמן/amon), and I was daily his delight [rejoicing before him always].</i> (Prov 8:30)	בראשית ברא אלהים וגו' ר' אושעיא פתח ואהיה אצלו אמן ואהיה שעשועים
(2)	
“Amon” (means) teacher, “amon” (means) covered, “amon” (means) reclusive, and some say: “amon” (means) big city.	אמן פידגוג אמן מכוסה אמן מוצנע אית דא' אמן רבתה
“Amon” (means) teacher, this is what you say: <i>as the guardian (האומן) carries a nursing child</i> (Num 11:12). “Amon” (means) covered, this is what you say: <i>Those who were brought up (האמנים) in scarlet</i> (Lam 4:5). “Amon” (means) reclusive, this is what you say: <i>And Mordecai had brought up (אמן) Hadassah</i> (Est 2:7). “Amon” (means) big city, this is what you say: <i>Are you better than No Amon</i> (Nah 3:8), and we translate: <i>Are you better than Alexandria the Great situated between the rivers?</i>	אמן פידגוג היך מה דאת אמר כאשר ישא האומן את הילד אמן מכוסה היך מה דאת אמר האמנים עלי תולע אמן מוצנע היך מה דאת אמר ויהי אומן את הדסה אמן רבתה היך מה דאת אמר התיטבי מנא אמן ומתרגמינן האת טבא מאלכסנדריא רבתא דיתבא ביני נהרותא

35. Cf. Alexander Samely's discussion of the “narrative petichah”: Alexander Samely, *Forms of Rabbinic Literature and Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 74 – 76.

3 Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to Midrash 2: Genesis rabbah*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2001, pp. 1 – 2.

(Continued)

(3)	
Another matter: “Amon” means artisan (אומן/uman).	[ד"א] אמן אומן
(4)	
The Torah speaks: “I was the tool of the art (אמנותו כלי) of the Holy One, blessed be he.”	התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אומנתו שלהקב"ה
(5)	
In the accepted practice of the world, when a mortal king builds a palace, he does not build out of his own head, but according to the knowledge of an artisan ( <i>uman</i> ). And the artisan does not build out of his own head, but he has scrolls and tablets, so as to know how to situate the rooms and the doorways. Thus the Holy One, blessed be he, looked into the Torah and created the world.	בנוהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין ואינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן והאומן אינו בונה אותה מדעתו אלא דיפטראות ופינקסות יש לו לידע היאך הוא עושה חדרים ופשפים כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה ובורא העולם
(6)	
So the Torah stated: <i>In the beginning God created</i> – by means of a beginning God created! (And:) There is no “beginning” (in the Scripture) which does not mean “Torah”, this is what you say: <i>YHWH acquired me in the (or: as a, as the) beginning of his ways (Prov 8:22).</i>	והתורה א' בראשית ברא אלהים ואין ראשית אלא תורה היך מה דאת אמר י"י קנני ראשית דרכו וגו'

## First Reading: Without Preconceptions

Step 1: At first we are struck by the juxtaposition of the two verses Gen 1:1 and Prov 8:30 at the very beginning of the Midrash work: *In the beginning God created – Then I was beside him like a confidant (amon), and I was daily his delight [rejoicing before him always]*. Even if the verse from the Book of Proverbs and especially the word *amon* are not so easy to translate, something joyous and delightful is expressed by means of this juxtaposition. Even if one is not well acquainted with the pre-rabbinic and rabbinic exegetical conventions, one may feel a very strong attraction to this, and one’s curiosity may thus be aroused. If one is not cognizant of the fact that our endeavours here are in the context of Prov 8, that Wisdom is the core concept there, and that biblical Wisdom in a rabbinic

context acts as a metaphor for the Torah, then one may be utterly clueless when it comes to taking a logical approach to this combination of verses. They are juxtaposed as erratic blocks, and we readers cannot foresee what line of argumentation is to be derived from them. That said, it is important to note at the same time that these verses already contain the entire line of argumentation to come. Thus, following it is simply a matter of taking the first step on the bridge the rabbis are about to construct. So how does this step-by-step exposition of the intended message proceed?

Step 2: The juxtaposition of the verses is followed by a passage that goes into how this puzzling Hebrew word *amon* ought to be understood. Four meanings are cited and supported with verses from the Scripture: *amon*, according to the authors, can mean “teacher,” it can mean “covered,” it can mean “reclusive,” and it can mean “big city.” Later, we will also deal with what *amon* perhaps really means, but at this point, suffice it to say that the basic meaning of the Semitic root אמן can be translated as “to be strong, stable, trustworthy.” This yields a spectrum of meaning from “intimate, confidant” in the sense of reliable friend, relative, loved one, assistant, helper, all the way to “capable, qualified” in the sense of competent, teacher, artist, artisan. Thus, semantics coincide only partially with the Midrash. The interpretations as “covered”, “reclusive”, and “big city” cannot be derived so simply from the root.

In any case, we have, in the meantime, been steered in a totally different direction from verse Gen 1:1, and we still do not have the slightest idea why. We do not know why the authors are focusing so intensely on Prov 8:30 and on the word *amon*.

Step 3: The Midrash puts out a new signal – *davar acher* / “another interpretation” – and presents a new take on our term *amon*, whereby which it is actually read as *uman*, which means “artist” or “artisan.” This signal, “another interpretation,” leads us to suspect that this meaning of the word will be determinative in the subsequent exegesis. We can also consider this shift as the initial signal that “Creation” will be the theme of the elucidation.

Step 4: Our authors suddenly reveal something else: it is, in truth, the Torah itself that is said to be speaking in this verse in Prov 8:30 (or at the same time in Gen 1:1, too?). The Torah is thus personified, and the authors can certainly presuppose that the identification of the biblical “Lady Wisdom” with the Torah is known or can at least be conveyed. The Midrashic authors hold the view that the Torah in Prov 8:30 says: “I was the tool of the Holy One, blessed be he.” In any case, we now have a subject in our text, a female protagonist: the Torah. And we notice a dramatic arc, having made a transition from the playful, naive approach at the beginning of the exegesis to the area of artisanal, artistic activities: from *amon* to *uman*. And the small leap from that starting point is barely noticeable: The artist or craftswoman becomes “the tool of the art of the Holy One, blessed be He.” It is

paradoxical: Our protagonist characterizes herself as a tool. She de-personalizes herself in the first person singular, which is an inherent contradiction.

Step 5: There follows an allegory that refers to precisely this last sentence "I was the tool of the art of the Holy One, blessed be He." When a common, everyday king builds a palace, he does not simply start building. Instead, he consults a master builder. And this master builder does not simply start building. Rather, he has to take counsel from parchment scrolls and tablets (a clear allusion to the theme of the interpretation) that contain his blueprints. And then the equation is put forth: "So was it with God as well. He consulted the Torah and created the world." If we now recapitulate the line of argumentation up to this point, we can recognize the following construction. At the start, the two passages are juxtaposed. There follows an elaboration of the spectrum of meaning of *amon*, from which our authors developed the artist-artisan-tool track and pursued it. They established the fact that the Torah reveals itself as the tool of God. The analogy provides an image for the assertion that, after all, every master builder needs an architect or a construction manager, each of whom, in turn, needs precise instructions to carry out the construction project. Creation is possible only with tools.

Step 6: Now we come to the last argument, which finally brings us back to verse Gen 1:1. There, it is written: *bereshit bara elohim* – and our authors immediately add: *reshit* always means Torah in the Hebrew Bible! By this we see, now suddenly in Gen 1:1 itself, what our authors have prepared in Prov 8:30: The Torah is God's tool, without which Creation would never have come about. And accordingly, if one experimentally reads "Torah" instead of *reshit* – *ba-torah bara elohim* / with the Torah God created the world – the instrumental character of this formulation makes everything crystal clear. The aim of our Midrash is to provide evidence that "In the beginning God created" actually means: With the Torah, God created the world! The "proof" added is Prov 8:22: *YHWH created me at the beginning of his way*, read as: the Torah was really there at the very beginning – a citation which affirms the prior exegesis.<sup>4</sup> All this is far from being a logical chain of arguments (even if you are convinced that completely different passages of the Hebrew Bible come to explain each other). Perhaps now it becomes understandable why some students are irritated by the Midrash and the way it proceeds. They regard it as something manipulative or at least something very strange.

A little digression on this last point: To be precise, up to the point of Step 3, one might still have thought that the Torah is the architect, the master builder. After that, she is only a tool, and God seems to be both the commissioning client and

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding the proof function of the third verse in the Petiḥa, cf. Arnold Goldberg, "Petiḥa und Ḥariza. Zur Korrektur eines Missverständnisses," in *Rabbinische Texte II*, pp. 297–302, pp. 297–298.

the master builder in the equation. How are we to regard the position of the master builder, situated between that of commissioning client and tool? I suspect that this construction refers to the trace of a highly diverse image of God with manifestations in many different forms in pre- and non-rabbinic Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Here we have three manifestations in different relationships: God *and* the master builder, and God *as* the master builder, and his tool, the Torah. In my opinion, our Midrash tries to take up those multifaceted and flexible ideas of God that were present in Jewish and even in rabbinic public thought and to integrate them in a rabbinic concept.

On the whole, the elaboration of the text up to this point can be read as a reference to the beginning of the Gospel of John (John 1,1 – 3):

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Especially the “with God” (*pros ton theon*) in John 1:1 makes us think of *we-ehyeh etslo* (“I was by him”) in Prov 8:30 in the Midrash. Thus, it seems totally conceivable that “something” or “someone” was there with God.<sup>6</sup> After all, a master builder cannot work without tools. But GenR 1:1 can also be read in connection with Origen’s first homily on Genesis. He explains the verse Gen 1:1: *in principio Deus creavit caelum et terram* in the sense that only Christ can be the beginning in a true sense, the *principium*:

*In the beginning God made heaven and earth.* What is the beginning of all things except our Lord and “Saviour of all”, Jesus Christ, “the firstborn of every creature”? In this beginning, therefore, that is, in his Word, “God made heaven and earth” as the evangelist John also says in his Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

So, if in the framework of rabbinic thinking the Torah is the/a means of Creation, in early Christian theology Christ appears in this function in a similar way.

5 Cf. e. g. Daniel Boyarin, “Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41 (2010), pp. 323 – 365, pp. 323 – 329.

6 R. B. Y. Scott, “Wisdom in Creation,” *Vetus Testamentum* 10,2 (Apr., 1960), pp. 213 – 223, pp. 216. 218. 220. 222 also mentions Col 1:15 – 17.

7 Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine. Washington D. C.: The Catholic University Press, 1982 (The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation 71), p. 47.

## Second Reading: Within the Rabbinic Discourse

Things look a lot different when readers are already accustomed to rabbinic discourse. For example, if one already knows that in this discourse Wisdom means and signifies Torah, that the Torah is pre-existent, and that all this has to do with Creation, then these ideas no longer astound you, and you can lean back and enjoy the nuances and allusions of this specific exegesis or even discover new ones yourself. It is a magnificently staged performance. The Torah speaks here both as a text – most emphatically in Gen 1:1 – and also simultaneously as a person. In rabbinic thinking, the Torah often bears the traits of a person, of a woman.<sup>8</sup>

Step 1: Once we are all aware of these rabbinic ideas, we can see and appreciate how the unity of God and Wisdom/Torah that culminates in the Creation is described so playfully and full of joy. Perhaps one can even see 'holy matrimony' in this pairing. God and Wisdom, God and the Torah, jointly engender the world.

Step 2: If one is aware that *amon* on the part of God is the Torah, one can also easily accept these peculiar philological-theological definitions of particular words. The Torah is a teacher (just as in Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Gal 3:24) and has been hidden since or even before the world began. And it is clear that the Torah remains concealed, covered until its revelation. The last image in this section is perhaps the most difficult to explain: how can *amon* be understood as a big city? Does this refer to the city as a representation of Creation, of the world, of the polity? Or even to Alexandria as an allusion to Jerusalem?

Steps 3 and 4: Anyone acquainted with the rabbinic discourse knows that its authors sometimes use more or less hidden erotic metaphors as theological references. The Torah is like a partner to God; she is an eternal source of joy, but nevertheless a hired artisan, and even a tool. This sort of controlled diversity is common in rabbinic literature. The Torah appears as a person on three levels in relation to God: as a loved partner, as a hired artisan, and as a "tool", whereby, on each level, the other two are also present.

Step 5: Despite the subordination of the Torah, God is dependent upon his tool when he wants to create the world. The hierarchical rankings are totally ambivalent. God needs the Torah in order to be able to create the world. What is especially exciting about this intra-rabbinic reading is that the Torah, which is ultimately the whole of rabbinic tradition and teaching, is, in an experimental sense, made superior to God!

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8 The view of Torah as a partner of God in GenR 1:1 differs from later (Babylonian) concepts describing Torah in erotic terms as a female partner (or sexual object) of the wise man, cf. Jeffrey Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp. 118 – 120.

Step 6: And finally, it is our Midrash verse (Gen 1:1) that contains and proves it all: *bereshit bara elohim* / in the beginning God created. If *reshit* always means Torah, this is the reason why we can understand the deeper meaning of this passage: *ba-Torah bara elohim* / with the Torah God created. Moreover, this is also where the Torah begins to speak, with the verse Gen 1:1. Creation and Torah thus, in the rabbinic view, begin simultaneously and are linked to the given text. And this profound correspondence is the point of our exegesis.

## How Does This Text Work?

How does this text achieve what is nothing short of a quite suggestive effect? Above all, this comes about by means of the fluctuating meaning of the word *amon*, which the interpreters utilize for their purposes. Concerning the term “*amon*,” we have to differentiate between, on the one hand, its meaning in the biblical verse Prov 8:30, and, on the other, the rabbinic understanding of it – that is to say, we must determine where our authors use which meaning.

The literature dealing with the question of what “*amon*” means in Prov 8:30 could fill several meters of library shelf space.<sup>9</sup> There are three main translation possibilities:

- (1) artist, artisan, master craftsman
- (2) trusted friend, confidant
- (3) small child, foster child.

The Bible translator also has to deal with the fact that “*amon*” is a masculine noun, whereas what follows in Prov 8:30 “rejoicing before him” is a feminine form.

In the Septuagint, “*amon*” is given as the feminine ἀμύζουσα, “the ordering, organizing force”, which is, in turn, translated with the Latin word “conponens” in the Vulgate. On the other hand, the Greek translators Symmachus and Theodotion as well as Aquila employ terms that can be translated as “foster child.”

The biblical scholar Ruben Zimmermann suggests something completely different. He understands *amon* in Prov 8:30 to mean “intimate confidant” and interprets the passionate play mentioned in the verse in an erotic sense.<sup>10</sup> I find this highly convincing because in the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom is always de-

9 Michael V. Fox, “‘Amon Again’,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996), pp. 699 – 702 (with references to the interpretation history of ‘*amon*’); R. B. Y. Scott, “Wisdom in Creation”; Ruben Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*. Tübingen: Mohr, 2001, pp. 159 – 166.

10 Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik*, pp. 159 – 164.



picted as a woman, an active lover, one beloved.<sup>11</sup> Using this approach, at the beginning of our Midrash, we have a sexual metaphor and the image of the "engendering" of the world. *Amon* is the beloved of God, God's partner. The mythological tradition of the loving and procreating divine couple is taken up here.<sup>12</sup> This is so because this content was known, and because it is beautiful and lovely. In our Midrash, on the one hand, this theme is open for all to behold; on the other hand, it remains below the surface.

From this perspective, we can clearly observe the development of our term in the course of the text of GenR 1:1. The Torah makes the transition from beloved to artist and from artist to tool, albeit an indispensable and precious instrument to be sure.

But now, finally, we have to ask: When in the course of the reading do we notice what is actually transpiring here? When is the signal sent that enables us to understand the point of the elaboration?

A clear shift in this direction is made when the authors state that *amon* is to be read as *uman* (artist). This enables – by phonetic association – the next step: from *uman* to *keli umanuto* (tool of his art), a switch that seems to work for the authors only in combination with *torah*. Only the Torah can be the tool of the Creation because only she/it is God's confidant from the beginning. Now (since we have a tool) the biblical term *be-reshit* can be read as an instrumental case: "by *reshit*", "by means of *reshit*." This opens up the field for the final *hermeneutical operation* (German "hermeneutische Operation"<sup>13</sup>): *reshit* has to be identified with "Torah." The authors do that by means of a wonderful reading of Prov 8:22 – the third verse of the *Petiha*<sup>14</sup> and again Wisdom's direct speech. Usually translated *YHWH acquired me*<sup>15</sup> in the beginning of his way they read the verse as: *YHWH acquired me as the beginning of his way*. So this verse comes to be the midrashic proof that Wisdom/Torah is the *reshit* of Gen 1:1.

The authors can now take everything that they have established and deduced concerning the common function of Wisdom, *amon*, and Torah, and insert it into *reshit*. Needless to say, they knew right from the start that this was the conclusion they wanted to reach and towards which they strove – just as all authors do. Our Midrash is by no means the outcome of an impartial reading. The entire line of argumentation is already laid out in the two verses juxtaposed at the outset. The

11 Cf. Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Schöpfung: Biblische Theologien im Kontext alt-orientalischer Religionen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, pp. 220 – 223.

12 Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik*, pp. 165 (reference to Wisdom 8:3).

13 Arnold Goldberg, "Die funktionale Form Midrasch," in *Rabbinische Texte II*, pp. 199 – 229, p. 202.

14 Cf. above note 4.

15 Regarding the discussion on the meaning and translation of קָנִיתִי/"acquired me" or "made me" cf. Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik*, pp.159.163 – 165 and the literature quoted there.

remarkable thing about this is that only we readers who are unfamiliar with the argumentation have no idea how it is going to turn out until the very end. Then all we have to do is to reread the text and we can follow what the authors are saying. Only in retrospect we can comprehend the rabbis' reading of the verse.

To conclude with a broader perspective, our *petiha* verse Prov 8:30 (31) appears again in another *Petiha* in GenR (85:9) when the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) is discussed. The verse 38:20, *And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not*, is said to be explained or deepened by: *Rejoicing in his inhabited world, rejoicing before him always* (Prov 8:31.30). Once again, the reader needs help to understand this combination of verses (which is, again, understandable only in retrospect). The Torah is rejoicing, it/she is making fun of the human protagonist. Judah had once fooled his father, Jacob, "with a kid" – i. e. he and his brothers had dipped Joseph's garments in the blood of a slaughtered kid to trick Jacob into believing that Joseph had fallen victim to a wild animal. Now, he wants to send a kid to Tamar, the purported whore, but it looks as if Judah cannot get rid of this kid from bygone days. The Torah, the text of the Torah, or the Torah as a person, is making fun of him.

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Gerhard Langer (Vienna)

## ***Lekh Lekha*: Midrash Bereshit Rabbah and Tanhuma to Gen 12:1**

The following article tries to explain, based on an example, how Midrashic texts can be analysed using a literary approach integrating historical-critical questions.

### **Midrash and a literary approach**

Midrash can be seen – with certain reservations and additions – as a product of deep rabbinic involvement with the Bible. It is based on the understanding of the constant validity of the Scripture's message and its meaning and on the premise of its inherent continuity. Furthermore, the Bible is and remains “the world where Jewish life takes place” and where Jewish identity can be obtained. Even when the rabbis introduce certain events in history or of their own environment, they deduce major conceptions and rules for life from the Scripture by means of Midrash.

As Paul Mandel<sup>1</sup>, amongst others, has shown in some of his works, Midrash cannot be reduced to “haggadic” or exegetical exposition of biblical material, since it was also used as instruction (in older corpora) on Halakhah, without necessarily referring to Scripture. It is important to understand these facts in order to comprehend the complex development of the Midrash from its forerunners within the Bible and Second Temple literature, so that it is not interpreted one-dimensionally as “exegesis.”

According to Mandel, “darash” in a series of texts is, as opposed to common interpretation, closer connected to instruction and expounding of the Torah than

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1 Paul Mandel, “Legal Midrash between Hillel and Rabbi Akiva: Did 70 Make a Difference.” In: Daniel Schwartz and Zeev Weiss (eds.), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012 (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 78), pp. 343 – 370; idem, “Darash Rabbi Peloni. A New Study.” *Dappim: Research in Literature* 16 – 17 (2008), pp. 27 – 54 [Hebr.]; idem, “The Origins of Midrash in the Second Temple Period.” In: Carol Bakhos (ed.), *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006 (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 106), pp. 9 – 34.

to explorative explanation and interpretation of the text, which turns out to be the main function of the Midrash in later rabbinical literature. However, a change of the “object” of “searching for/explorate” (*darash*) takes place in the later stages of the Tanakh and the Qumran scrolls – from God (via prophetic intercession) to an instruction from God: the Torah.

To be sure, not only the halakhic, but also the exegetical and haggadic aspects play an important role in understanding Midrash, which cannot be elaborated further here.

Rabbinic Midrash is the result of a special connection to Scripture as an always actual and valid “text-world,” as witness of God’s revelation and, therefore, as means of communication with God.

Midrash makes the Bible a steady foundation of the relation with God, closes gaps, answers questions, opens a dialogue between the “old lessons” and the “new challenges,” the community and God, between the text-world and the experienced world.

This communication does not ask for the “one” true meaning, and is nevertheless not arbitrary, but “true” in a wider sense. Exegesis is guided by the gaps in the text and needs hermeneutical principles to correlate the text-world with the rabbinic world. The rabbis gain power as exegetes, as communicators with God via explanation of the textual revelation, as legitimate heirs of the revelation at Sinai. Not the direct prophetic interaction with God, but the continuing exploration – and teaching – of the textual meaning is guarantee of the lasting presence of the Bible, and with it, God Himself.

Examination of Midrash in modern research may focus on a wide range of questions and approaches. One has to locate a perception of the Midrash as fictional literature, which dates back to the Renaissance and at the latest to the beginning of the Haskalah.<sup>2</sup> Here one can refer to authorities such as Leopold Zunz, Wilhelm Bacher, and Nachman Bialik in order to show the call for rhetoric, artistic and literary analysis in the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the same time, one has to take into account that this age was dominated mostly by a historical perception of the texts. In the past 50 years, the literary approach to Midrash as an independent discipline with its own methodology and questions grew stronger. One must think of the *Jerusalem School* with Dov Noy, Joseph Heinemann and Yonah Fraenkel. Studies on language, structures, and the lit-

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2 Cf. Joshua Levinson, “Literary Approaches to Midrash.” In: Bakhos, *Current Trends*, pp. 189 – 226. Cf. also his articles “Dialogical Reading in the Rabbinic Exegetical Narrative.” *Poetics Today* 25/3 (2004), pp. 498 – 528; “Tragedies Naturally Performed: Fatal Charades, Parodia Sacra, and the Death of Titus.” In: Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*. Leuven: Peeters, 2003, pp. 349 – 382; “olam hafuch raiti – ijjun ba-sippur ha-shikhor u-banaw.” *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 12 (1990), pp. 7 – 29 [Hebr.].

erary structure of text units became increasingly important. At the same time, in the maelstrom of movements such as New Criticism or Formalism, a development of methods of close readings took place in order to understand the text as a literary piece of art. Historical examinations took a back seat, while the literary core of fictive narrative came to the fore. In the past 15 years, a counter-movement has developed in terms of “back to history” with the justified indication that such texts were created in a certain setting, within a context and social reality.

Joshua Levinson, who contributes an important article to this volume, tries to find a literary approach to Midrash in the sense described above, by using the exegetical narrative as an example, which combines both interpretation and narrative and thus creates suspense. In this context, his central work “The Twice Told Tale”<sup>3</sup> is worth mentioning.

The exegetical narrative is defined by the intense encounter between the biblical text and the rabbinic culture and helps solve problems occurring both in Scripture and in the current rabbinic cultural context. The new and the old merge here in a fascinating manner. The commentary derives its meaning especially through the connection to the authoritative text.

Gaps, blanks, and tensions are symptoms of an underlying narrative. Some of the gaps within the rabbinic narratives cause problems for the rabbis and are therefore picked out as central themes. Those gaps include, amongst others, the lack of an inner life, of thoughts and feelings and an inner conviction. The internal monologues of the biblical characters in the narratives play an important role and have subsequently to be interpreted by means of a narratological analysis.

On the one hand, rabbinic texts must be viewed within the context of literary theories and their usage in order to comprehend the complex aspects of the cooperation between the biblical text and the rabbinic narrative. On the other hand, this approach does not disagree with the view of rabbinic narratives as an expression of the very environment of the rabbis, their problems and the historical context.<sup>4</sup> Literary approach and historical(-critical) questions are connected.

3 Joshua Levinson, *The Twice-Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash (ha-sippur she-lo suppar: omanut ha-sippur ha-mikra'i ma-murchav be-midreshe hazal)*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005 [Hebr.]. Regarding the exegetical narrative cf. also Ofra Meir, *The Exegetical Narrative in Genesis Rabbah [ha-sippur Ha-darshani bi-Vereschit Rabba]*. Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1987 [Hebr.].

4 Here the studies of Jeffrey Rubenstein are also worth mentioning. Rubenstein developed a close reading of Talmudic narratives as well as thoughts about the culture which created them: *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010; “Context and Genre: Elements of a Literary Approach to the Rabbinic Narrative.” In: Matthew Kraus (ed.), *How should rabbinic literature be read in the modern world*. New Jersey 2006 (Judaism in Context 4), pp. 137 – 165; *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture*. Baltimore 1999.

In the following I would like to analyze two Midrashim that deal with the beginning of Gen 12:1, Lekh lekha.

The verse, which covers Abraham's order to decamp, marks a turning point from the history of the peoples to the history of the fathers of Israel.

Its function as a "hinge" is appealing enough to analyze the rabbinic reception of the text. I am restricting myself to two traditions, namely Bereshit Rabba (Gen. Rab.) and Tanḥuma.

The following analysis offers an approach to dealing with a Midrash text systematically in an easy and comprehensible manner. Mainly straightforward phrases are used. First is the analysis of the hermeneutical steps. A close reading of the text based on narratological analyses follows. After this, the text will be put very briefly within a historical and cultural context.

Though concentrating on the sample, some additional passages will be consulted, if they can help create a deeper understanding of some terms or interpretation used, through a broader spectrum of examples, especially when a passage in the text refers to other passages.

## Gen. Rab. Lekh Lekha 1<sup>5</sup>

The choice of the text and its boundaries are prerequisites for a serious discussion of the text. The choice of a Ms or a regular edition, in case a complex synoptic editing is hardly feasible, always poses a challenge. This is aggravated by the different versions of Mss.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Gen. Rab., I choose Ms Vat. Ebr. 30 as our source, since it offers an excellent textual basis and is superior to Ms Vat. Ebr. 60. This text is also used in the Ma'agarim database. Gen. Rab., in its editorial form, dates back to the fifth century C.E.<sup>7</sup>

5 In this article I do not present texts in Hebrew/Aramaic, but presuppose the work on the "original" text, in this case, Ms Vat. Ebr. 30.

6 Cf. Hans-Jürgen Becker, *Die großen rabbinischen Sammelwerke Palästinas: Zur literarischen Genese von Talmud Yerushalmi und Midrash Bereshit Rabba*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999 (TSAJ 70).

7 Hans Jürgen Becker objects to the global dating emphasizing the long editorial process coming to a preliminary end with the manuscripts of the Middle Ages, which should be taken into account. (cf. Hans-Jürgen Becker, "Texts and History: The Dynamic Relationship between Talmud Yerushalmi and Genesis Rabbah." In: Shaye J. D. Cohen (ed.), *The Synoptic Problem in rabbinic Literature*. Providence: Brown Univ., 2000, pp. 145 – 158). Chaim Milikowsky, on the other hand, questions the theoretical principals of Becker's theses, based on intensive studies of the manuscripts ("On the Formation and Transmission of Bereshit Rabba and the Yerushalmi: Questions of Redaction, Text-Criticism and Literary Relationships." *JQR* 92 (2002), pp. 521 – 567). He rejects some of the assumptions which he deems poorly verified, offers alternative explanations by using catchy examples, and tries to show that a relatively closed mode of transfer did exist.

The text in translation<sup>8</sup>

## A

The LORD said to Abram, *Lekh lekha* [from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you] (Gen 12:1).

R. Isaac taught/explored (*patah*)<sup>9</sup>: "Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house" (Ps 45:11).

Said R. Isaac: (This may be compared) to a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a building in flames. He said, Is it possible that the building lacks a person to look after it? The owner of the building looked out and said, I am the owner of the building. Similarly, because Abraham our father said, Is it conceivable that the world is without a guide?, the Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, I am the Guide, the Sovereign of the Universe.

"And the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your Lord. Bow down to him" (Ps 45:12): "And the king will desire your beauty" – i. e. to make you beautiful in the world. "Since he is your Lord. Bow down to him": hence, "The LORD said to Abram."

## B

R. Berekhia taught/explored (*patah*): "Your anointing oils are fragrant" (Song 1:3). Said R. Berekhia: What did Abraham resemble? A phial of myrrh closed with a tight-fitting lid and lying in a corner, so that its fragrance was not disseminated; as soon as it was taken up, however, its fragrance was disseminated. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, our father: Travel from place to place, and your name will become great in the world: hence, "The LORD said to Abram, *Lekh lekha*."

<sup>8</sup> The translation by Moshe A. Mirkin, *Midrash Rabba 1 – 4*. Tel Aviv 1956 – 1958, is adapted and further developed.

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Mandel's research on the usage of the verb *patah* in Jewish antiquity on the topic *Petiḥa/proem*. ("al 'patah' we-al ha-Petiḥa: ijjun hadash." In: Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (eds.), *Higayon L'Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyyut. In Honor of Professor Yona Fraenkel*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006, pp. 49 – 82 [Hebr.]) The term doesn't only bear the meaning "commence" as it is commonly used in the Bavli. Relating to the expression "Rabbi NN *patah*" which is characteristic of the *Petiḥa*, he turns against the assumption that it is an abbreviation of "he disclosed and said" or "he disclosed and interpreted" resp. "he disclosed his interpretation/ started to interpret". It cannot merely be understood as "to conduct an interpretation" but in the meaning of "teaching", "explaining" and "discover" (the sense of the quoted verses, stemming from the *Neviim* and *Ketuvim*) in many cases. According to Mandel – followed by Burton Visotzky with statistical investigation – ("The Misnomers '*Petiḥah*' and 'Homiletic Midrash' as Description for *Leviticus Rabbah* and *Pesiḳta De-Rav Kahana*." *JSQ* 18 (2011), pp. 19 – 31) – it cannot be proved that *Petiḥot* in the classical Midrash point towards a kind of homily. Only in the editorial *Petiḥot* of *EkhR* one can find a continuous use of *patah*, but that is not the case in *PesK* or *WaR* (or in *Gen. Rab.*). This kind of radical rebuff of the term *Petiḥa* is closely connected to a rejection of the concept of homiletical midrash. Besides that, Mandel shows that the interpretations of the *Petiḥa* don't lead towards or back to the verse interpreted. This undermines the common description of the *Petiḥa* that a verse from the Pentateuch is contrasted with a *Petiḥa* verse, whose interpretation eventually leads back to the initial verse. Visotzky doesn't deny an editorial form, which he suggests should rather be called *proem* than the misleading term *Petiḥa*, in connection with the Greco- Roman rhetoric.

## C

R. Berekhia taught/explained (*patah*): “We have a little sister and she has no breasts” (*aḥot*)” (Song 8:8): “We have a little sister”: this refers to Abraham, who united (*iḥah*) the whole world for us. Bar Kappara said: Like a person who sews a tear together. “Little”: (till) made to a tall suit: (it means, that) even while young he stored up pious acts and good deeds.

“And she has no breasts” (Song 8:8): no breasts suckled him with pious acts or/and good deeds.

“What shall we do for our sister, on the day when she is spoken for?” (Song 8:8) – i. e. on the day when Nimrod ordered him to be cast into the fiery furnace.

“If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver[; but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar]” (Song 8:9): if he resists (Nimrod) like a wall, He (God) will build up (a defence) for him. “but if she is a door (*delet*), we will enclose her [with boards of cedar]” – if he is poor (*dal*) in pious acts and good deeds, “we will enclose (*natzur*) her with boards of cedar”: and just as a drawing (*tzura*) (on boards)) is only temporary, so will I protect him only for a time.

Said he (Abraham) to Him: Sovereign of the Universe! “I [was a] wall” (Song 8:10): I stand as firm as a wall; “And my breasts were like towers” (Song 8:10): these are my sons Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

“Then I was in his eyes as one who brings peace” (Song 8:10): he entered (the fiery furnace) to peace and left it to peace: hence, “The LORD said to Abram, *Lekh lekha*.”

## D

“Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten rulers [that are in a city]” (Eccl. 7:19).

“Wisdom gives strength”: this refers to Abraham; “than ten rulers”: than the ten generations from Noah to Abraham; out of all of them I spoke to you alone, as it is written, “The LORD said to Abram, *Lekh lekha*.”

## E

R. Azariah taught/explained (*patah*): “We tried to heal Babylon, but she could not be healed. Forsake her, and let each of us go to our own country” (Jer 51:9). “We tried to heal Babylon” – refers to the generation of Enosh; “But she could not be healed” – refers to the generation of the flood; “Forsake her,” – refers to the generation of the tower of Babylon; “and let each of us go to our own country” (Jer 51:9), (as it is written), “The LORD said to Abram, *Lekh lekha*.”

## F

R. Azariah taught/explained (*patah*) in R. Aha’s name thus: “You love righteousness and hate wickedness. [Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions]” (Ps 45:8).

R. Azariah in R. Aḥa’s name referred (*patar*) the verse to our father Abraham. When Abraham our father stood to plead for mercy for the Sodomites, what is written there? “Far be it from you to do such a thing[, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?.]” (Gen 18:25). R. Aḥa explained this: You have sworn not to bring a deluge upon the world. Would you evade your oath! Not a deluge of water will you bring but a deluge of fire? Then you have not been true to your oath.



R. Levi commented: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:25). If you desire the world to endure, there can be no (absolute) justice, while if you desire (absolute) justice the world cannot endure, yet you would hold the cord by both ends, desiring both the world and absolute justice. Unless you overlook a little, the world cannot endure.

Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Abraham: “You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions” (Ps 45:8). What does “beyond your companions” mean? From Noah until you were ten generations, and out of all of them I spoke with you alone; hence, “The LORD said to Abram: *Lekh Lekha*.”

G

Now what precedes this passage? “And Teraḥ died in Haran” (Gen 11:32), (which is followed by) “The LORD said to Abram: *Lekh Lekha*.” R. Isaac said: From the point of view of chronology a period of sixty-five years is still required. But first you may learn that the wicked, even during their lifetime, are called dead.

For our father Abraham was afraid, saying, Shall I go out and bring dishonor upon the Divine Name, as people will say, He left his father in his old age and departed? Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, reassured him: I exempt you (*lekha*) from the duty of honoring your parents, though I exempt no one else from this duty. Moreover, I will record his death before your departure. Hence, “And Teraḥ died in Haran” is stated first, and then, “The LORD said to Abram,” etc.

H

R. Juda and R. Neḥemia: R. Juda said: *Lek lekh(a)* (Go, go) is written twice, one passage (referring to his departure) from Aram Naharaim, and the other (to his departure) from Aram Naḥor. R. Neḥemia said: *Lekh lekha* is written twice, one passage (referring to his departure) from Aram Naharaim and Aram Naḥor, and the other intimating that he made him fly from the Covenant between the pieces (Gen 15) and brought him to Haran.

I

It is written: “Your people (‘*ammekha*) will offer themselves willingly (*nedaboth*) on the day of your warfare (*ḥelekha*). From the womb of the morning, yours is the dew of your youth” (Ps 110:3).

(This means): I was with you (‘*immekha*) when you willingly offered (*nadabta*) for my name’s sake to enter the fiery furnace.

“On the day of your warfare”; when you brought me all those bands.

“In the holy majesty”: out of eternal majesty<sup>10</sup> did I sanctify you.

“From the womb of the morning (*merehem misheḥar*)”: from out of the womb of the world have I sought you (*shihartikha*) for me.

“Yours is the dew of your youth”: because Abraham was afraid and said to himself, Perhaps I bear guilt for having worshipped idols all these years, God reassured him:

“Yours is the dew of your youth”: even as dew evaporates, so have your sins evaporated

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<sup>10</sup> Ms. London reads *be-harre qodesh* and refers to the holy mountain, probably an allusion to the Mount Moriah.

(disappeared); as dew is a sign of blessing to the world, so are you a sign of blessing to the world.

J

It is written: "And I say, O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest" (Ps 55:7). Why like a dove? Said R. Azariah in the name of R. Judan b. R. Simon: Because all other birds, when tired, rest on a rock or a tree, but when a dove is tired she draws in one of her wings and flies on with the other.

"Truly, I would flee far away" (Ps 55:8): exile after exile, journey after journey. "I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah" (Ps 55:8): better is it to lodge in the deserts of Eretz Israel than in palaces abroad.

And should you object, if he (Abraham) had no qualms but rejoiced (to go), why did he not emigrate (sooner)? Because he had not yet been permitted; but as soon as he was permitted, it is written, "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran]" (Gen 12:4).

K

R. Levi said: When Abraham was travelling through Aram Naharaim and Aram Nahor, he saw its inhabitants eating and drinking and jumping (or: being overweening). May my portion not be in this country! he exclaimed. But when he reached the promontory of Tyre and saw them engaged in weeding and hoeing at the proper seasons, he exclaimed, Would that my portion might be in this country! Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: "To your descendants I give this land" (Gen 15:18).

L

R. Levi said: "*Lekh Lekha*" is written twice (Gen 12:1 and 22:2), and we do not know which was more precious (in the eyes of God), whether the second or the first.

R. Johanan said: "Go from your country" (Gen 12:1): means, from thy province; "and your kindred": from the place where you are settled; "and your father's house": literally, your father's house; "to the land that I will show you"; why did he not reveal it to him (there and then)? In order to make it more beloved in his eyes and to reward him for every step he took.

This agrees with another teaching of R. Johanan, (for R. Johanan said): And he said: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah" (Gen 22:2) – He asked: Which one? "Your only son." He answered him: Each is the only one of his mother? He said to him: "Whom you love." He answered him: I love them both: are there limits to one's emotions? Said he to him: "Isaac." And why did he not reveal it to him (without delay)? In order to make him even more beloved in his eyes and reward him for every word spoken.

R. Jose and R. Huna said in R. Eliezer's, the son of R. Jose ha-Gelili's name: The Holy One, blessed be He, first places the righteous in doubt and suspense, and then He reveals to them the meaning of the matter. Thus (it is written), "to the land that I will show you"; "On one of the mountains that I shall show you"; "and proclaim to it the message that I tell you" (Jonah 3:2); "Rise up, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you" (Ezek 3:22).

M

R. Berekhia b. R. Simon said in R. Neḥemia's name: (This may be illustrated) by a king who was passing from place to place, when a gem fell from his head. Whereupon the king halted and stationed his retinue there, gathered the sand in piles, and brought sieves. He sifted the first pile but did not find it; the second but did not find it; but in the third he found it. Said they: The king has found his pearl. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: What need had I to trace the descent of "Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Naḥor, and Terah?" (1Chr 1:24 – 26). Was it not on your account? Thus it is written, "And you found his heart faithful before you" (Neh 9:8). In like manner God said to David: What need had I to trace the descent of Perez, Hezron, Ram, Aminadab, Nachshon, Shalmon, Boaz, Obed, and Jesse? Was it not on your account? "I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him" (Ps 89:21).

Structures, forms and hermeneutical processes

The following table provides an overview of the forms and hermeneutical processes used in the verse quoted:

Forms	Prooftexts	Hermeneutical processes	Problems, questions (gaps in the text) and answers	Conclusions
Proem (with <i>pataḥ</i> ) <i>Mashal</i>	Ps 45:11	<i>Mashal</i> : wanderer seeing a building in flames	Is there a guide/sovereign? theodicy	Abraham looks for God; God shows himself
	Ps 45:12			God promotes Abraham, he adores God, therefore God speaks to him
Proem (with <i>pataḥ</i> )	Song 1:3	Abraham compared to a phial of myrrh	Dissemination in the world	Abraham must wander to be "fragrant"
Proem (with <i>pataḥ</i> ) <i>Mashal</i>	Song 8:8:	Allegory	Abraham/a person sews the tear	Abraham unites the world;
	Little	Allegory	Pious acts and good deeds done	Abraham has pious acts and good deeds,
	No breasts	Allegory	No pious acts and good deeds were taught	Although not taught from his family

(Continued)

Forms	Prooftexts	Hermeneutical processes	Problems, questions (gaps in the text) and answers	Conclusions
	The day when the sister is spoken for (Song 8:8)		Abraham in the fiery furnace	Abraham endangered
	Being a wall or a door (Song 8.9)	Allegory/ metaphor, pun (alliteration) Abraham is the "author" of the verse	Being a strong or weak character	Abraham is a wall
	Breasts as towers	Allegory	The martyrs in the future, Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are "relatives" entering and leaving the fiery furnace in peace	There is a line from Abraham to the martyrs of later times
	Bringing peace Eccl. 7:19	Allegory; Pun on <i>shalom</i> Allegory	Abraham in the fiery furnace Abraham is better /wiser than the former generations	Abraham left in peace Abraham is the beginning of a new era
Proem (with <i>pataḥ</i> )	Jer 51:9	Identification with "historical" events	No chance to heal Babylon	Abraham had to leave the country
Proem (with <i>pataḥ</i> )	Ps 45:8	Petirah		
	Gen 18:25	Abraham in Sodom		Abraham loves and fights for righteousness
	Ps 45:8	Abraham is anointed with oil of gladness; Abraham is better than the former generations		Abraham is the beginning of a new era
	Gen 11:32	Explanation of problems in the text: age of Terah	Terah is wicked, therefore his death is mentioned early	Abraham is free from honoring his father
	<i>Lekh lekha</i>	Explanation of problems in the text: why is <i>lekha</i> mentioned twice?	Abraham's wandering	

(Continued)

Forms	Prooftexts	Hermeneutical processes	Problems, questions (gaps in the text) and answers	Conclusions
	Ps 110:3	Allegory: pun	Abraham's youth. Abraham in the fiery furnace Abraham bringing people to God Has he done something wrong in the beginning?	God protects Abraham and assures him  He has done everything right
	Ps 55:7	Allegory: Explanation of "dove"	Comparing a dove with other birds	Abraham/Israel is different
	Ps 55:8	Explanation of "flee"		Exiles
	Ps 55:8	Explanation of "lodge"	Why did Abraham not leave earlier?	Israel is better than other countries Abraham does the will of God and makes good decisions
	Gen 12:4		Abraham left, when he was told to do	
	Gen 15:18		Abraham lives among good people	God answers him with a blessing
	<i>Lekh lekha</i> Gen 12:1 and 22:2	Explanation of problems in the text: why is <i>lekha lekha</i> mentioned twice?		
	Jonah 3:2 Ezek 3:22	Explanation of Gen 12:1 and 22:2	Gen 12:1 and 22:2 are similar; Abraham is honored for every word Righteous are left in doubt first	The first and last trial of Abraham are intertwined Abraham is the righteous, who may be tested
<i>Mashal</i>	1Chr 1:24 – 26 Neh 9:8 Ps 89:21	<i>Mashal</i> : a king loses a pearl and tries to find it in the sand	Abraham and David are pearls, both are compared	God looks for the right persons; David, the Messiah, is seen in the light of Abraham

Looking at this structure, one notices the alignment of proems in the beginning, while at the end problems arising from the text are being explained. Both in the beginning and in the end, *Meshalim* (parables) serve as an explanation. Their common topic is searching and finding. Abraham is looking for the caretaker of a building; God is looking for the pearl in the sand.

After the long introductory section to Ps 45:11 – 12 and Abraham's encounter with God, the manager of the world, follow the proems to Song 1:3 and 8:8 – 10. Their main theme is the significance of Abraham for the world and his strengths. The subsequent sections deal with parts of protohistory, the days of Noah (prooftext Eccl 7:19), the generation of the builders of the tower of Babel (prooftext Jer 51: 9), and finally Abraham's commitment to the Sodomites (prooftext Ps 45:8). In Pisqa 7 the text focuses on solving problems arising from difficult time specifications and – from the rabbinic point of view – unnecessary double naming of terms, e. g. *lekh lekha*.

The prooftexts Ps 110: 3 and Ps 55:7 – 8 at the end return to Abraham's childhood and his leaving his homeland. In Gen 12:1 this is closely connected to 22:2, the beginning of the Aqeda-pericope (binding of Isaak). In both verses, Abraham earned merits.

There is a certain concentric structure:

- A) Abraham and the disposer of the world; Abraham as an outstanding personality – looking for God
- B) The migration and the meaning of the exile; Abraham's strength
- C) The early generations
- D) Abraham's commitment to justice
- C') Terah
- B') Abraham's strength; the migration and the importance of Israel
- A') Abraham as an outstanding personality – found by God

Gen. Rab. works with allegoric references, which means that biblical verses relate to a certain person (e. g. Abraham and others) rather than to an abstraction. In one case, Abraham is referred to as the "little sister." This kind of identification is usually done in a petirah form, especially in the haggadic Midrash. *Patar* is linguistically related to the *Pesher* (a form favored in Qumran) and means "solve, interpret." Often petirot are simple explanations such as: biblical verse – meaning – a person/an event etc. Quite frequently, general facts or abstract terms refer to persons or concrete events.

The events interpreted in the Petirah are not contemporary, certainly not imminent in the eschatological future (or recent, near apocalyptic past, as in the New Testament use of the fulfillment form); rather, they tend to be chosen from the far past, usually from the Biblical past, a realm of history that can be best characterized by its unthreatening distance from the interpreter.<sup>11</sup>

The first Petirah to Ps 45:11: "Hear o daughter" = Abraham, is not actually carried out but explained in a Mashal. I will refer to this later on.

Also in the next section, a simile follows instead of a particular reference: Abraham resembles a phial of myrrh.

11 David Stern, "Midrash and Indeterminacy." *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988), pp. 132 – 161 at 143.

Only the interpretation of Song 8:8 carries out a Petirah: We have a little sister (*aḥot*) (Song 8:8) = Abraham. Here it also goes along with a simile: like a person who sews a tear together.

Abraham was not suckled with pious acts and good deeds. The symbol of nursing is often used in Rabbinic texts, in different contexts and meanings.<sup>12</sup> Here it is connected with the parental care to become a successful personality, getting taught the “habitus” of the righteous.

Not only Abraham, but also the likes of Ḥananiah, Mishael and Azariah, the heroes of the Book of Daniel who were thrown into a furnace but managed to escape alive, are connected to a Petirah (Dan 3). They are the “Towers” in Song 8:10.

Ps 45:8 also refers to Abraham:

“You love righteousness and hate wickedness.” (Ps 45:8). R. Azariah in R. Aha’s name referred (*patar*) the verse to our father Abraham.

The companions in the same verse turn out to be the ten generations from Noah to Abraham.

The identification with persons and events can be extended by another little story to show Abraham’s inner life. The biblical text does not deal with such issues, but in rabbinic literature, it becomes more and more significant:

“Yours is the dew of your youth”: because Abraham was afraid and said to himself, Perhaps I bear guilt for having worshipped idols all these years, God reassured him: “Yours is the dew of your youth”: even as dew evaporates, so have your sins evaporated (disappeared); as dew is a sign of blessing to the world, so are you a sign of blessing to the world.

Puns are frequently used, developing from alliterations or assonances. They are deliberately used as connections to convey a message that can differ from the written text and cannot be regarded as etymologically similar.

“but if she is a door (*delet*), we will enclose her with boards of cedar” – if he is poor (*dal*) in pious acts and good deeds, “we will enclose (*natzur*) her with boards [of cedar]”: and just as a drawing (*tzura*) (on boards)] is only temporary, so will I protect him only for a time.

or:

It is written: “Your people (‘*ammekha*) will offer themselves willingly (*ne-davot*) on the day of your warfare (*helekha*). From the womb of the morning, yours is the dew of your youth” (Ps 110:3) = I was with you (‘*immekha*) when you willingly offered (*nadavta*) for my name’s sake to enter the fiery furnace.

Without punctuation, it is easy to read “‘am” (People) as “‘im” (with).

12 Cf. Admiel Kosman, *Gender and Dialogue in the Rabbinic Prism* (Studia Judaica 50), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 133 – 153.

It is not only the puns that push the exegesis. The rabbis consider the biblical text perfect, without contradictions, stringent and clear. Each repetition and reduplication has to be explained, each contradiction must be solved, and redundancies must be avoided.

This applies also for the double *lekh* in Gen 12:1 or the repetitions in Gen 12:1 and 22:2. The understanding of *lekh* resp. *lekha* itself is up for discussion.

A closer look at the usage of the prooftexts will offer a stepping stone.<sup>13</sup>

### Analysis according to narratological categories

In the following I want to take a closer look at the narratological elements in the chapter.<sup>14</sup> I focus on persons and their appearance, about actions and speech acts, time and space and point of view.

#### Time and space

Here we are dealing with a turning point, a departure situation. From this point, one gains hindsight about the past and foresight for the future, or, as Genette would call it, analepsis and prolepsis.

The hindsight in C) shows the missing “mother’s breast” in the broader sense. Abraham’s experience with Nimrod supports this. The later martyrs come into play in a proleptic sense. The choice of *Geschehensmomente* (moments when things happen) is defined by the connection of pious acts and good deeds, the action of Nimrod, which is not explained but assumed, and by the succession of later martyrs for monotheism.

The ten generations before Abraham are briefly brought up (D; E) before the time period reaches Sodom. This is followed by a longer account of the dialogue between Abraham and God. Then it goes back to Abraham as a child and to his thoughts about his father Teraḥ. Here, the originally brief mention of Teraḥ (and his death) in the Bible is stretched (G). The temporal level plays an important role. Teraḥ is 205 years old when he dies in Haran. But when Abraham left Haran at the age of 75 (Gen 12:4) and Teraḥ begot Abraham at the age of 70 (Gen 11:26), then he would have died at the age of 145. The time difference can be explained in a way that death is not a physical, but a spiritual ending, experienced by the idolaters.

13 I do not deal with this in this context, but refer to my “Abraham zur Rechten Gottes. Der Ps 110 in der rabbinischen Tradition.” *Evangelische Theologie* 59 (1999), pp. 252 – 266.

14 For a theoretical discussion and an introduction to narratology, see Wolf Schmid, *Elemente der Narratologie*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics*. London et al.: Routledge, 2002; Gérard Genette, *Paratexte. Das Buch vom Beiwerk des Buches*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001; idem, *Palimpseste. Die Literatur auf zweiter Stufe*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993.



H covers the migration of Abraham in two stages. Aram Naharaim is not simply Mesopotamia, but rather the region around Haran, while Aram Naḥor is probably the city named after him (Gen 24).

Gen 15 is also a link to the decampment. Again, some temporal discrepancies need further investigation. According to rabbinic calculation, Abraham had his encounter with God (Gen 15) at the age of 70. This must have been before he left Haran.

The perspective widens for a moment until the beginning of the creation of the world, when God is looking for Abraham and sanctifies him from the old mountains. This is not told as an account, but as a reflection of God. Again the focus is on Abraham, who is willing to throw himself into the furnace. After reflecting for some time that he might have worshipped idols, he is relieved by God.

The next temporal level comprises the exiles. This is proleptic in the sense of Abraham's history.

Then we jump back to Abraham's decampment in connection with his advanced age. Why did he not leave earlier? Now he is walking through Aram Naharaim and Aram Naḥor, looking for a place to stay.

In Gen 22, Abraham is walking with Isaac. Finally, it comes to an end with the mention of David.

The locations – world, Babylon, father's house, Sodom, Aram Naharaim and Aram Naḥor, Tyre, Israel, Moriah, etc. – can be subjected to further scrutiny. The reference to Israel as the favored residence is certainly important, but the interweaving of places and moral evaluation makes clear that locations are often identical with associated proper or wrong behavior.

### **Persons**

There are only a few persons mentioned in this text. Besides Abraham, the three martyrs, Isaac, and David stand out as positive characters, as opposed to in-nuendos to Nimrod's traits, obviously known to the readers.

Then there is Teraḥ, Abraham's father, and the nameless generations from Enosh up to Abraham, who did not meet God's expectations. Noah and his covenant are mentioned in connection with Sodom. There is some name-dropping at the end that seeks to prove that God is waiting patiently for David the way he did with Abraham.

The three martyrs Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah appear in Gen. Rab. in connection with Gen 22. The pericope to the Aqeda in Gen. Rab. ends in 56.11 by addressing Gen 22:19, where it says that Abraham returned to his servants:

And where was Isaac? R. Berekhia said in the name of the Rabbis of the other place: He sent him to Shem to study Torah. This may be compared to a woman who became wealthy through her millstone. Said she: Since I have become wealthy through this millstone, it will

never leave my hand. R. Jose b. R. Ḥanina said: He sent him [home] at night, for fear of the [evil] eye. For from the moment that Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ascended unscathed from the fiery furnace they are no more mentioned. Whither then had they gone? R. Eliezer said: They died through the spittle; R. Jose b. R. Ḥanina said: They died through an [evil] eye. R. Joshua b. Levi said: They changed their locality and went to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, to study Torah; that is meant by the verse: "Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are a sign of things to come: [I am going to bring my servant the Branch]" (Zech 3:8). R. Tanḥuma b. Abina commented in R. Ḥanina's name: For this very purpose did Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah descend into the fiery furnace, that a sign should be wrought through them.

Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are called "sons" by Abraham himself, not in a biological, but in a figurative sense. Just like the pupils of a scholar are called sons, the same goes for Abraham's followers in their fearless commitment to the one and only God. The martyrs are part of Abraham's family.

There is no description of people's appearance, except of the king in the last *Mashal*, who wears a crown of pearls. Abraham is described with his behavior, his doubts, and his personal thoughts as well as with his brave appearance before God.

Here is a list of rabbis whose traditions and opinions are mentioned:

R. Isaac (A), R. Berekhia (B, C), Bar Kappara (C), R. Azariah (E), R. Azariah in R. Aḥa's name (F), R. Azaria in the name of R. Judan b. R. Simon (J), R. Levi (F, K, L), R. Joḥanan (L), R. Jose and R. Huna in R. Eliezer's name (L), R. Berekhia b. R. Simon in R. Neḥemia's name (M); anonymous texts in D, G, I, J.

Abraham and God engage in permanent "dialogue," often without speaking, or speaking via proof-text:

	God and Abraham are looking for each other; Wandering	Tests and rewards	Abraham on the side of God
A	Abraham wanders and is looking for God – God finds his companion in Abraham		
		A. challenges God – God shows himself to A.	
			A. adores God
		God promotes A.	
C		God tests A.	
			A. passes the test; fiery furnace
		God promotes A.	
F		A. challenges God in Sodom – God promotes A.	

(Continued)

	God and Abraham are looking for each other; Wandering	Tests and rewards	Abraham on the side of God
G		God exempts A. from honoring his parents	
I		God is with A.	
			A. in the fiery furnace, and brings people to God
		God sanctifies A.	
J	Abraham leaves according to the will of God		
L		God tests A. as righteous	
			A. passes the tests
		God rewards A.	
M	God is looking for A. (and David)		

## Speech acts

The dialogue level shows that Abraham talks with God in a self-confident way (C: I am a wall), especially in his plea for justice for the Sodomites (F).

This long, central dialogue between God and Abraham goes beyond the short biblical depiction in Gen 18. In Gen. Rab., in the opinion of no less than three rabbinical authorities (i. e. Azariah, Aḥa, and Levi), Abraham is not arguing about the number of righteous in Sodom, but about the “correct” stance of God himself. God answers with a psalm (45:8) and confirms his commitment to justice. He does not address the actual criticism of “pushing justice too hard.” By setting Abraham as a good example, he backs up the virtue of justice. This dispute in the Midrash typifies the impression one gets from reading Gen 18:22 – 33. God is becoming more and more monosyllabic and finally withdraws altogether. The impression of Abraham trying hard to temporize with God overshadows God’s willingness to give in.

Concerning Terah, God reassures Abraham and exonerates him. The same happens at a later stage when Abraham worries about having served idols.

Abraham again has his say when it comes to deciding about his stay in Tyre. Once again, God approves it and gives him a promise on his way.

It also gives a more detailed and longer account of the dialogue between God and Abraham in Gen 22:2 and Gen 12:1.

Finally God explains to Abraham the relevance of the individuals in 1Chr 1:24 – 26 and Neh 9:8.

## Actions

The following events are mentioned on the narrative level:

*Mashal*<sup>15</sup>: wanderer (A)

Nimrod and the fiery furnace

Abraham standing in Sodom

Terah's death

Abraham's decampment from Aram Naharaim and Aram Naḥor to Tyre

*Mashal*: vagrant king (M)

The introducing *Petiḥa* starts with Ps 45:11 – 12. The song that praises the grand, righteous king and describes his bride and their wedding, pertains to Abraham. The parable/*Mashal* was already discussed by Paul Mandel, for whom the guardian of the building evokes a promoter of a Roman insula.

Abraham, upon seeing, throughout his journey, the discord and conflagration among the “tenants” of the world, correctly deduces that the world is lacking a manager, a leader to guide the various peoples to mutual peace. At just that time, God, the “owner” of the world, looks down and cries out – a cry that is more a cry for help than a revelation. God's call to Abraham (and, through the open-ended character of the parable itself, to the reader!), is a call for action: Abraham may heed God's call, stop in his tracks, and take on the task of a leader; or he may continue along his way.<sup>16</sup>

Abraham's active role continues through the whole paragraph. Mandel's observations are very helpful in this case. Nevertheless I would like to add another thought. The burning building at the beginning of the *Mashal* makes one think of the burning temple. In order to further develop this thought, we need to take a step back and superimpose the cultural and historical context.

Mandel rightfully refers to the Jewish-Hellenistic interpretative traditions of Abraham's childhood, to Philo, Josephus, the Jubilees, and the Apocalypse of Abraham. Back then, he was already looking for a creator of the luminaries and the world. The luminaries do not move by themselves, but are moved by a god. This close connection of knowledge of God and astrology can be seen in Jewish art in the famous zodiacs in the synagogues of Bet Alpha and Sepphoris.<sup>17</sup>

In Gen. Rab., the tradition of searching for a manager of the world is clearly visible. The *Mashal*, however, does not connect it to a heavenly contemplation, but to a profane catastrophe. The burning building can symbolize the unprotected world, but it also reflects the experience of a people feeling unprotected after the catastrophe. In this case, the *Mashal* contains a theodicy aspect.

15 Regarding the form *Mashal* cf. David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.

16 Paul Mandel, “The Call of Abraham: A Midrash Revisited.” *Prooftexts* 14 (1994), pp. 267 – 284, p. 276.

17 Chirbet Wadi Ḥamam, Na'aran, Husifa, Ḥamat Tiberias, Yafia, and En Gedi also display the motif of the Zodiac, comparable to the depiction of Helios, which is of similar importance.

Abraham's question is directed towards a seemingly absent God, who has to recall himself into people's minds.

The *Nimshal* part of the *Mashal* interprets the building as the world. This may be because of the standard texts where Abraham is examining the world and the luminaries. This does not explain the *Mashal*, though it leads a life of its own and influences the understanding of the *Nimshal*. Abraham's question to God whether there is a manager of the world is not naïve, but rather a critical inquiry into whether this manager is still in charge after the destruction of the "building." Here, not the existence of God, but his influence is questioned in a positive sense.

Abraham is exalted by God and made beautiful in the world, but God also needs him for God to be visible to the world.

The *Mashal* is the center of the proem (with Ps 45:11 – 12).

R. Isaac taught/explored (*patah*): "Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house" (Ps 45:11).

Said R. Isaac: (This may be compared) to a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a building in flames. He said, Is it possible that the building lacks a person to look after it? The owner of the building looked out and said, I am the owner of the building. Similarly, because Abraham our father said, Is it conceivable that the world is without a guide?, the Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, I am the Guide, the Sovereign of the Universe.

"And the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your Lord. Bow down to him" (Ps 45:12); "And the king will desire your beauty" – i. e. to make you beautiful in the world. "Since he is your Lord. Bow down to him": hence, "The LORD said to Abram."

This interpretation of Ps 45 combines the prostration of Abraham with the address of God at the end. The *Hishtahawut*, the worshipping recognition of God, establishes an important means of communication with God. It is not only a commitment, but also an act of worship accompanying prayer or sacrifice. This is expressed in Gen. Rab. 56:2 in connection with the Aqeda:

Abraham returned in peace from Mount Moriah only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping, as it is written: "And we will bow down and we will come back to you" (Gen 22:5). Israel were redeemed only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping: "then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Ex 4:31). The Torah was given only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping: "You are to bow down/worship from afar" (Ex 24:1). Hanna was remembered only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping: "And they bowed down/worshipped before the LORD" (1 Sam 1:19). The Temple was built only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping: "Extol the LORD our God, and bow down/worship at his holy mountain" (Ps 99:9). The dead will come to life again only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping: "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel [before the LORD, our Maker!]" (Ps 95:6). The exiles will be reassembled only as a reward for bowing down/worshipping: "And on that day a great trumpet will be blown," [and those who were lost in

the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem] (Isa 27:13).

This text sends a very clear message: the prostration before God sets in motion a whole chain of events. The beginning of *lekh lekha* fits into here neatly.

The *Mashal* states that message more precisely. When Abraham recognizes God in the world and spreads his name, Abraham himself is promoted in the world. "Bow down" must be understood rather as a commitment – up to the point of martyrdom – than in a liturgical sense. The readers of this text get the feeling that it is directly aimed at them – Abraham's children. Abraham's ideal is both an appeal and an assurance at the same time. The same applies to what follows, where Abraham spreads the good message of the knowledge of God over the world. Moreover, he unifies the world. He heals the rift that occurred out of sadness over the flood, the confusion after Sodom, over even worse, the destruction of the temple, which occurred as an immediate result of Israel's guilt.

The proems focus on Song 8 and Ps 45. Abraham can easily be compared to a woman, either the sister or the bride. His deeds, but also his self-conception, show his greatness. His willingness to sacrifice himself is obvious. A line is drawn from Abraham to the faithful of the Book of Daniel, Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Like them, he goes into the fiery furnace and leaves *le-shalom*. Abraham fulfills *mitzvot* and *ma'asim tovim*, even though he was not taught to. He did them by himself. It is not clear how to translate *mitzvot* in this case, as pious acts or rather as commandments. One should consider another document in order to better understand the concept of Gen. Rab. In 9.5 and 30.6, *mitzvot* and *ma'asim tovim* are performed by the righteous. Abraham is the emblematic righteous. The *mitzvot* are often substantiated in Gen. Rab. and connected to the exertion of the commandments or the eschewal of prohibitions. Life in a world of commandments expresses itself in good deeds.

One gains the impression that Abraham's activities, his deeds and his engagement, especially where he is displayed as a righteous, play an important part in Gen. Rab.. His engagement for Sodom is essential and paradigmatic at this point and shows the central concern of the pericope. Abraham fights stubbornly (see speech acts) for the correct understanding of justice. The key sentence is "Unless you forget a little, the world cannot endure." I assume that if, behind the beginning of the paragraph – the *Mashal* about the guide/manager of the burning city – is a question to God himself, how he could have let the destruction of the temple and subsequently endanger Israel's identity happen, then there is something similar behind Abraham's plea for "oblivion." God has to be willing to forgive the world and Israel in order to keep them both alive.

The effort to see the world as a whole is quite obvious here. The perspective is not solely directed towards Israel. Abraham disperses good fragrance, fights for

Sodom on one hand, and on the other he chooses the cities in which he wants to live. This way he avoids the epicurean and sinful metropolises and feels at home with diligent and modest people.

The exile cannot be avoided. He is wandering from one exile to the next. Still, a life in poverty in Israel should be preferred to a life of abundance in another country. Once again there is a straight message to the reader: avoid the epicurean cities and try to live a life in Israel.

The concluding *Mashal* about a king whose crown loses a pearl shows Abraham's exclusivity very clearly and also closes a gap in the Bible. Insignificant persons whom the rabbis did not even mention (blended with other persons more accurately described, such as Shem and Boaz) gain importance. Nothing in the Bible is senseless or written without a reason.

There are many mini and micro narratives within the paragraph. Often they are only hints to greater narratives, e.g. the connection to the martyrs, Teraḥ or Nimrod, the generation of Enosh as well as the flood and Noaḥ narrative. Other short narratives relate to comparisons, e. g. the dove that does not rest but keeps moving on.

#### Perspective or point of view

I will concentrate on the ideological perspective, which plays an important role. The text shows a definite interest in Abraham as a fighter for justice, as the ideal righteous person who heals the rift between God and the world. According to rabbinic categories, justice is reflected not only as life according to the *mitzvot* and doing *ma'asim tovim*, but also turning ones back on a decadent way of life (i. e. eating, drinking, and dancing).

Abraham disperses good fragrance and brings blessing to the world. Israel must be preferred to other countries, but in the end it all depends on other people's behavior in the diaspora if one should live amongst them.

Abraham's behavior is obviously special and cannot be copied by everyone. Only the martyrs are mentioned separately.

His relationship with his father is less well defined. There is an obligation to the commandment of paternal love, but Abraham is less worried about insulting his father than "to bring dishonor upon the Divine Name." *Lekh lekha* is seen as Abraham's relief: "I exempt you (*lekha*) from the duty of honoring your parents, though I exempt no one else from this duty" (G).

Abraham loves righteousness and hates wickedness. This constitutes the tension with his father, something that is not explained here properly. Teraḥ is labeled as wicked by the narrator, not by Abraham himself. Objections to Abraham, that he set off too late, are cleverly overruled. The relationship with God is totally at eye level. Even when Abraham surrenders himself to God, He

makes it clear that He needs Abraham as a mediator between Him and the people/world. Abraham is the righteous mediator between God and the people.

#### Intended Readership

The question of which reader or listenership is intended is closely related to the text's ideological focus. The readers or listeners are expected to know the stories in Genesis. Their central values are presupposed or at least are highly desired.

The motivation is comprehensible: not to forget about the land of Israel in a life threatened by exile, even if it is not the best place to live. The promises to Abraham occur repeatedly. He established a precedent with his behavior. He sets an example, up to the willingness to martyrdom, and he is unique. He is the only one not obliged to honor his parents.

His "sons" Ḥananiah, Mishaël and Arzarja are also mentioned here. Martyrdom for God is an option for Abraham's offspring. But it is outshone by justice and the endeavor and reassurance of God's loving care. The readership can relate to Abraham's blessed deeds and try to live justice in real life.

#### Historical and cultural context

The historical and cultural references to the time of composition of this Midrash are only indirectly palpable. This text, like so many others, "lives" in the world of the Bible, i. e. its own environment is filtered through the biblical one. One can carefully assume that Gen. Rab., like some other texts, offers a critical approach toward Christianity. Abraham, as the mediator between God and the world, undermines Jesus' position. He brings people closer to God and heals the rift. Abraham's merits assure Israel of the gift of the land. The universal impact of Abraham is very important, since he always refers to a God who rules and judges the world. An interpretation based solely on a Christian-Roman context is out of the question. The biblical text itself offers gaps and hurdles that must be filled in or surmounted. The hermeneutical and exegetical role of the Midrash must not be downplayed.



## Tanḥuma Lekh Lekha 1

The text in translation<sup>18</sup>

The basis of the text is the print version Mantua 1563, which deviates from the first print Constantinople 1520 – 1522, but influences later prints and is cited as the standard text in the Bar Ilan Library.<sup>19</sup> In our case, the variants mostly occur with rabbinic proper names and are therefore insignificant content-wise. For comparison, see the text on the right hand side, Tanḥuma Buber<sup>20</sup> (translation by Townsend with amendments). I will not go into detail about this variant, but will consider it at times.

Tanḥuma:	Tanḥuma Buber:
<p>A Let our Rabbi teach us: Should a Jew take the kingdom of heaven upon himself (recite the Shema) whilst walking?</p>	<p>“The LORD said to Abram, <i>Lekh lekha</i> [from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you]” (Gen 12:1). Let our master instruct us: What does it mean for one to take upon himself the Kingdom of Heaven (i. e., recite the Shema) while he is walking?</p>

18 Translation by Joanna Weinberg, “Abraham, Exile, and Midrashic Tradition.” In: M. Goodman et al. (eds.), *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010 (Themes in Biblical Narratives Jewish and Christian Traditions 13), pp. 223 – 241, pp. 236 – 241, with amendments.

19 Cf. the textual variants in Tanḥuma et al. Marc Bregman, *The Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of the Versions*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003 [Hebr.]; idem, “Early Sources and Traditions in the Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu Midrashim.” *Tarbiz* 60 (1990 – 1991), pp. 269 – 274 [Hebr.].

20 Basis: MS Oxford Neubauer 154, Cod. Vat. Ebr. 34, Munich Cod. hebr. 224 and MS Parma De Rossi 1240.

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Tanḥuma:	Tanḥuma Buber:
<p>Rav Iddi and Rav Huna in the name of R. Judah, and R. Jose in the name of Rav Samuel said: It is forbidden for him to take the yoke of heaven upon himself whilst walking. Rather, he should remain stationary and direct his heart to heaven in trepidation and fear, trembling and in awe, for the unity of God. He should recite: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4) – each word said with concentration of the mind – and after that, "Blessed be the glory of his kingdom forever and ever." When he begins the words "And you shall love [the Lord with all your heart] ..." (Deut 6:5) he may stand or sit as he so wishes since it is written: "when you sit in your house and when you walk on your way, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut 6:7).</p>	<p>Rav Iddi and Rav Huna in the name of R. Jose bar Judah said in the name of R. Samuel: It is forbidden for a person to take upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven while he is walking. Rather let him stand upon his feet and give the recitation of the <i>Shema</i>. Then, when he arrives at "Blessed be the name of his glorious majesty forever and ever," let him immediately begin to walk, reciting the <i>We-ahavta</i> (= "And you shall love [the Lord with all your heart] ..." Deut 6:5) with no fear (of sinning).</p>
<p>You find (The fact is) that great is the reward of all those who are meticulous in observing the commandments. For such is the case of Abraham who was meticulous in his observance of the commandments and therefore called the beloved of the Holy One, blessed by He, as it is said, "the seed of Abraham my beloved" (Isa 41:8). R. Samuel bar Nahmani said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: They even observed the law of <i>eruv tavshilin</i> in our father Abraham's house as it is said, "and kept my charge: my commandments, my laws and my Torot" (Gen 26:5). Are there then multiple Torot? Surely it is said, "One Torah shall be to him ..." (Exod 12:49) and it is also written: "One Torah and one law ..." (Num 15:16)? Rather, the meaning of "my Torot" refers to Abraham's meticulous ways of keeping the commandments. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "You are meticulous with regard to my commandments, and yet you live amidst idolaters. Depart from their midst, 'Get yourself out of your land ...!'"</p>	<p>You find that whoever is meticulous about the commandments receives much reward. Now Abraham was meticulous about the commandments.</p>

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Tanhuma:	Tanhuma Buber:
	<p>R. Aha said in the name of R. Alexandri and R. Samuel bar Nahmani in the name of R. Jonathan: They even observed <i>eruv tavshilin</i> in Abraham's house, as it is said, "because Abraham obeyed my voice [and kept my charge: my commandments, my laws and my Torot]" (Gen 26:5). But is there not a single Torah? (The plural usage here) simply (indicates) that he was meticulous with all commandments which are in the Torah. The Holy One said: You are meticulous after my commandments; but you dwell amidst idolaters. Depart from their midst. Where is it shown? Where they read on the matter: "The LORD said to Abram, <i>Lekh lekha</i>."</p>
<p>B R. Berekhia explained (the verse), "We have a little sister (<i>ahot</i>) and she has no breasts," etc. (Song 8:8). What is the subject of the verse? It refers to Abraham whom Nimrod cast into the furnace. "Little" – For the Holy one, Blessed be He, had not yet performed miracles for him.</p>	<p>"The LORD said to Abram, <i>Lekh lekha</i> [from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you]" (Gen 12:1). R. Berekhia the Priest explained: "We have a little sister" (Song 8:8). What is the subject of the verse? It refers to Abraham whom Nimrod cast into the furnace, up to that time the Holy One had performed no miracles for him. The ministering angels said to the Holy One: Sovereign of the World, behold, Nimrod has cast Abraham into the midst of the fiery furnace.</p>
<p>Why is he called "sister"? Because he sewed (<i>iḥah</i>) up the world for the Holy one, blessed be He, like a person who makes a tear and then sews it up. This is why he is called "sister." "And she has no breasts" – For as yet he did not have children.</p>	<p>R. Eliezer ha-Qappar said: "We have a little sister." The passage speaks of one who rends asunder (a garment in mourning) and does not sew (it) together. Abraham, (however), sewed the world together before the Holy One. Since up to then he had no children, for that reason it (Song 8:8) called him "sister."</p>

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Tanḥuma:	Tanḥuma Buber:
<p>What shall we do for our sister in the day that she shall be spoken for – on the day that Nimrod ordered him to be cast into the fiery furnace.</p> <p>“If she is a wall we will build upon her a battlement of silver.” (Song 8:9). If he sets his life like a wall, which withstands many battles, and surrenders his life for the sake of the sanctification of God’s name, “we will build upon her a battlement of silver”: These are the Israelites who are called “the wings of the dove covered in silver” (Ps 68:14).</p>	<p>“What shall we do for our sister [on the day that she is spoken for]?” On the day that Nimrod said to throw him into the midst of the fiery furnace, the Holy One said to the ministering angels (in v. 9): “If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver; [but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar].” [If he gives his life for the sanctification of the name, we shall build upon her a battlement of silver];</p>
<p>“And if she is a door.” If he is too weak-kneed to surrender his life for the sake of the sanctification of God’s name “we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”</p>	<p>“and if she is a door (<i>delet</i>), we will enclose her with boards of cedar.” If he is too weak-kneed (<i>dal</i>) to give his life for the sanctification of my name, “we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”</p>
<p>Just as the picture on the cedar board is easy to erase, so, too, Abraham, if I do not protect him.</p> <p>Abraham said: “I am a wall [and my breasts like towers]” (Song 8:10), and I am prepared to surrender myself for the sake of the sanctification of Your name. This applies not only to me, but also to my breasts like towers, the descendants of Ḥananiah, Miśhael, and Azariah and the generation of R. Ḥananiah ben Teradion and his colleagues who surrendered their lives for the sake of the sanctification of Your name. And that is why “I was in his eyes as one that found peace” (ibid.) – for peace exited from the furnace.</p>	<p>Just as a picture (<i>tzura</i>) which is on a panel is easy to erase, so it is easy for him to perish from the world when I do not protect him.</p> <p>Abraham said: “I am a wall.” I am giving my life for the sanctification of your name. Straightaway he gave his life. How?</p>
<p>It happened that Teraḥ his father was a manufacturer of idols and worshipped them. The Holy one blessed be He said to him [Abraham]: “Get yourself out of your land.”</p>	<p>His father, Teraḥ, was serving idols [and worshiping them]. The Holy One said to him, “These are idolaters; yet you live amidst them. ‘Get yourself out of your land ...’”</p>
<p>C</p> <p>“And the Lord said to Abram, Get yourself out.” This verse must be understood in the light of the verse “Hear, O daughter; consider and incline your ear; forget also your own people and your father’s house” (Ps 45:11).</p> <p>“Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear”: This is Abraham.</p>	<p>Another interpretation (of Gen 12:1): <i>Lekh Lekha</i>.</p> <p>This verse must be understood in the light of the verse “Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father’s house” (Ps 45:11). “Hear, O daughter, consider”: This is Abraham.</p>

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Tanhuma:	Tanhuma Buber:
"Forget your people and your father's house": This is idolatry for it says: "They say to a tree: you are my father" (Jer 2:27).	"Forget your people and your father's house": These are the idolaters, for it says: "They say to a tree: you are my father" (Jer 2:27).
"And the king will desire your beauty" (Ps 45:12). This is the king of kings who desired to beautify him in this world and in the world to come.	"And the king will desire your beauty" (Ps 45:12). This is the king of kings, the Holy One, (who desired to) beautify you in the world.
<p>"For he is your lord and you should bow down to him" (ibid.). R. Abin said: This is to be likened to a vial of foliatum which is put in a cemetery and its fragrance cannot be discerned by anybody. What did one do? They removed it and carried it from place to place so that its fragrance could be discerned in the world. Similarly, Abraham was living amidst idolaters.</p> <p>The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Get out from your land and I will make your mark felt in the world ...."</p>	<p>R. Abin said: "Since he is your Lord. Bow down to him" (Ps 45:12). Now what did Abraham resemble? A vial of persimmon which is put in a cemetery and its fragrance cannot be discerned by anybody. What did a certain one do? He took it and carried it from place to place, so that its fragrance began to disperse in the world. Similarly, Abraham was dwelling amidst idolaters.</p> <p>The Holy One said to him: "Why are you living amidst the wicked? Go out from among them, and make your good works known in the world." Thus it is said: "<i>Lekh lekha</i>."</p>
What is the meaning of <i>Lekh lekha</i> – get yourself out? Each letter <i>lamed</i> equals thirty and the letter <i>kaph</i> equals twenty, ergo, by (the method of) Gematria one hundred, thereby hinting that at the age of a hundred he would beget an upright son, as it is written: "And Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him" (Gen 21:5).	Another interpretation: <i>Lekh lekha</i> . R. Levi said: What is the meaning of <i>Lekh lekha</i> ? The Holy One said to him: At the age of hundred you will beget a son, as it is said: <i>Lekh lekha</i> : <i>lamed</i> = thirty; <i>kaph</i> = twenty. <i>LK</i> appears two times, <i>LK LK</i> . Ergo, one hundred.
	Another interpretation: <i>Lekh lekha</i> . R. Joshua ben Levi said: Throw away your ( <i>lekha</i> ) life in this world, but in the world to come your reward is prepared for you ( <i>lekha</i> ).
R. Levi said: Abraham's first trial was like the last. At the first trial he was told "Get yourself out of your land" (Gen 12:1) and at the last one "Get yourself to the land of Moriah" (Gen 22:2).	Another interpretation: <i>Lekh lekha</i> . R. Levi ben Hama (said): The Holy One said to him: "For first trial and last trial I am only testing you with <i>Lekh lekha</i> . (Thus:) 'Get yourself out ( <i>Lekh lekha</i> ) of your land' (Gen 12:1); (and Gen 22:2 reads): '(take your son) ... and get yourself ( <i>lekha lekha</i> ) to the land of Moriah'" (Gen 22:2).

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Tanḥuma:	Tanḥuma Buber:
	R. Joshua ben Qorḥa said: David said: “Your people (‘ <i>ammekha</i> ) will offer themselves willingly ( <i>nedavot</i> ) on the day of your warfare ( <i>ḥelekha</i> ). [From the womb of the morning, yours is the dew of your youth]” (Ps 110:3): The Holy One said to him: I was with you ( <i>imkha</i> ) on the day that you armed your forces (rt.: <i>hjjl</i> ). What is the meaning of “the dew of your youth”?
R. Ḥanina said: Come and see the loving attachment Abraham had for his Creator. At the age of three years he knew his Creator as it says, “Because ( <i>egev</i> ) Abraham obeyed my voice” (Gen 26:5). The letter <i>ayin</i> equals seventy, <i>quf</i> equals one hundred and bet equals two. Abraham lived for one hundred and seventy-two years. Thus you can deduce that at the age of three years he knew his Creator.	Another interpretation: <i>Lekh lekha</i> . The Holy One said to him: I sought you ( <i>lekha</i> ) early. Thus R. Aḥa said: R. Ḥanina said: At the age of three years Abraham knew his Creator. Where is it shown? Where it is said: “because Abraham obeyed my voice [and kept my charge: my commandments, my laws and my Torot]” (Gen 26:5): because ( <i>egev</i> ). By gematria <i>egev</i> = 172 (years), and all the days of Abraham are 175 (years). Hence you learn that at the age of three years Abraham knew his Creator. The Holy One said to him: I am making all the evil deeds which you did in those three years like this dew. Ergo “The dew of your youth.”
	Another interpretation (of Gen 12:1): <i>lekha lekha</i> . For your sake I created the world. R. Tahlifa said: The Holy One said: I looked at you when I created the world. Thus it is said (in Gen 2:4): “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (Gen 2:4). What is the meaning of “when they were created” ( <i>behibbaram</i> )? In Abraham ( <i>be-Avraham</i> ) he created them.
“To the land that I will show you.” He did not tell him to go to a specific place – this constitutes a trial within a trial. What did he do?	Another interpretation: “To the land that I will show you.” A trial within a trial, since he did not tell him which place to go to, merely: “to a land that I will show you.”

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Tanḥuma:	Tanḥuma Buber:
	<p>Another interpretation: “To a land that I will show you.” R. Berekhia the Priest Berabbi said: [This text is related (to Ps 32:8): “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; [I will counsel you with my eye upon you].”</p> <p>So shall I instruct you. What is the meaning of “I will instruct (<i>askil</i>) you”? Let me place wisdom within you, as stated (in Josh 1:7): “so that you may be successful (<i>taskil</i>)”; “and teach you,” in the sense that I am enlightening your eyes.</p> <p>Another interpretation (of Ps 32:8): “and teach you.” (The words mean) that I am guiding you onto a good way; “the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you” (Ps 32:8).</p>
<p>He took his things and wife, and Abram went as he had spoken to him. “And I will make you [a great nation]” (Gen 12:2)]. It is not written: “I will set you,” but rather I will make you. He said to him, “I will make you,” I will create you as a new creation just as it says, “And God made the firmament” (Gen 1:7), “And God made the two lights,” etc. (Gen 1:16).</p>	<p>Another interpretation (of Ps 32:8): “I will instruct you and teach you”. What is the meaning of “and teach you”? (according to Gen 12:1) “to the land that I will show you.” He said to Abraham: You are not losing out. For (according to v. 2) “I will make you into a great nation.” “For I will establish you” is not written here but “for I will make you,” because I am creating you as a new creature. In the same sense it is stated: “And God made the firmament” (Gen 1:7), Similarly (in v. 16): “And God made the two lights.”</p>
<p>R. Pinḥas the priest bar Ḥama said: When did the Holy One, blessed be He, make Abraham into a great nation? When Israel received the Torah, for Moses said to them, “For what great nation (<i>goy gadol</i>) [is there that has laws and rules as perfect as this Torah?]” (Deut 4:8).</p>	<p>R. Pinḥas the priest bar Ḥama said: When did the Holy One make Abraham a great nation? When Israel had left Egypt, come to Sinai, and received the Torah, Moses looked at them and said: Behold, they have been made just as the Holy One had promised to the patriarch. Thus it is stated: “For what great nation” (Deut 4.8).</p>

## Structures, forms and hermeneutical processes

The following table gives an overview of the forms and hermeneutical processes used in the cited passage to Tanḥuma.

Forms	Prooftexts	Hermeneutical processes	Problems, questions and answers	Conclusions
A Yelamdenu Halakhic part	Deut 6:4 – 7	Halakhic discussion	How to recite the Shema?	Speak Deut 6:4 stationary, the other texts as one wants
Haggadic part	Isa 41:8 Gen 26:5 Exod 12:49 Num 15:16	Haggadic explanation with Torah-texts as prooftexts	Abraham was meticulous in keeping the commandments. Loved by God; are there more <i>torot</i> ? <i>torot</i> (pl.) in 26:5 means , that he observed every law; had to leave the country of idolaters	Reward for keeping the commandments. Impossible to live amidst idolaters
B Proem	Song 8:8:	Allegory/Petirah	Abraham and Nimrod/ fiery furnace	
	<i>Little</i>		No miracles	
	<i>Sister</i>		Abraham sews the tear	
	<i>Breasts</i>		No children	
	<i>On the day</i>		Nimrod/fiery furnace	
	Song 8:9: Wall and battlement of silver Ps 68:14	Intertext (keywords: silver, dove)		
	Being a wall or a door (Song 8:9)	Pun on <i>delet/dal</i>	Weakness or strength	
	Boards of cedar	Small <i>Mashal</i> : board and picture		
	Song 8:10 Breasts as towers	Abraham as author of the text: he is strong	Is Abraham strong or weak?	Abraham is protected
			Abraham is a wall: ready for <i>Qiddush ha-shem</i> the martyrs in the future Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; Ḥananiah ben Teradjon	Be ready for <i>Qiddush ha-shem</i> like Abraham. There is a line from A. to the martyrs of later times
	Bringing peace	play with the word <i>shalom</i>	Fiery furnace Teraḥ as idolator	Peace through <i>Qiddush ha-shem</i> . Leave a country of idolaters



(Continued)

Forms	Prooftexts	Hermeneutical processes	Problems, questions and answers	Conclusions
C	<i>Lekh lekha</i> : Ps 45:11	Petirah: identification with Abraham		
	Jer 2:27	Petirah: idolatry		
	Ps 45:12	Petirah: God	God desires the beauty of Abraham, who fights idolatry	Fighting against idolatry saves life in both worlds
Mashal	Ps 45:12	Comparison with a vial of foliatum	Abrahams is fragrant	One must leave the company of idolaters to be “fragrant”
	<i>Lekh lekha</i> Gen 21:5	Gematria	Abraham begets a son with 100	
	<i>Lekh lekha</i> Gen 12:1 and 22:2	Connecting two comparable textual units	Gen 12:1 and 22:2 are similar. The appearance of the same expressions must be explained	The first and last trial of Abraham are intertwined
	Gen 26:5	Gematria	Abraham is 175 Loving attachment to God beginning with only three years old	
	<i>Land that I will show you</i> Gen 12:2	Intertextual process of solving textual problems	No name of the land; a trial within a trial; problems in the text.	
	<i>And I will make you</i> Gen 1:7; 1:16		Why “make you” With Abraham a new creation begins.	Israel in the footsteps of Abraham; the blessing is fulfilled at Sinai
	Deut 4:8		Israel is a new creation through the Torah	

Beginning with *Yelamdenu rabbenu* (“let our rabbi teach us”) is typical of the Tanḥuma. It introduces a long chapter with halakhic references to Shema Israel with haggadic extensions. The aggadah explains God’s love for Abraham as the result of his meticulous adherence to the Torah. At the end of chapter C, the prooftext Deut 26:5 is taken up again to show – calculated with the help of the Gematria – that Abraham loved God already at the tender age of three.

The second part picks up a proem also found in Gen. Rab. to Song 8:8 – 10. The connection to Nimrod and the furnace is central for the allegorical interpretation

and serves as the framework for the exegesis of 8:8. Ps 68:14 is taken as alluding to Israel. Weinberg cites Midrash Tehillim 68.8, where it reads:

Why is Israel being compared to “doves”? To teach that, the way a dove doesn’t struggle when it gets slaughtered, the Israelites won’t struggle when they get slaughtered for the sanctification of the Name, and that a dove can only save itself by the means of her wings, the Israelites can only save themselves through the merit of the Torah, which is compared to silver, as it says: “God’s words are pure words, approved silver, without slag, refined seven times” (Ps 12,7). “The wings with greenish gold” (Ps 68,14) are the *Mishnaijot* and the *Massekhot*.

To Israel, compared to a dove, the wings of a dove symbolize the commandments that offer both protection and help.<sup>21</sup>

It is significant that the verse occurs in the interpretation of Gen 14:14 in both Tan(B) and Gen. Rab.

Tanḥuma Buber Lekh Lekha 15 – 16 (36b/37a) mentions Nimrod and his idolatry as well as Abraham and his espousal of strangers (Sodom’s tradition). According to Exod. Rab. 49.2, the psalm is also interpreted as showing how Abraham proved himself in the furnace.<sup>22</sup>

The third chapter interprets Ps 45:11 – 12 first. In simple Petirot, Abraham is compared to the daughter, idolatry to the father, and God to the king.

In addition and with some minor changes of Gen. Rab., the martyrs Ḥananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and their offspring are mentioned along with the famous Ḥanina/Ḥananiah ben Teradion and his family under the prosecution of Hadrian. The *Qiddush ha-shem* is mentioned here several times.

The comparison with a fragrant perfume in Gen. Rab. is changed here and refers in this case to a foliatum buried at the cemetery. A world in the hands of idolaters resembles a cemetery. The motif in Gen. Rab., that Teraḥ is actually a living dead, is picked up.

Two interpretations with gematria are offered: that Abraham will beget a son at the age of 100 and his cognition of God at the age of three.

The connection between Gen 12:1 and Gen 22:2 is mentioned briefly without going into details. A new aspect is introduced though, the “new creation.” Like

21 They can also refer to the booty in Egypt one earned with appropriate behavior, mostly women’s, e. g. in bSot 11b or Exod. Rab. 1. Cf. PesK 5.6, subject to PesR 15 (F 70b). Also in Mekhilta Pisha 13 or SifDev § 120 (F 179) to Dtn 15:15 the silver wings refer to the booty in Egypt. In Tanḥuma Buber Tetzawwe 1 and the like, the dove stands for the Sanhedrin and the devotion Israel’s. Israel carries light into the world, like the dove (Noah), so that the candlelabrum turns into a symbol with oil (Ex 27,20). In the Babylonian tradition, the psalm verse refers to the giving of the Torah (e. g. bBer 53b; bShab 49a).

22 Midrash Tehillim 118 mentions the disputes between David and Goliath, Israel and the Philistines, Abraham and Nimrod, Isaac and Abimelekh, Jacob and Esau, and once again David and Goliath and explains the legend of Abraham in the furnace in 11 to v.8.

the creation of the world, Abraham induces a re-creation by God, which comes to an end with the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

The dependance on Gen. Rab. and the use of common material is obvious here, but Tanḥuma arranges it differently, amending and omitting some parts. The whole paragraph is cut short.

Buber's variant is longer. It mostly agrees with the Tanḥuma while focusing on different things. The exegesis of Song 8:8 is shaped as a conversation between God and the ministering angels. The structure uses the set phrase *davar aḥer*, the "other interpretation," certainly meant as an addition and not as an alternative. This reinforces the impression of a sequence of different opinions to *Lekh lekha* as opposed to a composition. The interpretation of Ps 110:3 in Gen. Rab. is used here again and explains the following paragraph about Abraham as a three-year-old. The closing discussion about the new Creation describes Abraham more elaborately. It offers the reading of "*be-hibbaram*" as "*be-Avraham*," familiar in Gen. Rab. 12.9, followed by the interpretation of "instruction and teaching" in Ps 32:8.

Let us return to the traditional version of the Tanḥuma:

A rough outline might look like this:

- A Shema Israel and reward for obeying the Torah like Abraham;  
leaving a land of idolatry
- B Allegories on Song 8:8 and Ps 45:11 – 12 on idolatry, martyrdom and fragrance
- B' Gematriot on Abraham: Begets a son and fights idolatry
- A' Abraham is created as a new generation; leaving a land full of idolatry;  
giving of the Torah to Israel

The main topic is (the fight against) idolatry and the worship of the one God up to the point of martyrdom, connected with the commitment to the Torah, which is the contents of the new creation and the "wandering homeland" of Israel.

Analysis according to narratological categories

Time and space

It starts in the here and now of the Rabbinic authors with the discussion about the Shema Israel, followed by the mentioning of Abraham's obedience to the Torah.

The second paragraph focuses first on the fiery furnace of Nimrod and then on the generations of martyrs of the Book of Daniel and the persecution under Hadrian.

The third paragraph deals with Abraham's childhood, the birth of his son as well as his first and last trial. An outlook on the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai follows.

The statements pertaining to the spatial setting(s) are sparse. Except Nimrod's furnace, only an undefined cemetery, the world and probably Sinai (implicitly) are mentioned.

### Persons

The amount of persons important to this text is very small. Positive role models are, besides Abraham, the three martyrs as well as Ḥananiah ben Teradion and his generation. Israel is also mentioned in a positive way.

On the other side are Nimrod's deeds. Abraham's father is described as a manufacturer and worshipper of idols.

Worth mentioning are the names of the rabbis, who utter their traditions and opinions, even though they are outside the "narrative:" in A R. Iddi and R. Huna (fourth Amoraic generation) in the name of R. Judah and R. Jose in the name of R. Samuel, R. Samuel ben Nahman (third Amoraic generation) in the name of R. Jonathan; in B R. Berekhia (fifth Amoraic generation); in C anonymous statements and R. Abin (fourth Amoraic generation), R. Levi (third Amoraic generation), R. Ḥanina (first or fifth Amoraic generation), and R. Pinḥas the Priest bar Ḥama (fifth Amoraic generation).

### Speech acts

The dialogue between God and Abraham connects parts scattered on the macro level. God tells Abraham to leave the environment of idolators (interpretation of *lekḥ lekḥa*), since Abraham is meticulous in obeying the commandments.<sup>23</sup> Abraham replies to him quoting Song 8:10 and applies the interpretation to himself and the later martyrs. God reassures him again that he will be made into a new creation.

In Tanḥuma Buber there is a conversation between God and the angels, then God continues to talk to Abraham (especially at the end), who does not reply further.

### Actions

Three motifs are mentioned on the narrative level: Nimrod and the fiery furnace, the three heroes of the Book of Daniel (not specified), and Ḥananiah ben Teradion and his generation with reference to *quiddush ha-sheṁ*. There are references to the life of Abraham under the idolators, his keeping certain commandments, some chapters of his life and the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

23 That Abraham was keeping the Law is stated already in Jubilees 23:10; the Damascus Document (CD) 3:2; Syriac Baruch 57:1 – 2; in rabbinic literature, e. g. mQiddushin 4:14; bYoma 28b; bNedarim 32a and, as already noticed, in Gen. Rab. (also 95.3).

The Mashal about the foliatum tells of a perfume carried from place to place to spread its fragrance throughout the world.

The proem of Berekhia is adopted, but with amendments and changes. The proem to Ps 45:11, passed on in the name of Isaac in Gen. Rab., is also quoted, anonymously and with amendments. The first *Mashal* from Gen. Rab. (Abraham and the manager) is missing. The second one (foliatum) is modified and passed on under the name of R. Abin.

Abraham fulfills the *mitzvot*, but there is no mention of *ma'asim tovim*. The law of *eruv tavshilin*<sup>24</sup> is given as an example of the accuracy of Abraham's observance of the commandments. The reference to the breasts in the interpretation of Song 8:8 does not allude to his lack of education in the commandments, but to Abraham's childlessness. He is exalted in this world and the world to come.

#### Point of view

The ideological perspective is once again very important. There are two central points that belong together and provide the focus: the commitment to the one God up to the point of martyrdom and, in connection with this, the Torah that must be adhered to. Noticeable is the emphasis on the oneness of the Torah, which is compared to God's oneness. The paragraph intentionally begins and ends with Israel and not with Abraham.

The *Shema Israel* is the visible, daily liturgic mark of recognition of the one God. The Midrash focuses on the halakhic question of how the Shema Israel should be recited. The theme here is the exact observance of the commandments and moves on to Abraham's obedience of the commandments. He is the paragon not only of commitment to the one God, but also to the strict observance of the *mitzvot*.

The perspective of the whole paragraph is influenced by the understanding of *lekh lekha* itself. The root *halakh* ("go") is hidden here as well as *lekha* ("for you"). *Halakh* and *halakhah* are closely connected. Weinberg<sup>25</sup> rightly points out that the question discussed in bBerakhot 13b, if the Shema can be recited while walking, is linked to Deut 6:7 which deals with reciting the Shema while walking, sleeping, and getting up in the morning. The Midrash Tanhuma makes "clear, if it were not clear before, that the state of mind of the individual worshipper is paramount"<sup>26</sup>; to "direct his heart to heaven in trepidation and fear, trembling

<sup>24</sup> *Eruv tavshilin* means that if a holiday falls on a Friday, one should set aside a piece of food on the day preceeding the holiday, which is allowed to be cooked on Friday. The *eruv* functions as beginning of cooking.

<sup>25</sup> Weinberg, "Abraham", p. 226.

<sup>26</sup> Weinberg, "Abraham", p. 227.

and in awe, for the unity of God.” He should recite: “Hear o Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4) – each word said with concentration of the mind.

The keyword *halakh* is taken up again when Abraham is asked to leave and escape the environment of idolaters and idolatry. *Halakh* is seen here in a rather abstract way and does not necessarily mean a literal walk. There are no hints towards the stops described in Gen. Rab. As in Gen 22, the place is unclear and mysterious. It refers to the place of the Torah, the home of the *halakhah*. Weinberg states: “paradoxically, then, the reward for perfect behaviour is exile.”<sup>27</sup> This should be understood in the sense that every person attached to God’s Torah should steer clear of idolatry at any cost, as well as avoid contact with the idolaters themselves. Only then can one disperse the fragrance. The perspective is directed inwards, even more than in Gen. Rab. It is all about the edification of Israel, and Abraham is the great role-model. He teaches Israel not to relent in its efforts for the Torah and not to deviate from it.

The *Mashal* of the foliatum buried in the cemetery deems the idolatrous world dead. The same was implied with Teraḥ in Gen. Rab., but not in such a radical manner. The wings of the dove were mentioned in Gen. Rab. in connection with the exile and here in connection with Israel itself and not necessarily the exile (Ps 68:14); the context is to a greater degree *Qiddush ha-shem*, the sanctification of God’s name. When peace exited from the fiery furnace, it does not mean that Abraham or the youth escaped in peace (*le-shalom*) from the furnace, but that the ones that went into the furnace brought peace. Their death was beneficial.<sup>28</sup> The central position of martyrdom in the Midrash passage can be seen as an invitation to do as Abraham did. The reference to Ḥananiah ben Teradion is obvious. In a time when it was forbidden to teach the Torah in public, Ḥananiah defied the decree and was therefore imprisoned by the Romans (bAvoda Zara 18a), wrapped in a Torah scroll, and burned alive. The resistance to the rule of idolaters is evident. One does not submit.

Tanḥuma also emphasizes Abraham’s effect on the world. He sets an example and leaves his mark. He heals the rift between God and the world. This is also known from Gen. Rab., but in Tanḥuma it does not have the direct connection with the desperate search for a caring, just, and merciful God.

The land of Israel is irrelevant. It is replaced by the Torah. One gets the impression that the only real weapon against idolatry is the “inner” exodus to the land of the Torah.

<sup>27</sup> Weinberg, “Abraham”, p. 227.

<sup>28</sup> If one doesn’t read Shalom as a form of shallem, which “exhausts” its meaning with regards to content.

Abraham's relationship with his father is only communicated through the terrible experience in the fiery furnace. There is no sign of paternal love. The parental home equals idolatry.

#### Intended readership

The question of the intended reader or listenership can be answered by the ideological focus. It is intended for people that need urgent admonition not to relent in their efforts for the sake of the Torah and not to deviate from it amidst idolatry. Martyrdom for God is an option of *Qiddush ha-shem*.

#### Historical and cultural context

The historical and cultural references are only indirectly palpable. Tanḥuma complements the world of the Bible with rabbinic narratives about martyrs and an effective halakhic discussion about the Shema Israel. Such a halakhic introduction is typical of the Tanḥuma.

Gen. Rab. and its content are familiar and are given a new structure and modifications. The attitude towards the environment seems hostile. The Torah is the retreat that makes Jewish identity possible. The commitment towards one God is understandable in an presumed Christian environment. Tanḥuma can be seen as a complex genre that cannot be dated as a whole. It has been considered as dating back to a period between the fourth and the ninth century C.E. and even into the Middle Ages. The variety of versions and Mss witness calls for a cautious estimation. Are we dealing with a text from Christian-Byzantine Palestine or with an early medieval situation where *Qiddush ha-shem* is practiced? A definite answer cannot be given, maybe because the excerpt is too short. A more intensive comparative discourse<sup>29</sup>, single case studies of the editorial process,<sup>30</sup> and an intensive close reading of longer passages are necessary.

29 Cf. the comparison of Jacob Elbaum between Gen. Rab. and Tanḥuma in reference to the account of the Akedah: "From Sermon to Story: The Transformation of the Akedah." *Prooftexts* 6 (1986), pp. 97 – 116.

30 Cf. Chaim Milikowsky, "The Punishment of Jacob. A study in the Redactorial Process of Midrash Tanḥuma." *Annual of Bar Ilan University: Studies in Judaica and the Humanities* 18 – 19 (1981), 144 – 149 [Hebr.].

## Conclusions and remarks

While the structure of Gen. Rab. shows Abraham mainly as a righteous person and emphasizes his commitment to justice and his dialogue with God, Tanḥuma focuses more on the willingness to *Qiddush ha-shem* and observance of the *mitzvot*. Leaving the land full of idolatry is leaving death itself. In Gen. Rab. migration is an element of real life, differentiating between good and bad diaspora, while in Tanḥuma the real land of the living does not exist physically, but spiritually as the (land of the) Torah.

Looking at Gen. Rab. shows that a more detailed analysis requires a comprehensive array and collection of material. In Tanḥuma, the particular traditions are noticeable, as known proems from Gen. Rab. are adopted with deliberate amendments.

Consideration of the literary form, close reading of the paragraphs, and the simplified implementation of work steps from narratology help us to understand a complex phenomenon like the Midrash.

A simple, short sentence like in Gen 12:1 can be affected with many problems, based on the basic understanding of the rabbis to come upon a perfect, non-redundant text that is logical in itself. This already answers some questions that arise from “Lekh lekha.” The different interpretations revolve around the outer and inner migration/ halakhah, around the “for you” in the meaning of God’s promise to increase the glory of Abraham, who disperses the fragrance in the world, and much more.

Biblical texts are connected intertextually with familiar rabbinic hermeneutics. This kind of exegetical work would have to be explained in a separate work step.

It would be important to study individual interpretations, connections between the texts, intertextual references, etc. according to their establishment in the broader context of rabbinic literature. Here I tried to do this with a tiny example in connection with the application and meaning of Ps 68:14.

There are still many desiderata besides the important studies already made.



## The emergence of the individual author(-image) in late rabbinic literature<sup>1</sup>

With the exception of written texts of at least some works such as Sifra and, most probably, also the Mishnah, rabbinic literature was for the most part orally transmitted over long periods of time rather than authored and written down once and for all the way the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel was. Rabbinic literature is said to be the collective literature of rabbis – those authorities whose sayings are authoritative, but who cannot be regarded as the authors of the works in which their sayings are quoted, at least not in the modern sense of the word author. If one states that rabbinic works are not “authored”, what is meant is that they are not the product of the mind of a named or an anonymous individual.<sup>2</sup> Daniel Boyarin, acclaimed author and authority in the area of rabbinic literature of our days, has even proposed that “[i]f post-structuralism has declared the death of the author, the rabbis produce their literature in a world in which the author has not yet been born, as it were.”<sup>3</sup> Another scholarly author of our days, Martin Jaffee, goes so far as to point out that rabbinic texts present themselves as belonging to a tradition in which texts “just happened”.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, readers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, do have access to many physical volumes of anonymous rabbinic literature – we can pick up a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud or the Midrash Genesis Rabbah –, which, at first sight, are as

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1 I want to thank Prof. Günter Stemberger for his comments and suggestions on a previous version of this paper.

2 Even if according to some literary theorists we can regard the modern novel as a complex creative social process not “utterly different” from a Mishnah tractate (see Martin Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise.” In: Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin Jaffee (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*. Cambridge, New York et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 17 – 37 at 19), for our purposes in this article, classical rabbinic literature and 19th century novels are regarded as utterly different with respect to the problem of authorship.

3 Daniel Boyarin, “Anecdotal evidence: the Yavneh conundrum, “birkat hamminim”, and the problem of talmudic historiography.” In: Avery-Peck, Alan and Jacob Neusner (eds.): *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective II*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 1 – 35, p. 13.

4 Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship”, p. 32.

fixed and quotable as a novel by Elias Canetti or Amos Oz. When the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century started the systematic enterprise of editing documents of rabbinic literature they also had the anonymous written material of manuscripts and early prints at their disposal. This was possible for them because some time in the history of rabbinic literature a sort of “fixing” took place, i. e. manuscripts were produced and later on print editions appeared. Before this “putting down to paper” happened, anonymous agents are assumed to have given the texts a final polish by filling in many of the gaps of that literature transmitted over centuries. These anonymous agents are seldom called “authors”. Instead it is of “redactors”<sup>5</sup> that we speak, even though their task is to a certain extent similar to that of the authors of several textual sources we are familiar with today. From what has been said, it follows that the category of a single (named) author as the originator or *Urheber* of a text, in the sense that it stems from his own imagination, seems to be inadequate to deal with the classical rabbinic literature, i. e. Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmudim, and the classical Midrashim. As Martin Jaffee puts it:

As far as human authorship is concerned, there are no Yeshua b. Siras or Philo in the rabbinic literary world. Rabbis would not admit to writing formative texts for the ages out of the resource of their own imaginations until the ninth century C.E., when political and cultural exigencies drew Rabbi Sa’adia b. Yosef of Baghdad out of the shell of anonymity to confront Muslim philosophers and dissident Jewish Karaites in his own literary voice. As producers of literary works, the sages of Late Antiquity, by contrast imagine themselves at most as shapers of what already exists in tradition. They are not authors but repeaters (Tanna’im) and “explainers” (‘Amora’im); they do not invent, they merely transmit.<sup>6</sup>

In the following pages I will discuss two works of the last period of rabbinic literature whose composition can be dated shortly before Saadia b. Yosef, better known as Saadia Gaon,<sup>7</sup> and which can be seen as illustrative of an incipient individual author-image<sup>8</sup> and of an individual narrator, even if this remains in both cases “within the shell of anonymity”: *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* and *Seder Eliyahu*.

5 In the case of the Babylonian Talmud they are referred to by the expression *stammaim*, which can be translated as “the anonymous”. For that other vast, but in contrast with the Babylonian Talmud, heterogeneous corpus of rabbinic literature, the Midrash, we do not use this term, but assume that there were also anonymous redactors at work.

6 Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship”, p. 25.

7 Saadia was originally of Egypt, of the district of Fayyum, which is why he was called the ‘Fayyumite’. He moved to Baghdad, where he became head of the geonic academy or Gaon. On Saadia’s life see i.a. Robert Brody, *Sa’adyah Gaon*. Transl. Betsy Rosenberg. Oxford, Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013, pp. 25 – 29.

8 Cf. Sandra Heinen, “Das Bild des Autors. Überlegungen zum Begriff des “impliziten Autors” und seines Potentials zur kulturwissenschaftlichen Beschreibung von inszenierter Autorschaft.” *Sprachkunst* 33 (2002), pp. 329 – 345.

The first part of this article will focus on the problem of pseudepigraphy of these works, and the second will reflect on those characteristics which have led scholarship to see them as the product of a single author.

## The pseudo-author: the problem of pseudepigraphy

Myron B. Lerner observed that a distinctive characteristic of late midrashim is their tendency to pseudepigraphy. He writes:

Although most of the names of the rabbinic tradents quoted in midrashic literature are generally taken on face value and considered to be reliable, there are, nevertheless, certain midrashic works in which no authenticity whatsoever can be vouched for the names of the rabbis cited, and so these traditions must actually be considered pseudepigraphic.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that Lerner does not refer to *works as a whole* as pseudepigrapha in the sense that the Book of Enoch and many other Jewish Hellenistic literary works make use of this literary convention,<sup>10</sup> i. e. as attribution of a text to a well-known person of the biblical past in order to give the text authority. The pseudepigraphic character of these late midrashic works Lerner refers to has primarily to do with the way single traditions are intentionally attributed to rabbis who were not the first to express them.<sup>11</sup>

Now, is it legitimate to consider works such as Seder Eliyahu or Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer pseudepigrapha as has been the case in earlier stages of scholarship, even though they present their material as a whole in an anonymous manner?<sup>12</sup> In other words: To what extent can we consider these works as cases of pseudepigraphy if there is not any evident trace of authorial intention of attributing the

9 Myron B. Lerner, "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim." In: Shmuel Safrai, Zeev Safrai, Joshua Schwartz, and Peter J. Tomson (eds.), *The Literature of the Sages. Second Part*. Assen et al.: van Gorcum et al., 2006 (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum 2), pp. 133 – 229 at 152

10 See James H. Charlesworth, "Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments." *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 27 (1997), pp. 639 – 645; Petr Pokorný and Günter Stemberger, "Pseudepigraphie." *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 27 (1997), pp. 645 – 659; Ruben Zimmermann, "Pseudepigraphy / Pseudonymität." *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 6 (2008), pp. 1786 – 1788.

11 Cf. Michael E. Stone, "Pseudepigraphy Reconsidered." *The review of rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006), pp. 1 – 15. For a general overview on the subject of pseudepigraphy in Second Temple literature see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Pseudepigraphy and First Person Discourse in the Dead Sea Documents: From the Aramaic Texts to the Writings of the Yahad." In: Adolfo Daniel Roitman, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Shani Tzoref (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Contemporary Culture*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011 (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah), pp. 293 – 326. The works discussed all name a biblical figure and present it as tradent of the whole or of the majority of the material comprised in the work.

12 According to Lerner's argument this might probably be legitimate for the works in question do contain numerous attributions to individual rabbis and some of them may be pseudepigraphic.

text as a whole to anyone within the text that has come down to us, but only certain parts of it?<sup>13</sup> If pseudepigraphy is not found *within* the work, where does it come from? I deal with this question first. At least the titles of both post-talmudic works, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* and *Seder Eliyahu*, do seem to attribute the whole content to individuals, which has led scholarship to refer to them as pseudepigrapha – *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* to Eliezer b. Hyrkanos<sup>14</sup> and *Seder Eliyahu* to Elijah the Prophet or an otherwise unknown Rabbi.<sup>15</sup>

The Aramaic title *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* can be translated as “the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer”. The work’s final redaction has been dated to the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> It is conserved in several manuscripts<sup>17</sup> and more than two dozens editions, the first of which was printed in 1514 in Constantinople. Gerald Friedlander, the translator of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* into English,<sup>18</sup> was the first modern scholar to refer to the work as rabbinic pseudepigraphon;<sup>19</sup> before him, however, the work had already been seen as not written by the author it had been traditionally attributed to, the first century tanna R. Eliezer b. Hyrkanos. Friedlander supposes that due to the polemical and unorthodox character of the book, its author might have deemed it dangerous to reveal his own identity and might have chosen the name of Eliezer b. Hyrkanos, because his was, in spite of his excommunication, one of the most hon-

13 Cf. L. Jacobs, “Are there fictitious baraitot in the Babylonian Talmud?” *HUCA* 42 (1971) pp. 185 – 196.

14 Cf. Lerner, “The Works of Aggadic Midrash”, p. 153.

15 Cf. Leopold Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt*. Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1892, p. 110.

16 Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*. Munich: Beck, 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, p. 365.

17 Cf. L. Barth, “The Ban and the “Golden Plate”: Interpretations in *Pirque d’Rabbi Eliezer* 38.” In: C. A. Evans and Sh. Talmon (eds.), *The Quest for Context and Meaning. Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*. Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997, pp. 625 – 640, who counts 18 complete or nearly complete manuscripts of PRE datable to a period from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century (p. 626). Cf. Dagmar Börner-Klein’s introduction to her German translation for a list of manuscripts, translations, and commentaries of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*. Dagmar Börner-Klein (ed.), *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2004, pp. xvii – xxv.

18 Gerald Friedlander (ed.), *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) according to the text of the manuscript belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Hermon Press, 1965 (first published in London 1916). Quotations in the following pages are from this translation.

19 Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, Introduction, p. xiii. Friedlander not only considered the work as a pseudepigraphon, but regarded it as having “some sort of literary connection” to pseudepigrapha and apocrypha (p. lii). The most extensive section of his introduction, pp. xxi-liii, deals with this issue. Anna Urowitz-Freudenstein, “Pseudepigraphic Support of Pseudepigraphical Sources: The Case of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*.” In: J. C. Reeves (ed.), *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994, pp. 35 – 53 argues against Friedlander’s view that many passages of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* are dependent on apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, suggesting that these passages be seen as “loose parallels” to Scripture and other rabbinic writings, which the author of PRE, “a rabbinic midrash”, and rabbinic writers in general, would conventionally quote.

oured names the author could have attributed his work to.<sup>20</sup> But how does this attribution actually take place? Can we assert, as Rachel Adelman does, that “the author of PRE writes under a false name”?<sup>21</sup> The first two biographical chapters, with the narration of Eliezer’s calling, are generally regarded as spurious due to the fact that some of the manuscripts begin with chapter 3 of the printed text. They play, however, an important role in discussing the work’s authorship if, as Friedlander suggests, they were “prefixed for the purpose of providing a preface in order to justify the authorship attributed to Rabbi Eliezer.”<sup>22</sup> If, however, they were not part of the original work, can it then be affirmed that they constitute an authorial preface? In a very loose sense they do constitute a preface in our modern sense of the term, understood namely as a short introductory text by the author (or another figure, such as an editor or translator) preparing the reader for the reading of the main text and relating how it came into being, how the idea developed, naming other agents involved in the emergence of the work, etc.<sup>23</sup>

Günter Stemberger, on the other hand, points out that we cannot be sure whether the author of the work actually wanted it attributed to Eliezer b. Hyrkanos.<sup>24</sup> If we consider that many rabbinic traditions are quoted as transmitted by authorities known to have lived even centuries after Rabbi Eliezer, then it is highly improbable that an attribution of the whole work to him was ever intended by its author.<sup>25</sup>

It is a fact, however, that in those manuscripts of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* that do not have the two biographical chapters on Eliezer, the work begins with the words “Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos opened (*pataḥ*)”, i. e. began to expound.<sup>26</sup> R. Eliezer is thus the first among a number of Palestinian authorities cited in the course of the 54 chapters, only few of which are opened in this fashion.

Even if the work was known by other titles than that with which it is referred to nowadays – *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* is incidentally used only in medieval sources, such as Rashi, Jehudah ha-Levi, and Maimonides – Eliezer’s name is also a constant in the title according to earlier sources. There it is designated as *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer ha-*

20 Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, Introduction, p. xiii-xiv. With reference to this aspect, see Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009 (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 140), p. 26.

21 Adelman, *The Return*, p. 26.

22 Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, Introduction, p. xvi.

23 For an attempt at establishing literary connections between the first two chapters of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* and the rest of the work see D. Stein, *Maxims Magic Myth: A Folkloristic Perspective of Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004, pp. 115 – 168 [Hebr.].

24 Cf. Stemberger, *Einleitung*, p. 365.

25 Cf. Leopold Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, p. 286.

26 Only 12 chapters are opened by a rabbinic authority, and of these, only two, chapters 3 and 15 have R. Eliezer as first expounder.

*Gadol* (Ms. Epstein), *Haggadat de Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos* (Tosaphot to Ketubot 99a), *Baraitha de Rabbi Eliezer* (Arukh)<sup>27</sup> and *Mishna de Rabbi Eliezer*.

More or less contemporary to *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* is my second example, *Seder Eliyahu*.<sup>28</sup> The titles and colophons of the work's two parts (*Seder Eliyahu Rabba* and *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*<sup>29</sup>), as transmitted in the only manuscript which conserves both and which was copied in 1073, Codex Vaticanus Ebr. 31,<sup>30</sup> all contain the proper name "Eliyahu" without any modifier (see table below). The word *seder* ("order") is only used for the Zuta part, which is in both title and colophon referred to as "*Seder Eliyahu Zuta*".<sup>31</sup> The Rabba part is designated as "*Eliyahu Rabba*" in the title and as "*Midrash Eliyahu Rabba*" in the colophon.

<i>Title of Seder Eliyahu Rabba:</i>	
Let Him help me begin and conclude Eliyahu Rabba (f. 112).	יסיעני להתחיל ולגמור אליהו רבה
<i>Colophon of Seder Eliyahu Rabba:</i>	
The Midrash Eliyahu Rabba is concluded with the help of the chiefest among ten thousand (f. 159).	סליק מדרש אליהו רבא בסיוע דגול מרבבה
<i>Title of Seder Eliyahu Zuta:</i>	
Let Him help me begin and conclude the Order (Seder) Eliyahu Zuta (f. 159).	יסיעני להתחיל ולגמור סדר אליהו זוטא

27 Cf. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge*, p. 283, n. d), e), and f).

28 Meir Friedmann's edition of *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* first appeared in 1900 as "Beiheft" of the 7. Jahresbericht der Israelitisch-theologischen Lehranstalt. In 1902 he published it with his edition of *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* and a commentary to both parts, "Me'ir 'ayin". This edition was reprinted in Jerusalem 1960, 1967 and 1969. All translations in this article are based on the text of the reprint of 1960 of this edition. C. M. Horowitz had edited *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* from the same manuscript in his *עקד האגדות*, III. Frankfurt am Main 1882, pp. 31 – 55. An English translation was provided for by W.G. Braude and I. J. Kapstein (*Tanna Debe Eliyahu. The Lore of the School Elijah*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1981).

29 *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, the shorter part, is conserved in a number of manuscripts: Ms Parma 2785 (de Rossi 327), Ms Parma 2342 (de Rossi 541), Ms Oxford, Bodl. Libr., Mich 910, Ms Parma 3111 (de Rossi 1240), Ms Firkovitch Evr IIa 157/1. Cf. U. Berzbach, "The Textual Witnesses of the Midrash Seder Eliyahu Zuta – An initial survey." *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 31 (2004), pp. 63 – 74.

30 The manuscript was copied in the year 1073, as stated in the colophon of Sifra, the other work transmitted in the manuscript, according to two chronologies: ונגמר בשנת תתל"ג ליצירה ובשנת אלף ("and it was concluded in the year 833 since the creation of the world and in the year 1005 since the destruction of the temple. Let it be rebuilt soon. Amen.") The first one, the traditional Jewish chronology, should be read 4833 years since the creation of the world (3760 years are subtracted for the Gregorian chronology). The second date assumes that the destruction of the Temple took place in the year 68 C.E.

31 Ms Parma 2785 introduces *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* as follows אתחיל סדר אליהו זוטא. Cf. Berzbach, "The Textual Witnesses", p. 69 who points out that apart from codex Vat. 31 this is the only one to assign *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* a name.

<i>Colophon of Seder Eliyahu Zuta:</i>	
We will come back to you, Order (Seder) Eliyahu Zuta (f. 167)	הדרן עלך סדר אליהו זוטא <sup>32</sup>

Another interesting paratext<sup>33</sup>, i. e. one of those texts which, in diverse ways, “accompany” the main text of Seder Eliyahu, is a passage in tractate Ketubot of the Babylonian Talmud. This passage, bKet105b-106a, relates that a man brings Rabbi Anan a mess of little fish as a present and asks him to act as judge in a lawsuit in which he is litigant. Anan refuses to act as a judge but is persuaded by the man to keep the present and, as requested by the man, assigns him another judge. Assuming that Anan is impeded from acting as a judge due to being related to the man, the newly assigned judge shows partiality towards the litigant and thus intimidates the other party. Only in the second part of the story does Elijah make his narrative appearance to punish his friend and disciple Anan for his carelessness: We are told that until this day Elijah has been a regular visitor of Anan whom he has taught the Order of Elijah (i. e. Seder Eliyahu). From that day onwards Anan fasts and prays for mercy, but Elijah refrains from appearing to him. When he eventually does come to see Anan, it is so frightening a sight for the latter that he makes a box in which he sits writing down the Order of Elijah. At the close of the narrative the Talmud explains: To distinguish between the teachings before and after the incident we speak of *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* and *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*.

Braude and Kapstein, the translators of the work into English, remark in their introduction “that the legendary account of the work’s origin is closer to the truth than the common sense of scholars is willing to accept.” Furthermore, they surmise: “If R. Anan was a man open to such direct experience of the supernatural, he would have had no doubt that it was Elijah the prophet in person who, in the guise of a scholar, was visiting and instructing him in wisdom from above.”<sup>34</sup> It is beyond the scope of my inquiry in this context to examine whether this account was ever thought of as a factual narrative on how men open to the experience of the supernatural can access wisdom.<sup>35</sup>

The work is also known as *Tanna debe Eliyahu* or the Teaching of the School of Elijah, a title that goes back to a number of passages or *baraitot* in the Babylonian Talmud introduced with the very phrase *tanna debe eliyahu*.<sup>36</sup> Only some of them are actually transmitted in Seder Eliyahu as it is conserved.<sup>37</sup>

32 This wording is reminiscent of the Hadran prayer at the end of each Talmud tractate said upon completion of the tractate’s study.

33 For the concept of paratext see Gerard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 (Orig. publ.: Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1987).

34 Braude and Kapstein, *Tanna Debe Eliyahu*, Introduction, p. 10.

35 In any case, this episode was re-enacted by Samuel Haida in Prague in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in order to rewrite Seder Eliyahu.

36 The passages in the Babylonian Talmud introduced with *tanna debe Eliyahu* are: bNid 73a,



Scholars have read the Ketubot passage referred to above in combination with these baraitot and suggested that R. Anan (3<sup>rd</sup> century) gave his school and “the discourses comprising Tanna debe Eliyyahu”, i. e. the work that has come down to us, the name of the prophet Elijah out of respect for him. Anan would be, according to this view, the author of the work whose authority he passes on with pseudographical intention to Elijah. According to yet another hypothesis, the Tanna debe Eliyyahu could have originated not at Anan’s school but at one led by a certain Abba Eliyyahu, who also lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. According to this view the school’s given name led people to attribute the work to the celebrated prophet and the legendary account in Ketubot was invented in order to legitimate this attribution.<sup>38</sup>

The work is also designated with other pseudographical titles as well, such as *Teni Eliyyahu* in Genesis Rabba 54,4,<sup>39</sup> as *Elijah* in Numeri Rabba 4,20,<sup>40</sup> and as *Tanna debe Eliyyahu Rabbati* by Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (ca. 1165 – 1230) in his Rokeah, § 329, § 361. The Arukh, in turn, specifies that the parts of the work are *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* and *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, coinciding with the Talmud passage bKet 106a-b.<sup>41</sup>

No similar instances of attribution, however, are found in the main text of Seder Eliyahu, but rather in texts related to it or in its paratexts, such as titles and references in other works. Moreover, a brief look at the depiction of the Prophet Elijah within Seder Eliyahu leaves no doubt that the anonymous author of the work did not wish to be identified with this biblical character.

It is a well-known fact that the post-biblical reception of Elijah pictures the prophet in multiple roles. As Louis Ginzberg puts it in his *Legends of the Jews*, “Sometimes he looks like an ordinary man, sometimes he takes the appearance of an Arab, sometimes of a horseman, now he is a Roman court-official, now he is a

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bSanh 92a, bSanh 97a-b, bAZ 9a, bAZ 5b, bPes 94a, bPes 112a, bQid 80b, bShab 13a-b und bTam 32b.

37 This is the case with bSanh 97a-b and its parallel bAZ9a, bPes 94a and bShab 13a-b. Regarding the origins of the Talmud passages and their intertextual relation to Seder Eliyahu, Louis Ginzberg remarked: “The nine haggadic Baraitot cited by the Talmud from Tanna de be Eliyyahu [...] are very likely taken from a haggadic compilation by a Tanna called Elijah. [...] In the above-mentioned Midrashim attributed to Elijah these nine Baraitot are incorporated [...], and in three passages the Talmudic תנא דבי אליהו is changed to משום דבי אליהו הנביא by the author (authors?) of these Midrashim. This shows that at a comparatively early date דבי אליהו of the Talmud was misunderstood to refer to the prophet Elijah.” Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews VI: Notes to Volumes III and IV. From Moses in the Wilderness to Esther*. New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1928, pp. 330 – 331, n. 70. Those passages introduced with משום דבי אליהו הנביא are transmitted in the first chapter of Seder Eliyahu Zuta.

38 Cf. Braude and Kapstein, *Tanna Debe Eliyahu*, Introduction, p. 10.

39 The passage introduced with *teni eliyahu* does not have a parallel in Seder Eliyahu as it is conserved in the Vatican codex.

40 This passage contains a parallel to ER 65 – 6 in Seder Eliyahu.

41 Natan ben Yehi'el, *Aruch completum*. Vol VI, Vienna 1890, p. 27.



harlot.”<sup>42</sup> In Seder Eliyahu, however, Elijah the Prophet is the main or secondary character of a number of short exegetical stories expanding on passages from the Books of Kings.<sup>43</sup> His genealogy is discussed in a sages narrative until the Prophet himself appears to settle the matter.<sup>44</sup> These narratives told in the third person contrast in content and style with a number of stories told in the first person by a narrative agent that can be considered as the authorial voice of a main narrator of Seder Eliyahu. Therefore, it could be argued that this is at least a clear intratextual indication that the empirical author of Seder Eliyahu did not intend his readers to identify him with the prophet Elijah, with his words, or with the talmudic reception of the biblical character’s afterlife. The text manages to keep the biblical character Elijah and the rabbinic traditions around him separate from his authorial image within the text.

To sum up, the works are pseudepigraphically attributed to named authors in different ways. In the case of *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* attribution takes place not only in the titles with which the work is referred to in medieval sources, but also to a certain extent within the work. The first two biographical chapters as well as the opening of the third by Eliezer b. Hyrkanos in the manner in which rabbis commenced sermons (i. e. “Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos opened (*patah*)”) seem to justify from within the text the subsequent attribution by means of the several titles mentioned above. In the case of Seder Eliyahu the attribution is mainly of a paratextual nature; within the text itself no such phenomenon can be attested.

## Authored rabbinic texts?

A fundamental assumption underlying this paper is that both works, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* and Seder Eliyahu, can be seen as the product of individual authorship, or as “a reflection, however worked over, of the composition of an author,” to quote Louis Barth.<sup>45</sup> Although this might be true, is an individually authored rabbinic work an

42 Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews IV: Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913, p. 203.

43 E.g. ER 22, ER 22 – 3, ER 87 all of which presuppose and, in different degrees of explicitness, expand upon the biblical account of Elijah’s doings in the Books of Kings.

44 Elijah is also present in non-narrative contexts such as the interpretation in ER 96 of “The Lord showed me four craftsmen” (Zech 2:3) as “Messiah the son of David, Messiah the son of Joseph, Elijah, and the Righteous Priest.” (Tanna 254) which precedes the sages’ narrative commented above. A story in chapter 3 of the so-called *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, i. e. Pseudo-Seder Eliyahu Zuta, relates how Elijah will be brought with the Messiah by the Holy One. He is thus, contrary to a widespread tradition, not depicted as a forerunner of the Messiah, but somehow as his companion. His messianic activity seems to be reduced to bearing a flask of oil.

45 L. M. Barth, “Is every medieval Hebrew manuscript a new composition? The case of *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*.” In: Marc Lee Raphael (ed.), *Agendas for the Study of Midrash in the 21<sup>st</sup>*

oxymoron? Can a work present itself as, at the same time, belonging to the rabbinic corpus and as being anonymously authored by a single person?

If we follow Martin Jaffee's answer at the beginning of his article on rabbinic authorship,<sup>46</sup> then the answer would be also in this case be "no." Jaffee writes: "Rabbinic literature of Late Antiquity certainly had its audience. But can it be said to have had authors? From the perspective of the rabbinic tradition itself, the axiomatic answer is, of course, 'no.'"<sup>47</sup> He argues further: "In the rabbinic view, formulations of collective rabbinic wisdom, such as those ascribed to the Men of the Great Assembly, are 'said,' 'received' or 'heard,' and 'transmitted.' But they are not 'authored.'"<sup>48</sup> Jaffee proceeds to ask how – "deprived of the comfortable convention of 'authorship'" – we should describe and explain the "social, cultural, and imaginative processes that produced the *resolutely anonymous* and *collectivist literature* that lies at the very foundations of everything that eventually became the core of the rabbinic library?"<sup>49</sup>

Taking into account that Jaffee's inquiry focuses on the classical works of rabbinic literature, those composed in Late Antiquity, but also that the rabbinic period is conventionally assumed to last until 1071 C.E.<sup>50</sup>, it could be argued that we are dealing with different conceptions of "rabbinic authorship" for the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on the one hand, and for the 9<sup>th</sup> century on the other.

Jaffee's article deals primarily with the collectivist and anthological character of rabbinic literature.<sup>51</sup> In the next pages I will attempt to show that there are works generally regarded as belonging to the rabbinic corpus for which Jaffee's model is probably not as valid as it might be for classical works, since they present a number of characteristics that make them be perceived as individually authored and as works rather than anthologies.

Common to both the classical works of rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmudim, and Midrashim) and the ones discussed here, is the reluctance of their authors to describe how they actually worked. At best, transmission of wisdom is described in metaphors. Jaffee refers to the scattered poetology of

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century. Williamsburg, Virginia: College of William and Mary, 1999, pp. 43 – 62. Barth asks whether PRE is a stable document, the reflection of an individually composed work or the end redaction of collective traditions.

46 Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship".

47 Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship", p. 17.

48 Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship", p. 17.

49 Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship", p. 18. Emphasis added.

50 NumR 1 – 14, a work generally considered as belonging to the rabbinic corpus, is even later.

51 See David Stern, "The Anthological Imagination in Jewish Literature." *Prooftexts* 17 (1997), pp. 1 – 7. Stern distinguishes between explicit anthologies such as the classical midrash collections and implicit anthologies "like certain books in the Bible or the Talmud" (p. 3). This *Prooftexts* issue deals entirely with the anthology in Jewish literature; two essays discuss classical rabbinic works, the Babylonian Talmud and the Midrash Rabba, but leave unconventional works like Seder Eliyahu and Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer untouched.

rabbinic writings as the sages' "oblique references to their own intervention in the creation of texts that 'just happened.'"<sup>52</sup> In contrast with the works of Saadia and later authors of Jewish literature, rabbinic documents lack prologues<sup>53</sup> or other metatextual passages, i. e. commentary-like passages in which authors (or redactors) reflect on the way the composition of the document took place or on the purposes of the composition itself.<sup>54</sup> Saadia, on the contrary, writes in his introductory treatise to *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*:

Now after these preliminaries in praise of our Lord and our brief expression of tribute to Him, *I shall preface this book, which it has been my intention to compose*, with an account of the causes by which uncertainties may beset the minds of men in their search for the truth, as well as of the method by which they may resolve these uncertainties, and thus reach the goal of their search. *I shall show*, furthermore, how some of these uncertainties so intrigue some men that in their fancy and belief they become established truths. *As for myself, I invoke God's help* in lifting such uncertainties from my mind so that I may fully attain the means of serving Him, just as His pious one besought Him when he said: "Uncover mine eyes that I may behold the marvels of Thy Law" (Ps 119:18)<sup>55</sup>

The author figure that these few lines portray is not to be found in late rabbinic literature, neither in the frequent use of the first person, nor in the presentation of the contents of the work. Neither is the self-referentiality found in later passages of Saadia's work as palpable in our works:

Having now properly clarified the *aforegoing principles*, let me say next that the reward and punishment in the hereafter is meted out upon the body and soul unitedly, since they constitute together a single agent. *This has already been explained by me.*<sup>56</sup>

52 Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship", p. 20.

53 Michel G. Distefano, *Inner-Midrashic Introductions and their Influence on Introductions to Medieval Rabbinic Bible Commentaries*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009 (Studia Judaica 46) is of another opinion. He concedes that "Midrashim do not have introductions that precede their comments on 1:1 ff.", but argues that a "careful examination of the opening sections of many of the Midrashim (on the Torah and the Writings) reveals the presence of extensive introductory material embedded within the midrashic interpretations of the first verse [...]. Taken together, this material deals with questions regarding authorship and inspiration, time of composition, historical setting, genre, methods of interpretation, themes, and literary forms and unity." (p. 4)

54 A good example of an authorial metatext is the introduction in the form of a will in which Eleazar Halevi (14<sup>th</sup> cent.) addresses his children describing his oeuvre, entitled *The Book of Memory* or *Sefer Hazikhronot*, as "a historical book with a didactic function" while at the same time affirming its recreational character. Eli Yassif, "The Hebrew Narrative Anthology in the Middle Ages." *Prooftexts* 17 (1997), pp. 153 – 175 at 159.

55 Quoted after Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Transl. from the Arabic and the Hebrew by Samuel Rosenblatt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958 (Yale Judaica Series 1), p. 3. Emphasis added.

56 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs*, Treatise X, p. 336. Emphasis added.

The voice of the implied reader or author figure in *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* and *Seder Eliyahu* has, both because the author remains anonymous and because he does not comment upon his role as author, less “human qualities” than those who name themselves and present themselves as authors (or writers, redactors, or translators) within their texts.<sup>57</sup>

If, to respond to Jaffee, the “resolutely anonymous” character is still valid for these late rabbinic texts, maybe the “collectivist” is not anymore. If we cannot go very far in a “reconstruction” of the empirical author, we can at least describe the compositional features which let us speak of individually authored works, and, in the case of *Seder Eliyahu*, even of a relatively uniform narrator’s voice. It is to this question I now turn.

### Case 1: *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*

If the (historical) author of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* can be said to have left traces of an identity in the text in the form of an author-image, traces the interpreter can use in order to build an anthropomorphic mental image of the author, the most evident one is probably the fact that the authorities he cites are exclusively Palestinian sages. Moreover, the fact that direct quotations from the Talmud are all from the Palestinian Talmud led scholars to see the (historical) author as Palestinian.<sup>58</sup> However, in what follows I would rather concentrate on the implied author understood not anthropomorphically, but as text-as-a-whole, as literary program, as characteristic literary features that characterise the work.

A reader not acquainted with this sort of literature might, when first confronted with *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, object that we are anachronistically projecting later notions of unity and coherence if we state that the work has a *general literary program* and that this consists in the retelling, following two biographical chapters on Eliezer’s calling, of the most important stations of the Pentateuch.<sup>59</sup> Martin Jaffee himself warned in the above quoted article against superimposing on rabbinic compilations a comprehensive literary program:

57 Cf. A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988, p. 5; Burt Kimmelman, *The Poetics of Authorship in the Later Middle Ages: The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

58 Cf. Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, Introduction, p. xix.

59 *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* is generally regarded as belonging to the genre of the rewritten Bible. Cf. J. Dan, *Ha-sippur ha'ivri bime ha-benajim*. Jerusalem 1974, 134; J. Heinemann, *Aggadah and its development*. Jerusalem 1974, p. 181; Stemberger, *Einleitung*, p. 365. Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser* Börner-Klein, p. xxx and xxxviii points out that *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* is not simply a narrative midrash or an example of rewritten Bible. Cf. Adelman, *The return*, pp. 3 – 21 who analyses the work in terms of a narrative midrash.

A number of scholars have pointed out that there is enough coherence in many rabbinic compilations to justify the postulate of some sort of governing plan that informs the collection of intermediate units into larger documentary wholes. Yet, as many note, these wholes are just disjunctive enough in structure to caution us against subjecting them to hermeneutical torture in order to secure their editors' confession of harboring some sort of comprehensive urge to self-expression.<sup>60</sup>

If the retelling of the Pentateuch is *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer's* master-narrative, its general literary program, or governing plan, then this is interwoven with passages of what Friedlander<sup>61</sup> regarded as the work's three distinct sections: 1) God's ten descents from heaven to earth;<sup>62</sup> 2) an account of rabbinic mysticism including the mysteries of creation, of the divine chariot, the secret of the calendar, and the secret of the redemption among others; and, 3) a scattered midrash on the Jewish prayer *Shemoneh Esreh*. However, only eight of the ten descents and eight of the eighteen benedictions<sup>63</sup> are mentioned or quoted.<sup>64</sup>

God's ten descents to earth are listed at the opening of chapter 14 and discussed in a rather scattered manner in the rest of the work as it has been conserved. The first descent is discussed in chapter 14 (Garden of Eden), the second in chapter 24 (Tower of Babel), the third in chapter 25 (Sodom), the fourth in chapter 39 (Egypt), the fifth in chapter 40 (thornbush), the sixth in chapter 41 (Sinai), the seventh in chapter 46 (Sinai), and the eighth in chapter 54 (Tabernacle). In five cases the descent in question is explicitly introduced in a formulaic manner: ,ירידה הששי תשירד, ,ירידה החמשי תשירד, ,ירידה רביעי תשירד, ,ירידה שלישי תשירד, etc. The first descent follows immediately after the listing of the ten in chapter 14 and is introduced with the words *אחת בגן עדן*. With respect to the apparent disorder of the last part of the work (chapters 40 onwards), Friedlander points out that it is precisely the descents which constitute "connecting links in the narrative."<sup>65</sup>

The benedictions' distribution is different from that of the descents in that they are all dealt with only in the second half of the work. The first benediction is mentioned in chapter 27, the second in chapters 31 and 34, the third in chapter 35, the fourth in chapter 40, the fifth in chapter 43, the sixth in chapter 46, the seventh in chapter 51, and finally the eighth in chapters 52 and 54. The benedictions are spoken by the angels or by the main narrator or governing voice, and they apply

60 Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship", p. 32.

61 Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, Introduction, p. xv.

62 This section begins with the list of the ten descents in XIV, which deals with the first, the descent in the Garden of Eden.

63 Cf. Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, p. 196, n. 4. Cf. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge*, p. 284 – 285.

64 It has been argued that since both the first and the third of these sections appear to have been left incomplete, the work as a whole should be seen as conserved only partially.

65 Friedlander, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, p. 312, n. 1.

to characters (individual or collective) dealt with in the chapter in which they are inserted, i. e. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Manasseh and Nineveh, Israel in the desert, the Messiah, and Miriam. Since many are quoted at the end of chapters, Friedlander suggested that from this perspective the book can be seen as a kind of midrash on the *Shemoneh Esreh*.

Even if the author of *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* was not able to complete his work,<sup>66</sup> these are structural features meant to give the totality of the text a certain unity. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the work does seem to have a composite nature.<sup>67</sup> Still, on closer inspection, we can perceive that the author sought to interpret problematic aspects of biblical verses while apparently “only” retelling the biblical story. To analyse these verses the author chose to build what Dagmar Börner-Klein terms thematic groups with exegetical, structural, and theological foci.<sup>68</sup> This seems to have been his governing plan.<sup>69</sup> That his interest does not just pertain to the Pentateuch narrative is evident from his tendency to “interrupt” or complement it with digressions on matters of theology, astrology, mysticism, ethics, ætiology,<sup>70</sup> or even narrative episodes of other parts of the Tanakh.

Throughout the work, the use of numerical schemata is clearly one of the author’s favourite means of structuring his discourse. These schemata make frequent use of the numbers 3, 7, 10, and 12.<sup>71</sup> Placed at the beginning of a chapter, such numerical expressions tend to provide a structure to the chapter they open, but might as well continue to be effective beyond the chapter boundaries. The paramount example of this is probably the aforementioned list of the ten descents of God – announced in chapter 14 as follows:

66 Zunz assumed and he was probably right in doing so that a complete *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* would have covered the rest of Moses’ life and his death. Cf. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge*, p. 285.

67 Friedlander argues that the combination of the different sections is evident from the repetition of narratives and “in the absence of consecutive order in the arrangement of the material.” Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Introduction, p. xvi.

68 “Die Kunst in PRE besteht nun darin, dass diese Stellen nicht dem biblischen Textverlauf entsprechend exegesiert werden, sondern dass thematische Gruppen gebildet und exegetische, strukturelle sowie theologische Schwerpunkte gesetzt werden.” Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, p. xxx.

69 I follow Dagmar Börner-Klein in her line of argument according to which considering *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* as belonging to the genre of “rewritten Bible” is only tenable at first glance: “Diese Einordnung des Werkes ist nur vordergründig haltbar”. (Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, p. xxx).

70 Explaining, for example, why a city came to be named one way or another, the causes in the past for a certain practice in the present, etc.

71 There are, however, numerical structures based on other numbers. Such is the case at the beginning of chapter 32: “Six (people) were called by their names before they were created, and they are: Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Solomon, Josiah, and King Messiah.” (p. 231).

Ten descents upon the earth were made by the Holy One, blessed be He and these were: (1) One in the Garden of Eden; (2) one at (the time of) the generation of the Dispersion; (3) one at Sodom; (4) one at the thorn-bush; (5) one in Egypt; (6) + (7) twice at the cleft of the rock; (8) + (9) twice in the tent of Assembly; (10) once in the future. (p. 97<sup>72</sup>)

and discussed from this point in the text onward until the end of the work in chapter 54.<sup>73</sup> Although in this case we do not have to deal with a specific characteristic of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, it should be noted that the work abounds in examples of how numbers are used to provide structure to passages and to provide explanations; in combination with several other features this can also be seen as contributing to the homogeneous author-image in the text. To give but just one further example let us mention chapter 18, which makes use of the number seven in order to expound on the meaning of the Sabbath. Curiously enough, we read statements with exactly the same structure pertaining to the creation not of seven things, but of eight, i. e. dedications, firmaments, deserts, seas, æons, days, and years. If the category of days is viewed as the list's "odd one out", every one of the other seven categories and its seventh chosen item is presented as a parallel to the Sabbath. However, the fact that the list consists of eight items instead of seven seems to imply that the uniqueness of the Sabbath remains unparalleled. The passage, which is rather repetitive in tone and structure, reads as follows:

The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven dedications, six of them He dedicated and one is reserved for the (future) generations. [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven firmaments, and He selected from them all 'Araboth only for the place of the throne of glory of His kingdom. [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven lands, and He chose from all of them the land of Israel only. [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven deserts, and of them all He chose the desert of Sinai only to give therein the Torah. [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven seas, and of them all He chose the Sea of Kinnereth only, and gave it as an inheritance to the tribe of Naphtali. [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven æons, and of them all He chose the seventh æon only, the six æons are for the going in and coming out (of God's creatures) for war and peace. . [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven days, and of them all He chose the seventh day only. [...] The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven years, and of them all He chose the Sabbath year (pp. 136 – 141<sup>74</sup>)

Börner-Klein suggests that a compositional element of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer's* macro-structure is its development of what she terms a theology of history, according to which the history of the world is composed of a series of cycles which turn more quickly the more recent the history until they come abruptly to a

72 Translated following Börner-Klein's edition of the text.

73 This chapter was not conserved in the now-lost manuscript Friedlander translated.

74 Adapted following Börner-Klein's edition of the text.



standstill.<sup>75</sup> Viewed this way, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* need not be regarded as incomplete, but its abrupt ending might have always belonged to the work's general conception or governing plan,<sup>76</sup> though it would be interesting to ponder the precise reason why the work stops at exactly this point.

According to Börner-Klein, the work's macro-structure can be described as comprising a short frame narrative on R. Eliezer b. Hyrkanos' calling (chapters 1 – 2) related to the central part, a lecture by the same sage (chapters 3 – 47), and followed by yet another lecture by Jochanan b. Zakkai (chapters 48 – 54), which reviews topics already dealt with but also adds new ones, such as Esther's story.<sup>77</sup> Within the first major unit, Börner-Klein identifies an embedded unit of meaning (chapters 3 – 35) covering world history from the creation until the resurrection of the dead after the end of the world; this unit of meaning she analyses as illustrative of the work's specific theology of history.<sup>78</sup> The chapters on the resurrection of the dead (chapters 33 and 34) elucidate the author's establishing one of his main theological issues: Resurrection. Chapter 33 opens with the quotation of "And Isaac sowed in that land" (Gen 26:12), but leaves the story-time of the Pentateuch and continues with the retelling by rabbinic authorities of passages of the Books of Kings, 1 Samuel, Daniel, and Ezekiel dealing with resurrection. The following chapter goes on to deal with death and the resurrection of the dead but refrains from retelling Bible passages, quoting instead isolated verses as proof-texts for the argumentation in which the voice of a main narrator alternates with that of rabbinic authorities.<sup>79</sup>

Another example of how *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* is not just a midrashic new narrative of the Pentateuch is given by another type of "interruption". After introducing the literary program of God's ten descents to earth and retelling the first of them, which ends in Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden (chapter

75 Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, p. xxx.

76 For another view, see Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge*, p. 284 – 285.

77 Chapters 3 and 48 are the only ones "opened" by a sage. A number of other chapters are opened by other sages, though instead of using the verbal form "opened" the name of the sage is followed by "said". This is the case with chapter 19 (The School of Shammai), chapter 24 (R. Eliezer), chapter 44 (R. Jochanan), chapter 45 (R. Simeon b. Jochai), chapter 46 (R. Elazar, son of Azariah), chapter 47 (R. Elazar, son of Arakh), chapter 49 (R. Simeon b. Jochai), chapter 51 (Rabban Gamaliel).

78 Cf. Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, pp. xxxii-xxxviii.

79 Another "historical" issue present in several chapters is of special interest for many scholars: the possibility of interpreting passages dealing with the character of Ishmael and his children as allusions to early Islam Cf. Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the border: Rabbinic portrayals of the first Arab*. Albany, NY: State of New York University Press, 2006, esp. Chapter four: Ishmael in later midrashim, pp. 96 – 116; Steven Daniel Sacks, *Midrash and Multiplicity*. Berlin, New York 2009, especially his Appendix on PRE, Ishmael and Islam; Moïse Ohana, "La polémique judéo islamique et l'image de Ismaël dans Targum Pseudo-Jonathan et dans Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer." *Augustinianum* 15 (1975), pp. 367 – 387.



14), the author interrupts the biblical master narrative to deal with the theological doctrine of the two ways (chapter 15), and with the ethics of acts of loving-kindness (chapter 16). Chapter 16 opens with a quotation from Mishnah tractate Avot containing a numerical expression: “The world rests upon three things: upon the Torah, upon Divine Worship, and upon the service of loving-kindness” (mAvot I,2). Whereas this chapter focuses on those acts of loving-kindness showed to bridegrooms – as illustrated by the biblical episodes of Jacob’s wedding and Isaac’s wooing of Rebecca<sup>80</sup> – the next deals primarily with another type of acts of loving-kindness, i. e. those bestowed upon mourners. A short narrative on the construction of the Temple by Solomon at the end of chapter 17 combines the topics of both this and the preceding chapter, showing that the two form a unit of meaning. What this illustrates is that chapters form units with other chapters within the work, they do not stand on their own as closed thematic units but relate to those preceding and to those following them.

Another way of attaining textual cohesion is the use, attested to in several chapters of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, of self-referentiality. Even if he is still far from the explicit manner of Saadia, the author of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* does make use of a sort of self-reference when, to name but an example, he refers back to chapters 26 – 31, dealing with the ten trials of Abraham, in the following interpretation addressing the gematria of the name of Isaac in chapter 32:

Why was his name called Isaac? Because Yod (the first Hebrew letter of Isaac indicates) the ten trials wherewith our father Abraham was tried [...] (p. 232)

Among *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*’s recurring stylistic features is the use of Mishnah quotations at the opening of chapters, such as the one in chapter 16 mentioned before. Quotations from Mishnah tractate Avot open and give structure to chapters 13, 19, 26, and 43.<sup>81</sup> Not only the Mishnah but also the Bible is quoted at the beginning of chapters. The use of verses from other parts of the Tanakh is also attested at the beginning of certain chapters as triggering the retelling of Pentateuchal episodes, a technique known from the rabbinic literary form of the

80 Chapter 36 returns to the subject of the loving-kindness bestowed upon Jacob on the occasion of his wedding.

81 Chapter 13 is introduced with mAvot IV,21: “Envy, cupidity, and ambition remove man (Adam) from the world”; chapter 19 (in some textual witnesses this is chapter 18, also in Friedlander’s text) with mAvot V,6: “Ten things were created (on the eve of the Sabbath) in the twilight (namely): the mouth of the earth; the mouth of the well, the mouth of the ass, the rainbow, the Manna; the Shamir; the shape of the alphabet; the writing and the tables (of the law); and the ram of Abraham. Some sages say: the destroying spirits also, and the sepulchre of Moses, and the ram of Isaac; and others say: the tongs also.”; chapter 26 opens with mAvot V,3: “Our father Abraham was tried with ten trials, and he stood firm in them all.”; chapter 43 quotes mAvot IV,11: “Repentance and good deeds are a shield against punishment.”

peticha or proem.<sup>82</sup> Sometimes consecutive chapters (e. g. 37 and 38) make use of the same verse (Amos 5:9), which demonstrates that they are related not only regarding the narrative line of the Pentateuch but also regarding the interpretive tools used to present the narrative.

In spite of all that has been stated so far, the planned coherence of *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* remains relative and does not suffice per se as single proof of a coherent implied authorship or author-image. An analysis of the specific language and style, which is beyond the scope of this paper, would probably help in adducing sounder evidence of the work's individual authorship.

## Case 2: Seder Eliyahu

Even if this work neither contains any prefatory section as *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, nor can be adduced as a consistent example of rabbinic rewritten Bible, it also presents an author-image or implied author in a number of ways, the most salient of which are probably the recurring first person narratives which are embedded in what might be termed homiletical discourse.<sup>83</sup> It was already mentioned that our empirical author did not intend his readers to identify him with the Prophet Elijah – nor actually with anyone of this name. However, he does seem keen on letting his audience perceive *Seder Eliyahu* as a homogeneous document with a unity of style and thought. This he achieves, like *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, by making use, among other things, of self-reference, as for example in the following passage:

If you wish to study and rejoice in matters of Torah, then go and learn from the beginning of the matter [mentioned above, namely, that] the Holy One will sit in His academy and the righteous of the world will sit in His presence. (ER 15, l. 3)

With “the beginning of the matter” (*rosh she-le-‘inyan*) the text is referring back to the beginning of a list dealing with prefigurations of the future in the present world,<sup>84</sup> which I will turn to presently.

Another recurring feature that renders the work a unity of content and style is a technique by which apparently unrelated chapters or chapter sections are linked together forming units, which can be viewed as a form of tacit self-ref-

82 Günter Stemberger describes the basic structure of the Peticha as follows: “Der Grundaufbau ist dreigliedrig: ein Petichaverse, gewöhnlich nicht aus der biblischen Schrift(engruppe), aus der die Lesung stammt, meist aus den “Schriften”; der Prediger legt diesen Vers so aus, dass er zum abschliessenden Lesungsvers (gewöhnlich dem 1. oder 2. Vers der Lesung, i. A. der Pentateuchlesung, daher auch “Sedervers”) hinführt.” *Einleitung*, p. 270.

83 There are other forms of authorial presence in the text: e. g. explicit and implicit forms of self-reference. The author thus leaves traces of the unity of conception and composition.

84 Cf. ER 14, l. 14.

erence. This is achieved by means of: a) a passage, and b) its commentary. The passage can take the form of a list, which it generally does; in the same chapter a phrase of the passage or an item of the list is quoted – not always literally, though the reader can clearly recognize the quotation as such – and interpreted or commented; other phrases or list items continue to be commented beyond that chapter's boundaries in the ones following. This happens for example in chapters 3, 4, and 5. The list's wording, contained in chapter 3, is as follows:

From this they taught: Everything that will finally happen in the future has [already] been partially done in [this day]. In the time to come there will be a seat for the Holy One, blessed be He, in His great academy and the righteous of the world will sit before Him, [this has already been] partially [done by] the seat of the righteous in this world and of David, King of Israel.

The radiance of countenance of the righteous in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come [has already been] partially [foreshadowed by] the radiance of countenance of the righteous in this world.

The lives of the righteous, which will be without sorrow and without impulse to evil in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come [has already been] partially [foreshadowed by] the lives that are without sorrow and without impulse [to evil] of the righteous in this world, of Abraham, Isaac, Jakob, Jabez, Jethro and all that resemble them.

The resurrection of the dead both in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come [has already been] partially [foreshadowed by] the resurrection of the dead by the righteous, by Elijah, by Elishah, by Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest.

The honour and strength of the righteous in the days of the Messiah [and] in the world to come [has already been] partially [foreshadowed by] the honour and strength of the righteous in this world, [such as] Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

The eating, drinking<sup>85</sup>, and [the merrymaking and singing] of the righteous in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come, [has already been] partially [foreshadowed by] the eating and drinking, the merrymaking<sup>86</sup>, [and the singing] of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, in this world.

The blood and flesh, and the destruction of Gog in the time to come upon the mountains of Israel [has already been] partially [foreshadowed by] the blood and flesh and the destruction of those who oppress us in this world, whom our eyes behold every day without fail. (ER 14, l. 13)

Its first two items are quoted and expanded upon in the same chapter, shortly after the list has been given.<sup>87</sup> The commentary continues in the following two chapters, quoting the rest of the list's items and anonymously interpreting them

85 Ms.: *tsinah*, "and the cool comfort".

86 Ms.: *tsinah*, "and the cool comfort".

87 I.e. "the seat of the righteous in this world" (ER 15, l. 16) and "the radiance of countenance of the righteous in the days of the Messiah" etc. (ER 16, l. 14).

in a manner that resembles to a certain extent the way the Mishnah is interpreted in the Talmud or Bible verses in classical midrashim.<sup>88</sup>

This technique of linking together chapters or text segments can be seen as a literary innovation of a transitional time in which the individual author is emerging: Instead of taking the Mishnah as the basis for a commentary as the Talmud does, Seder Eliyahu provides, as Louis Ginzberg suggested, both its own Baraita and its own commentary.<sup>89</sup> Max Kadushin supports Ginzberg's theory observing: "It seems to me that we have frequent proofs of his theory in those passages which give terse mishnah-like haggadot which are then amplified by lengthy commentary."<sup>90</sup>

As was noted before, however, Seder Eliyahu's most salient feature and probably also the most tangible evidence of its individual authorship, is the use of the first person singular both in narrative and in homiletical passages, in which the author addresses his audience in a more direct manner. This "voice of the author in the text", which, as in the case of Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, refrains from dealing with the composition of the work, but which sometimes becomes a clear first person narrator's voice, is what I shall attempt to describe in what follows as a unifying trait of Seder Eliyahu.

Although rabbinic literature has plenty of narrative passages, there are surprisingly few studies on its "specific" narrator category. One of them is an article by Ofra Meir in which she presents the results of research based upon 679 stories found in Genesis Rabbah, Tanḥuma on Genesis and the Berakhot tractates in both Talmudim.<sup>91</sup>

88 I.e. "A life without sorrow in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come" (chapter 4, ER 19, l. 12 but also once more in chapter (5) 6, ER 27, l. 1). Notice that the commentary uses a form without suffix, whereas the baraita had used a suffixed form. "The glory and strength of the righteous in the time to come and in the world to come" (ER 20, l. 25 opening chapter 5). "The resurrection of the dead to the Holy One, blessed be He, in the world to come" (chapter 5, ER 22, l. 10). "The blood and flesh, and the destruction of Gog in the time to come upon the mountains" (chapter 5, ER 24, l. 25), "and partially [done by] the blood and flesh (Ms.: *shelo hetsim*) [of the oppressors] in this world" (chapter 5, ER 25, l. 3). "The eating, drinking, merrymaking, and singing of the righteous in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come" (chapter 5, ER 26, l. 6), "partially [done by] the eating and drinking in this world" (chapter 5, ER 26, l. 20). Notice that the commentary altered the order of the last two items, which are more thoroughly expanded than the rest.

89 Louis Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Shechter*. Vol. I (Midrash and Haggadah). Jewish Theological Seminary of America: New York, 1928, pp. 188 – 191.

90 Max Kadushin, *The Theology of Seder Eliahu*. New York: Bloch, 1932, p. 15, n. 46. For further examples of baraita and commentary see among others: ER 63, l. 11 (baraita) and ER 63, l. 20 (commentary); ER 123, l. 3 (baraita) and ER 123, l. 5 (commentary); ER 128, l. 13 (baraita) and ER 139, l. 28, ER 143, l. 25, ER 156, l. 15 (commentary).

91 Ofra Meir, "The Narrator in the Stories of the Talmud and the Midrash." *Fabula* 22 (1981), pp. 79 – 83.

The Seder Eliyahu's narratives constitute a special case insofar as they are told in the first person.<sup>92</sup> If Meir can state that the homodiegetic narrator is rather the exception in rabbinic literature as a whole, in Seder Eliyahu itself it constitutes a recurring feature. Most of the stories analysed by Meir have an omniscient or extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator, i. e. a narrator who is outside the world he narrates, who does not participate in the story he narrates. There is, however, a group of eleven 'independent' and 'Talmudic-type' stories told in the first person. Interestingly, no 'homiletical' story is told in the first person, since, according to Meir, "[t]he characters in 'homiletical' stories are always Biblical, and there is no way the narrator can substitute himself for one of them."<sup>93</sup>

The first person narratives consist mainly of direct speech in the form of dialogues. In none does the narrator name<sup>94</sup> or describe himself explicitly, except by using direct speech. Thus the degree of perceptibility of this narrator is, despite his active participation in the stories he narrates, considerably low.<sup>95</sup> What we do get to know about him is rather little: If we take all the stories as being narrated by one and the same narrator, as constituting a sort of fragmentary autobiography as some scholars would have it,<sup>96</sup> he depicts himself as a wandering rabbi, spending most of his time going from place to place or having arrived in Jerusalem, Ctesiphon, or in Babylonia. Even if the narrator does not, as was already mentioned above, explicitly deal with how the work, in which he narrates certain events of his life, came into being or was transmitted<sup>97</sup>, these pseudo-biographical bits and pieces could be regarded as the most weighty of all the exemplary narratives the work makes use of due to their testimonial (au-

92 The use of the first person in narrative passages is a rather unusual phenomenon in rabbinic literature. An exception is the group of fantastic narratives told in bBB 73a – 74a by Rabbah bar bar Chana. On this see Günter Stemberger, "Münchhausen und die Apokalyptik – Bavli Bava Batra 73a – 75b als literarische Einheit." In: idem, *Judaica Minora II: Geschichte und Literatur des rabbinischen Judentums*. Tübingen 2010, pp. 299 – 316.

93 Meir, "The Narrator", p. 83.

94 It should be pointed out that the last chapter of Seder Eliyahu Zuta contains a first person narrative featuring R. Jose as narrator. The Pseudo-Seder Eliyahu Zuta contains yet two more first person stories whose narrator can be identified with R. Johanan.

95 Cf. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary poetics*. London et al.: Routledge, 2002, p. 97 who observes on the narrator's degree of perceptibility that it "ranges from the maximum of covertness (often mistaken for a complete absence of a narrator) to the maximum of overtness."

96 Cf. Moritz Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden während des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit 2: Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Italien während der Mittelalters, nebst bisher ungedruckten Beilagen*. Vienna: Hölder, 1884, p. 301: "Der Verfasser unseres Buches war, was von allen anerkannt wird, ein weitgereister Mann."

97 It could be argued that the lack of reflection on the work is an especially remarkable aspect in an essentially metatextual work.

thorial) character.<sup>98</sup> As Ofra Meir suggests, the main function of the use of the first person seems to be the credibility it bestows on what is told.<sup>99</sup>

The narrator of the Seder Eliyahu's first person narratives is generally addressed as "Rabbi" by an individual male interlocutor, to whom he replies addressing him as "my son". At other times he is the one first addressing his interlocutors, e. g. the sages in the Academy. The dialogue situations he depicts are preceded by a short narrative frame pointing out where the action takes place, seldom when, and they consist, with one exception,<sup>100</sup> of a question or several questions posed by the interlocutors and monologue-like answers by the rabbi-narrator. His interlocutors include, among others, a Zoroastrian priest, men "who know Scripture but no Mishnah" or proto-Karaites, a widow, a fisherman, etc. The rabbi's answers leave no room for doubt: Even if he engages in a conversation with the sages before whom he humbles himself as "no more than dust under the soles of your feet",<sup>101</sup> it is *he* who gives the answers and literally has the last word.

The function of these stories, and at the same time their relative "independence" from a homiletical or exegetical frame, varies from case to case.<sup>102</sup> As with the rest of

98 God, on the contrary, is depicted as material author of the Torah, he speaks of himself as having written or created it or having had Moses write it down. E.g. (ER 4) כך אמר להן הקב"ה ("Thus spoke the Holy One, blessed be He, to Israel, My sons, did I not write in My Torah, *This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth* (Josh 1:8)"), (ER 16) אמר לו, דוד בני לא כך כתבתי בתורתך אף על פי שאין בכם ("He said, David, my son, did I not write in My Torah that even if you don't have words of Torah but good manners and only Scripture *five of you shall give chase to a hundred* (Lev 26:8)"), (ER 33) אמר לו, עמוס עמוס ("He said, Amos, Amos, did I not write in my Torah through your teacher Moses, *Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you* (Dt 33:29)"), (ER 56) באותה שעה ביקש הקב"ה להחריב את כל העולם כולו, אמר לא נתתי תורתך לאילו ("At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to destroy His whole world. He said, Did I not give My Torah to them so that they would study [Scripture] and recite [Mishnah] and they learnt from her good manners? Did I not write in My Torah that even if they do not have words of Torah but good manners *five of you shall give chase to a hundred* (Lev 26:8)"), (ER 56) It should be pointed out that also here we have an example of self-reference when God, speaking to Himself (ER 56) uses words he directed at David (ER 16).

99 Meir, "The Narrator", p. 83.

100 It could be argued that the story in chapter 18 of the master who died because of the conduct of his disciples (ER 100 – 101) inverts the usual teaching situation and makes the angel into a teacher and the Rabbi into a disciple.

101 Cf. ER 49, ER 51, and ER 122.

102 Jeffrey Rubenstein points out that "[s]tories embedded in the BT [Babylonian Talmud] should be considered in relation to talmudic halakha in general, as well as to the particular halakhot with which they are juxtaposed." He further observes that talmudic stories should not be regarded as "closed and self-contained texts", which is also applicable to the nar-

the narrative forms used in Seder Eliyahu, they are always used to exemplify points made in their respective homiletical or exegetical preceding or following contexts, though this might not be equally evident in every case.

Let's have a look at an example. In chapter 18 we read:

A. One time while journeying among those in exile in Babylonia, I came into a great city which was entirely Jewish – there were no Gentiles at all in it. I found there a teacher of young men who had before him two hundred students, most of whom were between eighteen and twenty years old.<sup>103</sup>

B. Because these young people disgraced themselves with immorality, their teacher died, his son died, and his grandson died, as did every one of the students most of whom were between the ages of eighteen and twenty.

C. As I was weeping and sighing for them, an angel came to me and asked: 'Why do you weep and sigh?' I replied: 'Shall I not weep and sigh for those who came to possess knowledge of Scripture and Mishnah and are now gone as if they had never been?' The angel said: 'It's nice of you to weep and sigh. Still, why should these young men have followed hideous ways and committed unworthy deeds and disgraced themselves with immorality discharging their seed for no reason? Did they not know that death would approach them?' (ER 100, l. 32)

Up to this point the story does not – at least not in a manifest way – illustrate what precedes it: the midrashist (i. e. the voice in charge of non-narrative, but midrashic or homiletical passages) has been dealing with the subject of intermarriage among the ten different classes who came up to the Land of Israel from Babylonia after the exile, as listed in the quoted mQid 4:1. The story seems to find its application rather in the lines following its narration.<sup>104</sup> Characteristic for these narratives is their open-endedness. In the example above we don't get to know whether the dialogue between the Rabbi and the angel came to an end with C., when the narrator turns midrashist and addresses his implied audience drawing conclusions from the rather mysterious narrative passage.

This story is in many ways an exception to the rule in the corpus of narratives, though at the same time it clearly belongs there. First of all, it shows the narrator not in his usual rabbi-role, i. e. teaching someone else, but as an observer anguished at the "sight" or recollection of how a certain group of people ruined their lives and that of their teacher. Although there is no indication of time passing by, we can distinguish two story times, almost two scenes, in A. and B. In

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ratives of Seder Eliyahu. (Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic stories: Narrative art, Composition, and Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, p. 15).

103 According to the Vatican manuscript this line is followed by: "Their teacher was not among them, there was only a son of his and a grandson."

104 Both in the passages preceding and following the story, mishnayot of the fourth chapter of tractate Qiddushin are quoted.



the first scene, devoid of dialogue, the young students and the teacher are present; the second scene relates the death of the teacher and his family as of every single young student seen in the first scene. We assume that the narrator is in C. still there weeping for the loss when he is approached, not by an old man or by a denier of the Oral Tradition as is usually the case in Seder Eliyahu, but by a supernatural being – an angel. Only after this more detailed closing narrative frame does a short dialogue begin, defining the nature of the immorality referred to previously in B. The angel only alludes to how this teacher's students caused their own death and that of their teacher: they were not capable of restraining their sexual appetites, and that is the reason why they and their relatives had to die. Unlike most of the first person narratives in Seder Eliyahu, it is not the rabbi, but the angel who provides the answer in this case.

The voice of the midrashist in D. and E. below<sup>105</sup> provides an application of this narrative, which includes yet another aspect of the alleged immoralities referred to, namely women:

D. If this be so, then this is the reason why this Mishnah was given to the Sages: "A man may not stay alone with two women". If you, however, say, "a woman may be alone with two men" (Qid 4:12, bQid 80b), [bear in mind that] the halakhah is not thus, for if one [of the men] should commit a sexual transgression with her, there is not enough testimony. On the other hand, a woman may be alone with three men, because should one commit a sexual transgression with her, there would be enough testimony. And why is there a difference between two and three [men with whom a woman may stay alone]? Those who taught that [a woman may be alone with] three, meant disciples of the wise and great sages. But if they are licentious, she may not be alone even with a hundred of them. The Sages taught in a Mishnah: "An unmarried man may not tend cattle, nor may two unmarried men sleep together under the same cover" (Qid 4:14, bQid 82a). And also this halakhah is widespread in Israel: One whose business is with women must not be alone with women, for example net makers, carders, [handmill] cleaners, wool dressers, tailors, spice peddlars, barbers, and launderers.<sup>106</sup>

E. If you wish to learn and take delight in the words of Torah, go and learn from what happened at the very beginning of it all: When our fathers stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah from Sinai, the Holy One said to Moses: *Go to the people and consecrate them* etc. (Exod 19:10). Moses went and spoke to them: *Prepare for the third day: [do not go near a woman.]* etc. (Exod 19:15). But is it really so that he warned them only against women? What he said was [actually]: "Abstain from transgression, from theft, and from improper acts, so that you are pure when you stand at Mount Sinai." (ER 101, l. 16)

105 Though it could be argued that the angel assumes the role of addressing the extradiegetical audience the way the rabbi-narrator-midrashist usually does.

106 A similar list in bQid 82a contains following professions: "goldsmiths, carders, [handmill] cleaners, pedlars, wool-dressers, barbers, launderers, bloodletters, bath attendants, and tanners." (Quoted after Isidor Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud. Seder Nashim 4: Gittin, Kiddushin*. London: Soncino Press, 1936).



Two of the three quotations from Mishnah tractate Qiddushin and the minimal exegetical narrative in E. mention women as essential “fuel” for immorality. Only by the end of E does the midrashist soften his “accusation” by warning Israel through Moses against all sorts of immorality. These two paragraphs are characteristic of the homiletical discourse of Seder Eliyahu. The midrashist addresses his implied reader (with a masculine personal pronoun *atah* or verbal forms with masculine endings) as if he were a potential questioner, poses himself questions, and answers them as well. What cannot be decided so easily is whether the story was told to anticipate the discussion of these three mishnayot or rather to illustrate the context preceding it. It is in any case remarkable that the story of the lascivious disciples is simply told but not commented upon or explicitly referred to in the passage that follows it. Its function as illustration or exemplum seems to be accomplished by its merely being related.

## Conclusion

David Stern asserted in *Parables in Midrash* that midrash in general, or rather the midrashic units – in the sense of those “larger literary units that we most comfortably use in reading and interpreting literary works” – tend to be no more than “simple exegetical miscellanies with no significant super-structure.”<sup>107</sup>

The works discussed above, generally regarded as belonging to the rabbinic genre midrash, are, however, defined by a number of stylistic and formal features which do seem to be related to a sort of super-structure, that of their individual authorship or consistent author-image. If, on the other hand, a main trait of rabbinic literature is its general reluctance to assume responsibility for authorship, for individuality, and self-assertion, and if the discussed works do, at least to a certain extent, show tendencies in the opposite direction, they cannot be deemed as precisely representative of *classical* rabbinic literature, but of what can be termed “late rabbinic literature.” The authors of Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer and Seder Eliyahu composed their midrashic-like works in times after those of the collective enterprises that gave rise to the classical works of rabbinic literature, in a transitional period of Jewish literature. What Andrew Bennett, in referring to Burt Kimmelman, describes as a paradox of medieval notions of authorship might to a certain extent apply to the notions of authorship of late rabbinic literature as described in the preceding pages:

[P]oets of the later Middle Ages ‘did indeed desire to assert themselves as poets – that is, as auctores – yet their enterprise took the form of an evolved sense of eloquence that in

107 Stern, David: *Parables in Midrash. Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1991, p. 153 and 154.

part derived from, and could be tested by, a reader's or listener's commitment to a literary past.' (Kimmelman 1999:21). In other words, one's identification as an author involved both self-assertion and a submission to the tradition.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Andrew Bennett, *The Author*. London, New York, 2005 (The New Critical Idiom), p. 41. Kimmelman's quote is from: *The Poetics of Authorship in Later Middle Ages: The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona*, New York et al.: Lang, 1996.

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## **The Challenge of Biblical Passion Narratives: Negotiating, Moderating, and Reconstructing Abraham's Sacrifice in the Qur'an<sup>1</sup>**

### **The Qur'an Text**

Talking about the Qur'an in Germany remains a political issue; the controversy around Islam's place in Europe is still making massive waves. It has brought to light a profoundly essentialist perception of Islam prevailing in wider social circles – a perception that makes it easy to forget that until only recently inclusive umbrella terms like “the three Abrahamic religions”<sup>2</sup> or “the three scriptural religions” were familiar and popular. In many circles, it would seem that these terms have given way to a dichotomy between monolithic blocks like “Europe” or “the West,” and “Islam.” This controversy has spilled over into academic Qur'anic studies as well. But what exactly are those supposedly unbridgeable differences between Europe's ‘Judeo-Christian’ background and Islamic tradition? Notions of social values and order, fundamentally associated with ‘another ethical paradigm’ allegedly grounded in the Qur'an, are sometimes regarded as the cause for such a divergence. Though this verdict is, in its generalizing thesis, not tenable, it may nevertheless be promising to verify the supposition that the Qur'an has contributed formatively to the mental and intellectual development of Islam. It is not inappropriate to attribute such a formative impact to the Qur'an, provided that one does not focus on the Qur'an's individual instructions, but rather on its social and religious pronouncements in general, i. e. the Qur'anic construction of the world (*Weltkonstruktion*). Gustave von Grunebaum called for such an approach already half a century ago:

The immediate historical effect of the new faith stemmed from the setting rather than the content, [...] its appropriateness to the Arab environment of the day, the amplification it allowed the intellectual and emotional life [...]. However, the underlying cause of this remolding of the Arabs and even more so, of the survival of Islam and its spread

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1 Translated by W. Scott Chahanovich.

2 Reinhard G. Kratz and Tilman Nagel (eds.), ‘Abraham unser Vater’: *Die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003, pp. 133 – 149.

into other language and culture areas is not to be sought in any specific tenet or command but in its giving body and articulation to a new experience of the holy from which there flew (or to which there became attached) a specific attitude to man and the universe, and experience and an attitude which became associated with certain (to the believer evocative) formulations and to which in turn new yet kindred experiences and attitudes would become associated. New yet kindred – for within the area of Near Eastern civilizations the religious life had, at least for the thousand years preceding the birth of Muhammad (ca. A.D. 580), centered on a limited number of motifs or, more subjectively phrased, been animated by a limited number of spiritual aspirations and moral preoccupations.<sup>3</sup>

Adopting von Grunebaum's perspective provides us with new premises from which to depart. Instead of reading the Qur'an, as is common, as the definitive, norm-setting law codex of the Muslims, we should place the Qur'an back into its cultural milieu and read it as the document reforming already extant religious traditions.<sup>4</sup> The individual Qur'anic impositions often conjured in contemporary debate can hardly be properly understood except with this overarching context in mind. In this light, the Qur'an crystallizes as an ongoing negotiation of extant Jewish and Christian traditions. From the sum of the diverse subjects of debate, one can claim to be of particularly enduring interest: the negotiation of the status of 'the emotional' in religion, which in the Qur'anic community was conducted against the backdrop of Christian doctrine.

It is hard to overlook that the central challenge of this debate was set by the Christian Passion narrative, the self-sacrifice of the Son of God, a story whose emotional potential demanded mitigation to fit the sober ascetic attitude of the growing religious community. The concept of God's love as such – both in the sense of subject and object – can be said to be alien to the Qur'anic proclamation. Excessiveness of God's love and love for God is theologically unfeasible vis-à-vis the essential concept of divine transcendence. In view of our premise that the Qur'anic proclamation was an integral part of Late Antiquity's debates and, moreover, that it was from the outset part of a discursive conflict with the older religious traditions as well as the pagan-Arab *Weltanschauung*, it appears especially promising to focus on and analyze the Qur'anic community's contention with the Christian Passion narrative. In the following, the process of the demythification of the emotionally packed Christian Passion narrative and its re-interpretation as an emotionally resistant act of obedience – performed not by Christ, but by Abraham – will be traced in order to shed some light on the

3 Gustave von Grunebaum, *Islam: Experience of the Holy and Concept of Man*. Los Angeles: University of California, 1965, pp. 1 – 2.

4 For more on the new interpretation of the Qur'an as a late antique, and not yet Islamic, text, see Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein Europäischer Zugang*. Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010.

surprisingly marginal role that emotions play in the religion of Sunni Islam. Concepts such as 'passion' and 'compassion' (*compassio*), suffering and sacrifice, along with virility and masculine predominance are, according to my thesis, connoted differently in Sunni Islam than they are in the Western tradition – perhaps as a consequence of the fact that the Qur'an presents them in a dialectic relationship with the Christian Passion story. To illustrate this thesis, different readings of the Abrahamic sacrifice will be compared.

The topic of this paper is, of course, not confined to the discourse of textual history, but is closely related to anthropological queries. The relationship between emotionality and gender-consciousness in the Qur'an and in early Islam, though dealt with occasionally<sup>5</sup> in scholarship, has not yet been studied in any breadth and methodical scrutiny comparable to the work presented by Peter Brown for Late Antiquity,<sup>6</sup> whose discussion, though pertaining to another time period and moreover another geographical and cultural space, has proved extremely helpful for the exploration of our topic.

## Christian Tradition and Abraham's Sacrifice

Let us enter the discussion through a quote from Ludwig Feuerbach's famous comment on the Christian Passion: "God suffers, means in truth nothing else than: God is a heart. The heart is the source, the centre of all suffering. [...] The mystery of the suffering God is therefore the mystery of feeling sensibility. [...] Feeling is absolute, divine in its nature."<sup>7</sup> This daring conclusion cannot be readily applied to other religious cultures, and certainly not to Sunni Islam.

The narrative of suffering in the Christian Passion story, which influenced European culture primarily through iconographic depictions of the Late Middle Ages, set up the primeval scene of the emotion of compassion. It was with this story that the European history of compassion, '*compassio*,' commenced. Its primary characters,

5 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*. London: Routledge und Kegan Paul, 1985; Georges-Henri Bousquet, *La morale de L'Islam et son éthique nouvelle*. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1953; Margaret E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989; Devin J. Steward, "Sex and Sexuality." In: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an IV* (2004), pp. 580 – 585.

6 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.

7 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*. Transl. George Eliot. New York, NY: Cosimo, 2008, p. 62. The German original is as follows: "Gott leidet, heißt (...) in Wahrheit nichts anderes als: 'Gott ist ein Herz'. Das Herz ist die Quelle, der Inbegriff aller Leiden. (...) Das Geheimnis des leidenden Gottes ist daher das Geheimnis der Empfindung. (...) Die Empfindung ist göttlichen Wesens." (Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Berlin: Schuffenhauer und Werner, 1956, pp. 121 – 122).

such as the *Mater dolorosa*, or the *Ecce Homo* representation of Christ, figured prominently not only in Church liturgy but equally in the arts; their expressive body language and gestures were apt to be instrumental in invoking the believers' contemplation of suffering.<sup>8</sup> It did not, however, take theologians long to realize that the Passion not only constituted the *beginning* of a new kind of emotionality, but also marked the *completion* of an age-old paradigm of love and suffering. It was already the early Church that identified the "type," i. e. the prefiguration, of the Passion story in the Hebrew Bible, namely, Abraham's sacrifice, commonly referred to in Jewish tradition as "the Binding of Isaac."<sup>9</sup>

The biblical story, Gen 22:1 – 19, tells of Abraham, who in a dream is ordered to sacrifice his son, "the one he loves." Together, father and son make their way to the place of the sacrifice. When the son asks why they have not brought a sacrificial animal with them, Abraham calms his son's worries without revealing his terrible plan. In Gen 22:8, it simply says, "[T]hey went both together." Once they arrive at Mount Moriah, Abraham builds the altar and binds his son in preparation for the sacrifice. In that very moment, as he raises the blade, God calls unto him to spare his son; Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own beloved son is proof enough of his loyalty. In Gen 22:13, the story concludes with a "ram caught in a thicket by his horns" that is then taken as the sacrifice instead of the son.

This archaic and emotionally shattering story of Abraham's unconditional obedience to God, his not shrinking from committing a self-destructive act, became a trigger for debate in Late Antiquity. It was at this time that strict rules for biblical exegesis were being laid out. One of these axioms was that the biblical text should be free from contradictions. If such were found, textual tools had to be developed and applied for solving them.<sup>10</sup> It was the cruelty of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son that was perceived as unnatural and, by extension, incompatible with the morally exemplary figure of Abraham. The conflict between a father's love for his own son, who had been given to him in old age, and the stipulated sacrifice of this very same progeny out of fidelity towards God, the tragic dimension of the story, appeared unbearable in Late Antiquity.

Accordingly, rabbinic tradition reworked the narrative into a story in which the father and the son "synergetically" prepare the requested sacrifice. Isaac himself consents to becoming the sacrificed offering and, in one version, Isaac even takes care that the process is correctly carried out. Midrash Tanḥuma reports that, "Immediately, an overpowering fear and violent trembling seized

8 Cf. Stavros Vlachos, *Unerträgliche Kreatürlichkeit. Leid und Tod Christi in der spätmittelalterlichen Kunst*. Regensburg: Historisches Museum Regensburg, 2010, pp. 11 – 29.

9 Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998, p. 117.

10 Cf. James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1997, pp. 17 – 23.

Isaac, for when he saw nothing to be sacrificed, he realized what was about to happen. Yet he asked once again: 'Where is the lamb for the burnt-offering (Gen 22:7)?' And Abraham responded: 'Since you ask, the Holy One, blessed be He, has selected you.' 'If he has chosen me,' Isaac replied, 'I shall willingly surrender my soul to Him, but I am gravely concerned about my mother.' Nevertheless, they went both of them together (ibid., v. 8), of one mind: convinced that one was to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered."<sup>11</sup>

The erstwhile primeval scene depicting absolute loyalty to God, which took into account one's own suffering as well as the suffering of the most beloved family member, has turned into a story deprived of its dramatic mood and thus into a mere edificatory story.

It is obvious that the new diegetic detail of the son's consent is no mere narrative trifle. The notion of the sacrifice undertaken synergetically blunts the point of the old story. The pathos of the depiction of fulfilling a personal duty unto God that transcends the bounds of natural law governing inter-human behavior is extinguished. The tragic element is lost, because the son accepts on himself the burden of any criminal guilt that could be attributed to Abraham. Thus, the emotionally moving dramatic mood is excised. A subversion of fundamental social norms, as well as an act of utmost self-denial – a passion – has been demoted to become a conflict-free and emotionally weak episode of fulfillment of duty.

It is possible that this reduction of the emotional potential is due to the harmonization principle inherent in the newly established rules of biblical interpretation. The depiction of Abraham as an ideal pious figure should not be distorted by an act of cruelty exacted upon his son, who remains unaware of his preset role to be the sacrificial offering. It is equally possible, however, that the turn of the story could be historically conditioned. It is well-known that at the time of the Maccabean rebellion against the Seleucid occupation, self-sacrifices of young men, some even encouraged by their parents, were a current phenomenon. Traces of a re-interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice as Isaac's self-sacrifice are transmitted already at an early stage.<sup>12</sup>

Given the rising Christian tradition, the new interpretation may also already be a response to the appropriation of the Abraham sacrifice story by Christian theology. After all, the Christian reading of the Bible, which recognizes in biblical stories the pre-figuration of events in the New Testament, had made Abraham's sacrifice a central symbol. Here, too, as in the Midrash, the phrase "they went both together" (Gen 22:8) was interpreted as pointing to a synergy between father

11 Cf. Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*. Gräfenhainichen: C. Schulz, 1931, pp. 164 – 166.

12 Cf. Kugel, *The Bible*, p. 175 ff.

and son in the sacrificial process. Such a reading lends itself to interpreting Abraham's sacrifice as pre-figuring the Christian Passion, in which the son, Christ, freely offers himself up as the sacrifice in his father's offering. An early attempt at interpretation that turned a father-focused narrative into a son-centered one is already found in Paul's writings.<sup>13</sup>

Here again, we find two sacrificers. Nevertheless, the story is different. It maintains the element of conflict and, by extension, the paradox, since the father, God himself – against all reason – gives up his only son out of love for the sake of humans who have become disloyal to him. Moreover, the son is the principle character in this story, as he is not only the one who offers up the sacrifice, but is the sacrifice itself. Such a paradoxical structure is likely to incite emotion. Its effect is significantly increased due to the conflict-ridden Passion story in which it is embedded.

### The Meccan Qur'an<sup>14</sup> and Abraham's Sacrifice

Let us now turn to the Qur'an, understood as the proclamation of the Prophet Muhammad, communicated to a growing circle of listeners, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century C. E., a time that is still part of Late Antiquity. Prophecy at this time in biblically-imprinted areas was long extinct. It had been replaced by 'exegesis.' Religious speech had already been bound up in exemplary written form embodied in the recognized collection of biblical writings that did not demand further additions but needed only commentary. Thus, the new type of religious speaker was no longer the prophet, but the wise man: *hakham*. The situation seems to have been different in Arabia, where the written Bible was not familiar. Here prophecy seems to have still been feasible. Yet the development has not passed unnoticed: Muhammad certainly deserves to be regarded as both, an, albeit late-coming, Arab prophet and a contemporary exegete of biblical tradition, *hakham*. As for his listeners, about whom we have no information save what is recorded in the Qur'an itself, we have to presume that they were Arabic-speaking educated individuals familiar with the Jewish and Christian traditions current at the time. The growing new religious movement around Muhammad was concerned with the integration of biblical narratives and teachings into Arabic linguistic culture and, in particular, with the 'updating' of biblical teachings to make them fruitful

13 Cf. Kugel, *The Bible*, p. 177 ff.

14 Already the inner-Islamic tradition divides the Qur'anic texts into Meccan and Medinan surahs. This is a classification that, in view of the Prophet's various audiences, is highly relevant for understanding the development of the Qur'an. See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 182 – 234.



for their particular situation as a monotheistic movement of renewal in the midst of a pagan dominated society.<sup>15</sup>

What then happened at this juncture with the tradition of Abraham's sacrifice? The short Qur'anic text about Abraham's sacrifice, which is in the focus of our reading, is preceded by another narrative, unknown from the Bible but going back to rabbinic tradition, which, for the Qur'anic image of Abraham, is by far more momentous than the sacrifice event itself. This story, following the rabbinic narrative, depicts Abraham as the biblical figure who, like Muhammad himself, in his pagan environment brings about the breakthrough of a new worship, that of one God. At the same time, Abraham is a figure who successfully initiates a social paradigm shift: the shift from a genealogical bond of the individual to his clan and family over to a transcendent bond with God.<sup>16</sup> It is this transition that Muhammad's community in Mecca equally had to achieve, in a situation where the enmity between monotheists and pagans within the urban society required that every individual choose between their genealogical bonds and loyalty towards the new religion.

The Qur'anic community at this time was already aware of its election as a new manifestation of "God's people" following the model of the Israelites. They gave themselves over to a kind of 'internal emigration' away from the pagan cult focused around the Kaaba, changing their orientation from loyalty towards their genealogical forefathers to loyalty towards spiritual forefathers, i. e. biblical protagonists and, in particular, the patriarchs.<sup>17</sup> What would have been unheard of in tribal society, for someone to disassociate himself from his family, had become an every day reality for many of Muhammad's listeners. In this regard, Abraham could be adduced as a particularly poignant example for the new community. It is therefore not surprising to see that the Qur'an's first Abraham story focuses on this very conflict. Abraham disassociates himself from his father because the latter refuses to renounce idolatry. A tale about the destruction of his father's idols, which is told more than once in the Qur'an,<sup>18</sup> serves as an introduction to the detailed Abraham narrative in surah 37.

15 Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 24 – 31.

16 Cf. Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009, pp. 117 – 120 and Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 633 – 652. See also Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands. The Abraham-Ishmael legends in Islamic Exegesis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, and idem, "Abraham." In: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* I (2001), pp. 5 – 11.

17 Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 451 – 509.

18 Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, pp. 134 – 140.

Q 37:84 – 98<sup>19</sup>

84 When he came unto his Lord with a pure heart,  
 85 when he said to his father and his folk, "What do you serve?  
 86 Is it calumny, gods apart from God, that you desire?  
 87 What think you then of the Lord of all Being?"

[...]

91 Then he turned to their gods, and said, "What do you eat?  
 92 What ails you, that you speak not?"  
 93 And he turned upon them smiting them with his right hand.  
 94 Then came the others to him hastening (to hold him back)  
 95 He said, "Do you serve what you hew,  
 96 and God created you and what you make?"

[...]

98 They desired to outwit him; so We made them the lower ones.

The sacrifice narrative follows directly thereafter in Q 37:99 – 109<sup>20</sup>:

99 He said, "I am going to my Lord; He will guide me.  
 100 My Lord, give me one of the righteous!"  
 101 Then We gave him the good tidings of a prudent boy;  
 102 and when he had reached the age of running with him,<sup>21</sup> he said, "My son, I  
 see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; Consider, what thinkest thou?" He  
 said, "My father, do as thou art bidden;  
 Thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the steadfast."  
 103 When they had surrendered, and he flung him upon his brow,  
 104 We called unto him, "Abraham,  
 105 thou has confirmed the vision, even so We recompense the good-doers  
 106 This is indeed the manifest trial."  
 107 and We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice,  
 108 and left for him among the later folk:  
 109 "Peace be upon Abraham!"

Abraham's first great achievement is thus, as it is in Gen 12:1 – 5, his decision to leave his homeland and renounce his family ties. In the Qur'an, however, this is accomplished not as an immediate response to God's invocation, but rather is

19 A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

20 Arberry, *The Koran*.

21 The Arabic *as-sa'y*, "the running," most likely is a reference to rite performed during the pilgrimage to Mecca, *hadjj*, i. e. the ritual running between the stations of al-Safa and al-Marwa.

causally justified by Abraham's enmity towards idolatry cherished in his – unnamed – homeland. That is, in the Qur'an, Abraham led a life, which is biblically unattested, prior to his emigration. It is here that he exchanges blood ties and genealogy for a spiritual bond, an act that is at the time of the surah's communication, also required of Muhammad's listening audience.

His second important achievement is his willingness to sacrifice his son. The short pericope was first told – without the long addition in verse 102 – according to the model of the biblical report: Abraham leaves his father and wanders, all the while relying on divine guidance, until finally his prayer for a son is heard (v.101). Also, as in the biblical text, he is called to sacrifice his son, who is then saved by divine intervention. Importantly, Abraham had already passed a difficult test (v. 106).<sup>22</sup> According to the biblical text, his utmost willingness to submit himself to God is rewarded with the dispensation of divine privilege on his descendants, who from now on are legitimized by the “merits of their fathers.”<sup>23</sup> In the Qur'anic text, in contrast, Abraham is rewarded with an honorable blessing: for the new community his name is henceforth to be accompanied with the formula, “Blessing be upon him.”

What does the story say about the sacrifice? The structure of the story demonstrates that it was told according to the biblical model, and only later was it expanded, as is evident from the style of the long prosaic verse 102, conspicuous in the middle of the short poetic verses. The verse was obviously added to introduce the explicit explanation of the son's consent.<sup>24</sup> The ‘revised’ Qur'anic interpretation demonstrates, as has already been shown in the Jewish rendition of Late Antiquity, that the terrible image of Abraham's sacrificing his son without his consent was no longer tolerable. Instead, a communal act of obedience between father and son<sup>25</sup> is fashioned out of the high-handed and self-destructive

22 Cf. Gen 22:1.

23 The distinction attributed to the descendants of Abraham is taken from the biblical promise of divine blessing told in Genesis as a sign that God acknowledges Abraham's loyalty: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen 22:18). Cf. Erik Aurelius, “Durch den Glauben gehorsam – durch Werke gerecht.” In: Kratz and Nagel (eds.), *‘Abraham unser Vater’*, pp. 98 – 111; Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*. New York: n.p., 1909, pp. 179 – 181.

24 A large number of suras during the proclamation ‘grew’ thanks to one or a number of additions, i. e. it ‘updated’ itself in accordance with the theologically developing community. These additions reflect an ongoing process of extrapolating and updating (*Fortschreibungsprozess*) that lasted up until the conclusive end of the prophecy with the Prophet's death. This process also facilitated new insights into the communal reception of the apparently liturgical continuation of re-introducing earlier surahs. Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 310 – 313.

25 The synergy of the father and son could be interpreted typologically as a pre-figuration of the crucifixion.

sacrifice.<sup>26</sup> The inevitable suffering is, on the part of the son, encountered with “patience” and perseverance, in other words, with a virtue that cancels from the outset any exaggerating meaning. In the Qur’an, human suffering is understood as a divine test that must be met with perseverance, without emotion. Agony should be neither sorrowful nor jubilant. Any interpretation whatsoever seeking to appropriate this story to suggest the pre-figuration of Christ’s self-sacrifice is thus excluded. The Qur’anic sacrifice narrative, which dates from the Meccan period of the Prophet’s activity, has an edificatory value not unlike the version preserved in the Midrash. The religio-political meaning that the story accrues only several years later during Muhammad’s prophetic activity in Medina, during the Meccan communication process, is not yet apparent.

### The Medinan Qur’an and Abraham’s Sacrifice

In Medina, the story is totally read anew. To understand the Medinan ministry of the prophet, it is necessary to know that the community’s emigration to Medina in 622 C.E., not only in social but also in theological terms, constituted a significant turn. It strikes the eye that in Medina the older Meccan proclamations accrued a new religio-political dimension.<sup>27</sup> In Medina, both the messenger and his audience were no longer outsiders in a pagan-dominated environment, but were surrounded by a community of Jews and probably also of Christians who claimed the biblical heritage, which had previously been considered a universal intellectual good, as their own. It is in this context that the sacrifice scene – which in Jewish tradition is celebrated as the unique proof of Abraham’s exemplary faithfulness and thus the reason for the privileged position of their religion, and which for Christians is the prototype of the Passion story – gains new significance for the Qur’anic community as well. It is henceforth upgraded for the emerging Islamic religion as a centrally important event.

Some background: According to the Qur’an, Abraham’s sacrifice does not take place in the Holy Land, but around Mecca.<sup>28</sup> Local tradition had already associated Abraham with the Arabian Peninsula and specifically with the Meccan sanctuary well before Muhammad’s appearance on the scene.<sup>29</sup> In view of the

26 Cf. Kugel, *The Bible*, p. 177.

27 Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 510 – 560.

28 Cf. Firestone, “Abraham.” This is reflected in the Qur’anic binding story in surah 37. The term *sa’y*, which we translate as the “consummation of the run”, seems to be based off of the pilgrimage ritual of running between the two pilgrimage stations of al-Safa and al-Marwah, cf. above.

29 Cf. Tilman Nagel, “Der erste Muslim: Abraham in Mekka”. In: Kratz and Nagel (eds.),

status of Abraham's sacrificial offering, it is no wonder that the story is also claimed by the Qur'anic community as part of their narrative. For the Qur'anic community, the story is associated with a central religious symbol of their own, the animal sacrifice during the pilgrimage. The ancient cultic practices of pilgrimage extant at the time of the emergence of the Qur'an, which culminate in a collective sacrifice, were integrated into the new cult during Muhammad's ministry at Medina. In this new context, the act of animal sacrifice acquires new meaning. Abraham himself is depicted as the founder of the rites of pilgrimage, his sacrifice serving as a model of the prescribed sacrificial offering for believers. The sacrifice thus receives the status of an Abrahamic institution. Participants in the cult perform an *imitatio Abrahami*, thus invaluablely increasing the appreciation of the pagan sacrificial offering while simultaneously facilitating a new imagination of the self on the part of the worshippers.

But the sacrificial offering is not associated with Abraham as father but with Abraham as role model. Abraham is not the father of all monotheists, as he is often portrayed in discourse today. From the Islamic perspective, the accomplishment that was formative in the development of an Islamic identity is more complex. Indeed there is a striking tension between his two greatest accomplishments. It is true that Abraham did give up genealogical ties for the sake of spiritual ones by leaving his father and substituting God in his place. Yet by including his son in the act of the sacrificial offering, he gave genealogical ties a new meaning again.

How does this dialectic work? The newly established connection between genealogy and sacrifice, as Margaret Combs-Schilling has demonstrated, contributed greatly to creating and establishing a patrilineal kind of thinking, i. e. the concept of social legitimacy acquired primarily through the father.<sup>30</sup> The dialectic generated through the Qur'anic embedding of the father-son-sacrifice into a father-denial-story simultaneously contributed to both limiting the significance of patrilineal ties as well as strengthening them. In Combs-Schilling's own words:

Transcendence comes in because, as told in the Qur'an, the prophet Abraham had to deny his own father in order to remain faithful to the one God [...]. Yet the Qur'an also reinforces patrilineality by portraying the ultimate sacrifice that God demands of humans as the sacrifice of the most precious tie on earth – the father's link to his male child – the fundamental patrilineal connection. The myth of sacrifice ennobles that bond over all others. So at the same time that the Qur'an underlines the limits of patrilineal affiliation [...], it reinforces patrilineality, for it was the father in connection with the

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<sup>30</sup> 'Abraham unser Vater', pp. 133 – 149; idem, *Mohammed: Leben und Legende*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008.

30 Cf. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances*, pp. 57 – 58.

son that made for connection to the divine and won for father and son – and by extension all of humanity – long life on earth and eternal life thereafter.<sup>31</sup>

The annual requirement of every Muslim head of household to perform the sacrifice lumps together the elements of the social ideal of male supremacy and patrilineal identity. This is accomplished with a minimum of emotion and through a decidedly sober, completely unemotional, cultic act.

## Conclusion

Abraham's unemotional animal sacrifice is taken up as the central act in the Hajj ceremony in Islam. Here we are far away from the emotionally charged narrative of the Passion story, which the Christian tradition spread above and beyond Abraham's sacrifice. One may assume that this sober reception of the sacrifice narrative in Islam is somehow connected to the fundamental skepticism of the new community regarding the mythical content of expiatory offering, which stands out as the central article of faith in the Christian religion. In addition, another contemporary problem may have been involved in the fading out of the Christian interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice as the precursor of the Passion story: the irritating ubiquity of a Christian culture of martyrdom. Christ is not only, as Isaac, the object to be sacrificed, but he above all sacrifices himself and thereby becomes the ultimate role model for the wide-spread culture of martyrdom in Late Antiquity.

The Qur'an positions itself vehemently against the emotionally powerful idea of martyrdom,<sup>32</sup> which at that time was the most striking feature of Christianity. This position seems to have been not in the least due to the fact that the martyrdom movement produced a large number of saints, whose intercessory powers<sup>33</sup> appeared highly problematic vis-à-vis strict conceptions of monotheism.

There was, therefore, no God who suffered with man, nor was there even an ideal of the suffering man. In its place appeared a type of man who was stable and acted out of unconditional trust in God. The Qur'an thereby distances itself from

31 Ibid.

32 See Silvia Horsch, *Tod im Kampf. Figurationen des Märtyrers in frühen islamischen Schriften*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2009; Reuven Firestone, "Jihad." In: Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 308 – 320; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text*, pp. 448 – 560.

33 See Angelika Neuwirth, "Spätantike Bilddiskurse in arabischem Gewand. Das koranische Bild der Welt zwischen Gottesthron und Schöpfungsschrift." In: Christoph Dohmen and Christoph Wagner (eds.), *Religion als Bild. Bild als Religion*. Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2012, pp. 39 – 43.

a fundamental tradition of the preceding religions. Gustave von Grunebaum perceives here a fundamental difference from the Christian tradition:

[T]he elimination of the idea of original sin and the burden of an inevitable inherited corruption which was yet the faithful's personal responsibility; the more optimistic outlook on human nature as needful of guidance rather than of redemption and hence the discouragement of the more extreme forms of asceticism [...] – in short, Islam's more realistic but also more vulgar adjustment to the world as it is – assisted in presenting the untutored with a system of beliefs that satisfied his primary religious concerns and relieved him of the typically Christian paradox of being in, but not of, the world [...]. With the different concept of man's condition and of his contractual status relation (*ḥukm*) to the Majesty of the Lord, the mysteries of man's redemption by a suffering God-man, God's son and yet not a second deity, mysteries whose articulation had led astray so many, lost their vital significance.<sup>34</sup>

One should, however, be cautious of following von Grunebaum in constructing a universally valid antagonism between Christianity and Islam. According to this model of Islam, due to its recognition of the absolute divine will, it would be exclusively obedience (i. e. patience and resilience) that becomes the gateway to salvation. Such a description not only narrows down the actual diversity of manifestations of (Sunni) Islam, with Sufism holding a strongly contrasting position, it is also incompatible with the much more differentiated self-perception of man, in which sin is not viewed as mere disobedience but as a matter of conscience involving emotional dimensions such as are attested in the Qur'an.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the attempt to contrast the different vantage points taken by the three religious traditions to the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice, which constitutes a key to the status of suffering and of emotion in the three traditions, may prove fruitful in making us more sensitive to the deeper dimension of their different self-representations.

34 Gustave von Grunebaum, "Islam: Its inherent Power of Expansion and Adaptation." In: idem, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962, p. 5.

35 The internalization of the commandments of the Decalogue is clearly manifest in the Commandment of honoring one's parents, whereby *rahma*, "mercy," is highlighted as an essentially important attitude expected to fulfill the divine will. Although this may not be equal with the mandate transcending all laws of loving one's neighbor, it nevertheless does provide the catalyst for introspection and facilitates the recognition that one's own humanity is inseparable from that of the other. Thus, the order to be established with the Qur'anic Decalogue Commandments relies on the principle of God's mercy and, in his service, man's mercy as well, an attitude that does not stem from mere obedience. See Angelika Neuwirth, "The Qur'anic Decalogue" (forthcoming).





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Andreas Mauz (Zurich)

**“Write what you see and hear”.  
Methodological problems of the poetics of ‘sacred text’:  
Hildegard’s *Protestificatio* as revelation narrative**

**“Conversations with God”**

A genre ...

If a book successfully remains 137 weeks – more than two and a half years – on the *New York Times* bestsellers list, one will with good reason know why this is so. In the case of the title in question the crucial reason for this success lies in the extraordinary co-authorship that led to its existence. Neal Donald Walsch (\*1943) was – and still is – engaged in “Conversations with God”. And, since the will and the opinions of his counterpart usually are seen as being removed from an immediate human access, millions of readers have taken the advantage and bought this “uncommon dialogue”<sup>1</sup> (as the subtitle runs).

Walsch has described in detail how the conversations began. In spring 1992 he found himself in a situation of great despair, so he sat down to write an angry letter to God in order to pose all the questions regarding his life’s difficulties. Now when he had written the last of these questions – one he perceived as “unanswerable” –, his hand mysteriously “remained poised over the paper, as if held there by some invisible force”. Then the pen suddenly started to move – to *write*. Walsch did not quite know what was going on, but he let it happen. What his hand wrote was the following: “Do you really want an answer to all these questions, or are you just venting?” And Walsch continues:

I blinked ... and then my mind came up with a reply. I wrote that down, too.

Both. I’m venting, sure, but if these questions have answers, I’d sure as hell like to hear them!

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1 Neal Donald Walsch, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue*. Vol. 1 – 3. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Pub. 1996 – 1998. The entire *Conversations* series includes nine volumes. The German edition (*Gespräche mit Gott. Ein ungewöhnlicher Dialog*) is available in the “Arkana” series of Goldmann-Verlag, München (1997 – 1999).

You are 'sure as hell' ... about a lot of things. But wouldn't it be nice to be 'sure as Heaven'? And I wrote:

What is that supposed to mean?

Before I knew it, I had begun a conversation ... and I was not writing so much as *taking dictation*.<sup>2</sup>

This mode of communication has gone on since then, laid down in various volumes with the nine books of the actual *Conversations* as the center piece. The enormous popularity of the material is coordinated and further promoted by Walsch's "Conversations With God" Foundation, which offers a wide range of secondary writing and an intensive course programme. Moreover in 2006, Walsch's experience was even made into movie.<sup>3</sup>

Even if the success of Walsch's writing – *genitivus objectivus* a little problematic with respect to its collective character<sup>4</sup> – is enormous, it is of course not at all exceptional with respect to its general profile. Texts which in one way or the other claim to be the result of a collaboration which bridges the transcendent and immanent form an actual genre throughout the history of religion, be it the Revelation of John as being part of a canonical sacred scripture, be it one of the many "new revelations" of a vast number of religious groups of quite different dimensions – including extremely successful movements such as *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* with *The Book of Mormon* (1830) as the core text of a canon of revealed sacred scriptures.<sup>5</sup> In the European context, it is usually the works of the "seer" Immanuel Swedenborg (1688 – 1772) and the "Writing knight" Jakob Lorber (1800 – 1864) that are referred to as paradigms of this genre.<sup>6</sup>

2 Walsch, *Conversations*, 1, p. 7.

3 Dir. Stephen Deutsch, with Henry Czerny as Neil Donald Walsch.

4 This points in a direction I will not follow here, although it is highly important: The way these texts are assigned to an author, whose name we find on the cover, has an immediate connection to copyright law. For a rather peculiar example, not only for copyrighting a received text but also its transcendent source, see: Sarah Lewis, "The peculiar sleep: receiving 'The Urantia Book'." In: James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (eds.), *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*. Cambridge: CUP 2007, pp. 199 – 212.

5 Regarding the *Book of Mormon* as poetological 'sacred text,' see my article "Heiligende Kohärenz. Systematische Überlegungen zum Selbstbeglaubigungsdiskurs 'heiliger Texte' – am Beispiel des Buches Mormon." In: Julia Abel et al. (eds.), *Ambivalenz und Kohärenz. Untersuchungen zur narrativen Sinnbildung*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009 (Schriftenreihe Literaturwissenschaft 81), pp. 251 – 272.

6 Cf. Helmut Obst, *Apostel und Propheten der Neuzeit. Gründer christlicher Religionsgemeinschaften des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000.

...and ways to deal with it

Now it is obvious that texts with such high claims cause reactions of all kinds – not just approval and enthusiasm but also critique and rejection. Not only in the case of the *Book of Mormon* can we see that from the very beginning the "given text" is questioned as being fake, as being a false revelation.<sup>7</sup> Bernhard Grom, a Catholic pedagogue and psychologist of religion, has named concisely the significant perspectives we find within *scientific discourse* on (new) revelations:

This variety [of "revelation testimonies"] can be reviewed in the horizon of *science of religion*, asking for influences of the history of ideas or how their content relates to Christian, esoteric or eastern belief traditions. In the horizon of *Christian-theology* one will first of all examine the relation of those revelations to the singular revelation of God in the logos that became flesh and classify them (on the Protestant side) as 'new revelations' or (Catholic) 'private revelations'. In a *sociological* view it is likely to relate the interest of specific persons and groups in higher messages with a rupture of tradition and a loosened connection to churches along with individualisation. The perspective of *psychology of religion* will however focus on the individual- or socio-psychological factors that explain their emergence: How are these experiences to be integrated in our knowledge about perception, brain function, attention, conscience, emotions and motives?<sup>8</sup>

What unites these perspectives is that the ones applying them usually do not spend much time with the description of the actual *corpus delicti*: the 'revealed' scripture. The text and its concrete properties move to the background, because its extraordinary origin has to be explained in terms of psychology of religion (as a manifestation of a certain "individual- or socio-psychological" condition of the author), because it sociologically has to be linked with larger religious parameters, or because it has (apologetically-theologically) to be set in the horizon of truth, that is, a set of convictions decisive for a certain belief. (The last mentioned type is especially well established in popular versions if a certain text claims to be a sequel or an 'authentic' correction of an established sacred scripture like the Christian Holy Bible.)

7 To name just two examples – an old and a recent one: Alexander Campbell, *Delusions. An Analysis of the Book of Mormon with an Examination of its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of its Pretences to Divine Authority*. Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832; Hans Martin Friedrich, *Die gefälschte Offenbarung: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit mormonischer Glaubenslehren, mit Selbstzeugnissen ehemaliger Mormonen*. Basel: Brunnen, 1997.

8 Bernhard Grom (SJ), "Offenbarungserlebnisse – Channeling: Religionspsychologische Perspektiven." In: Matthias Pöhlmann (ed.), *„Ich habe euch noch viel zu sagen ...“: Gottesboten – Propheten – Neuoffenbarer*. Berlin: EZW, 2003 (EZW-Texte 169), pp. 7 – 18, p. 8 (translation mine) – This systematic weakness could be in length demonstrated with regard to Olaf Hammer's otherwise highly enlightening study *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*. Leiden: Brill, 2001 (Numen, Book Series 90).

This is – in a careless simplified version – the background to my present considerations. What I am suggesting is a different approach, not in the sense of an alternative, but as a due complement: the *poetological* approach as highlighted through the *narrative grammar of revelation*.

## Poetics of ‘sacred text’

### Revelation narratives, sanctifying texts

What becomes central from this perspective is the *poiesis* of these texts – the way they came into being in the precise sense of the *representation* of a revelation event in the form of a *revelation narrative*. The poetological approach aims primarily at a description of the operating modes of the named higher claim. This means that the emphasis lies almost exclusively on the narrative framing which sets the “actual text” in its place. This actual text – the revealed transcendent knowledge – steps in the background. It is not of interest here how the text “actually came about”, nor is it of interest what its claims are with respect to how readers deal or dealt with it. Thus, this approach also implies a clear difference to the hermeneutical horizon usually strongly imposed by the genre itself: the claim of (historical) truth. The term “revelation narrative” does not make any comment on the character of that narrative; the poetological analysis takes place beyond the classic fictional/factual-distinction; it makes no comment on the relation between the narrated and the real world.

Referring to the established use of the term “sacred text” or “sacred scripture” (established both in theology and science of religion) the poetological approach can be described more precisely as follows: Within a poetological horizon, ‘sacredness’ is a textual phenomenon, more precisely: a phenomenon on the *text-surface*. ‘Sacred,’ in this sense, is not an attribute ascribed on the basis of assumed incidents of revelation or inspiration, but one that is oriented solely on the text’s *self description* as being revealed or inspired. ‘Sacred’ is simply the text that explicitly claims to be such in form of a specific type of *meta-textual self representation*: namely the claim that the text came about thanks to a supernatural intervention. (In order to show *prima vista* the relation to the common debate on sacred texts/scriptures and the specific focus I’m suggesting, I strictly use single quotation marks for the central term.)

Now, if attention is focused on the modes of a text’s self representation as ‘sacred,’ that means that not the entire text is taken into account but primarily the passages that perform its sanctification. In order to highlight this focus, it is advisable to expand the established notion of “sacred text” to include those of

*sanctifying* and the *sanctified text*.<sup>9</sup> Walsch's account cited above would be part of the framing sanctifying text of the actual *Conversations* as sanctified text, the former serving clearly as an 'instruction sheet' for the latter.

This terminological expansion makes clear the poetological notion of 'sacred text,' the dedication to text proximity, and the distance from the usual religious sense of the term. But of course, it is not done with this terminological refinement. Precisely the distinction between sanctifying and sanctified text shows how difficult their attribution is in concrete cases. The proposed terminology causes not only the problem of the distinctiveness (or isolability) of these parts but also that of their radius of impact: Is the sanctifying text at a time part of the sanctified text? Is the sanctifying text meta-textually characterized as such?<sup>10</sup> Are we dealing with a text-topologically separated part, or can it only be identified by an external ascription? Are we dealing with a single sanctifying text, or is it a matter of a multiple sanctifying ensemble? The benefit of this terminology is thus to bring us to a more refined perception and description of intra-textual relations.

A methodological punch line of the approach thus consists of a programmatic undifferentiation, a dispensation with established distinctions of a historical, genre-specific, theological, or disciplinary nature. In this sense, the corpus of 'sacred texts' is not limited to mainstream sacred scriptures but is considerably larger and also encompasses texts prevalently classified under such notions as "(high) literature," "apocrypha," "mystical writings," "hermetic literature," "church historical sources," "channelled texts," or "esoteric texts." The accustomed affiliations and well-rehearsed hermeneutical contexts are not simply dissolved with the assertion of this new genre, but they are put at a distance. And it is first this distance that allows the aforementioned commonality to be recognized as well as, ideally, the partly fine or substantial differences within.

## Narrative grammar of revelation

If what constitutes 'sacred' or rather sanctifying texts should be treated with a certain systematic claim, it is advisable not to insist on the concept of 'sacred text,' but rather to evolve it by means of the concept of *revelation*. In contrast to the concept of 'the sacred,' that of 'revelation' implies a *structure of action or*

9 As these notions are new, there is no need for quotation marks to highlight a specific understanding.

10 Think of titles such as *How the Book of Mormon came upon* (as central element of a multiple sanctifying framing of *The Book of Mormon*) or – to name the example we will examine thoroughly – Hildegard's *Protestificatio veracium visionum a Deo fluentium* (as sanctifying text of the *Liber Scivias*).

occurrence:<sup>11</sup> someone reveals something to someone else. The instrument that instructs the text-analytical development of sanctifying texts refers to this basic structure, the *narrative grammar of revelation*.<sup>12</sup> This instrument – a narratologically-adapted form of the general communication model of the so-called Lasswell-Formula (“*Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?*”)<sup>13</sup> – is appropriate to allow the peculiarities of sanctifying texts to step before the background of a uniform analytical grid. The narrative material can be sorted according to the structural elements of the formula:

“Who (revealer) reveals what (revealed content) to whom (revelation recipient) in which medium (medium of revelation) with what effect (effect of revelation)?”

If one proceeds from this scheme – from this *chain of revelation* – then at least three things appear obvious: (1) The basic form of the grammatical model is extremely rudimentary. In reference to the concrete text analysis, a set of differentiations are not only necessary but also possible. Consider perhaps the distinction between technical and human revelation media, between primary and secondary recipients of revelations (Walsch vs. Walsch’s readers), etc.(2) The methodological status of the grammatical model is one of a heuristic character. It allows the systematic development of a subject area, in that by serving as a basis for comparison, certain specificities or deviations then emerge also or especially in terms of a sensitization for *absences* of items that might otherwise be expected. (3.) The grammatical model is suitable solely for systematizing the (narratologically spoken) *story*-dimension of sanctifying texts for a structure of action or occurrence that can be signified as a revelation narrative. With regard to its *discourse*, it is blind. Since, however, the formation of the discourse is at least as relevant for the (as we could say with Barthes) *effet de la sainteté* as the material dimension, great attention must be granted it in interpretation. The first person perspective, for instance, portrays a defining signal of authenticity in sanctifying as well as in sanctified texts.<sup>14</sup>

11 Here again we are dealing with more than just a terminological problem: The alternative “action” vs. “event” indicates the aspect of (intentional) activity and (non intentional) passivity – a crucial difference in the given context.

12 As it will become clear, this grammar has nothing to do with the structuralist attempts to formulate a *general* “narrative grammar” (T. Todorov, G. Prince).

13 Harold D. Lasswell, “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society.” In: Lyman Bryson (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*. New York: Harper & Row, 1948, pp. 37 – 51, p. 37. Useful information on the different versions of the formula and its pre-history in rhetoric can be found in: Gregor Kalivoda and Heinrich Geißner, Art. “Lasswell-Formel.” In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* 5 (2001), col. 31 – 38.

14 By now it should be clear that the narratology to which I refer is a rather classical one in structuralist tradition: a narratology focused primarily on text analysis. Among the many theories viz. terminologies available, I prefer the excellent *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse* by Silke Lahn and Jan Christoph Meister, Stuttgart: Metzler 2008.

## Sanctifying scenes of writing

There is one last point missing in this brief outline. If we wish to perceive the specificity of a certain revelation narrative, it is crucial to pay attention to the representation of the *act of writing*. As we have seen in the case of Walsch's sanctifying texts, they regularly include descriptions of rather peculiar acts of writing: The special dignity of the product – the 'sacred text' – becomes apparent through the peculiarities of its production, the modalities of how certain signs find their way on some writable medium (be it a stone, parchment, paper, or a digital writing device). In this respect, my attempt is very much indebted to the so called "genealogy of writing," and especially to Rüdiger Campe's and Martin Stingelin's notion of "*the scene of writing*"<sup>15</sup>. What is highlighted by this term is the complex and – in the case of literary writing – not seldom explicit scenic character of its *corporal*, *technical* and *semantic* aspects. The notion of "scene" highlights the fact that we are dealing with a complex interaction of elements belonging to very different realms. The order of the afore-mentioned three aspects building up that scene is a highly conscious one: One of the concerns of the genealogist is precisely to relativize the usual fixation on the *what* of writing, the something to be secured by writing in favour of a sensibility to the corporal and technical aspects (to what Barthes calls the "scription"),<sup>16</sup> usually regarded as secondary to the word as such. Not only in the case of esoteric scenes of writing do these aspects step in the foreground, but precisely because the technical and corporal aspects of the writing process exemplify the distinctiveness of what is written. If the poetological approach focuses on the surface phenomena of sanctifying texts, the contribution of the genealogy of writing lies in the fact that this surface very often is a *sanctifying scene of writing*. Aware of these aspects, the

15 Martin Stingelin, "Schreiben". Einleitung." In: Martin Stingelin et al. (eds.), *'Mir ekelt vor diesem tintenklecksenden Säkulum'. Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Manuskripte*. München: Fink 2004 (Zur Genealogie des Schreibens 1), pp. 7 – 21; Rüdiger Campe, "Die Schreibszenen, Schreiben." In: Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (eds.), *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche. Situationen offener Epistemologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 759 – 772. For a detailed outline see my article "Göttliches Schreiben. Über die 'Genealogie des Schreibens' und ihre Nützlichkeit für eine Poietik des 'heiligen Textes'." In: Philipp Stoellger (ed.), *Sprachen der Macht. Gesten der Er- und Entmächtigung in Text und Interpretation*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008 (Interpretation Interdisziplinär 5), pp. 225 – 261. – These contributions are of course part of a larger tendency among cultural studies and humanities, the so called "material turn." For the German debate – the still classic title: Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (eds.), *Materialität der Kommunikation*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988. For the current debate on writing see the useful reader: Sandro Zanetti (ed.), *Schreiben als Kulturtechnik. Grundlagentexte*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012. See also the series "Wissen im Entwurf", Zürich: Diaphanes 2008 ff.

16 Roland Barthes, "Variations sur l'écriture" (1973). In: Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, édition établie et présentée par Eric Marty. Vol. 2. Paris: Seuil, 1994, col. 1535 – 1574.



poetics of ‘sacred text’ should ideally be able to describe the significant features of the medium of a revelation narrative and the interacting technical and human media within it. The narrative grammar of revelation and the act-based focus of the genealogy of writing are at least a certain safeguard against the often diffuse appeal to “inspiration” and “revelation” in theology just as in literary studies.<sup>17</sup>

## Hildegard’s *Liber Scivias*: a mystical ‘sacred text’

The “prophetissa teutonica” and her *Liber Scivias*

As an example, I will focus on the best-known work of one of the best-known authors of the so-called German mysticism: Hildegard of Bingen’s *Liber Scivias*.<sup>18</sup> This work – the first of three visionary books – “came upon” between 1141 and 1151 and is usually seen as the main work of the *prophetissa teutonica* (1089 – 1179). Her visionary capacity was the basis of a remarkable career not just within church. Along and in contact with Elisabeth of Schönau, she stands at the beginning of a rich and diverse tradition of “Frauenmystik”<sup>19</sup> (women’s mysticism), reaching its peak around the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century:

Hildegard had become the *exemplum* of the charismatic woman, a woman who dared not merely to speak and write, but also to ‘trumpet’ stridently, as ‘the voice of the Living Light’ blasting, on occasion, popes, kings, abbots, and prelates alike with Jehovian

17 Regarding modern Protestant dogmatics the general tendency is, on the contrary, to develop an understanding of revelation not focused on special experiences, inspiration etc. – a common sense one can find in theological positions otherwise rather contrary. To name just two central names of the German debate: Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Religiöse Erfahrung und Offenbarung”. In: Wilhelm Gräb et al. (eds.), *Ästhetik und Religion. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Identität und Differenz von ästhetischer und religiöser Erfahrung*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2007 (Religion – Ästhetik – Medien 2), pp. 183 – 203; Eilert Herms, *Offenbarung und Glaube: zur Bildung des christlichen Lebens*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992. For a philosophical alternative to the often authoritarian nexus between revelation and inspiration see Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutik der Idee der Offenbarung.” In: Paul Ricoeur, *An den Grenzen der Hermeneutik. Philosophische Reflexionen über die Religion*. Ed. Veronika Hoffmann. Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, 2008, pp. 41 – 83.

18 The critical edition of the Latin original text: *Hildegardis Scivias*. Ed. Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris. Turnhout: Brepols, 1978 (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio mediaevalis 43/43a); for an English translation: Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*. Transl. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop. New York: Paulist Classics of Western Spirituality, 1990.

19 Alastair Minnis (ed.), *Medieval holy women in the Christian tradition: c. 1100-c. 1500*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2010 (Brepols essays in European culture 1), on Hildegard, see the contribution by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, pp. 343 – 369; Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: women prophets in late medieval and early modern England*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1997. For a concise introduction to Hildegard also: Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Deutsche und niederländische Mystik des Mittelalters. Ein Studienbuch*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 47 – 62.



admonitions and directives. She spoke with all the force of conviction and indiscriminate severity of an Old Testament prophet, and understood herself as such.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, however, she describes herself as weak, sickly, and uneducated. Referring to her own image of a trumpet, she was only strong and audible if someone else made use of her: "she required a voice only *ex negativo*, by continually denying that it was she who spoke."<sup>21</sup> And also her contemporary popularity is certainly indebted to her prophetic gift that gave her considerable influence within a predominantly patriarchal religious system.

The *Liber Scivias* – to give at least a minimal idea of the sanctified text – consists of three parts and a total of 26 visions. The tripartite structure is motivated throughout by the Holy Trinity – the exposition follows the order of father, son and spirit; beginning with creation and ending with revelation, the *Liber* follows the biblical scheme. The whole work represents, as stated in its (editorial) German subtitle, "a vision of God and man in creation and time."<sup>22</sup>

The type of revelation Hildegard claims to experience is a combination of vision and audition. And this bi-mediality is also significant for the structure of the singular visions. Hildegard first of all describes what she saw (the stereotypical formula opening these paragraphs is "I saw ..."), then we meet a new narrative instance ("And again I heard the voice, that spoke to me earlier saying ...") in which God himself interprets the allegoric sense of the vision. Regarding their extent, the description of the visions is clearly exceeded by their detailed exegesis – which is why the visions sometimes are (following H. Liebeschütz) called "Lehrvisionen" ("educational visions"),<sup>23</sup> neglecting the interplay between the two channels constitutive in this case.

As set by the framework of the poetics of 'sacred text,' my analysis focuses exclusively on the sanctifying text that preludes it: the *Protestificatio veracium visionum a Deo fluentium*. This short text (it will be cited below in whole) is a relatively simple case. It has a clear title and, just as in the manuscripts as in print editions, it is easily identifiable as an independent textual entity. Typologically, we may call the *Protestificatio* an *original auctorial* sanctifying text – original as it has accompanied the sanctified text (the actual *Liber Scivias*) from the very

20 Morgan Powell, "Vox ex negativo. Hildegard von Bingen, Rupert of Deutz and authorial identity in the twelfth century." In: Peter von Moos (ed.), *Unverwechselbarkeit. Persönliche Identität und Identifikation in der vormodernen Gesellschaft*. Köln: Böhlau, 2004 (Norm und Struktur 23), pp. 267 – 295, p. 268.

21 Powell, *Vox ex negativo*, p. 268.

22 Hildegard von Bingen, *Scivias – Wisse die Wege: Eine Schau von Gott und Mensch in Schöpfung und Zeit*. Trans. and ed. Walburga Storch OSB. Augsburg: Pattloch, 1990.

23 Cf. Michael Embach, *Die Schriften Hildegards von Bingen. Studien zu ihrer Überlieferung und Rezeption im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003 (Erudiri Sapientiae 4), p. 242.

beginning and is part of every full edition,<sup>24</sup> and auctorial as it is written by Hildegard herself.<sup>25</sup> In addition to this text, I will later on also take into account the illustration usually called “The Seeress,” the first of 35 coloured illuminations that are part of the most important manuscript<sup>26</sup> and therefore almost all editions.<sup>27</sup>

### The sanctifying text: the Protestificatio<sup>28</sup>

[1] And behold, in the forty-third year of my passing course, while I was intent upon a heavenly vision [*caelesti uisioni*] with great fear and tremulous effort, I saw a great splendour, in which a voice came from heaven saying to me: ‘O weak mortal, both ash of ash and rottenness of rottenness, say and write what you see and hear [*dic et scribe quae uides et audis*]. But because you are fearful in speaking and simple in explaining and unlearned in writing these things, say and write them not according to human speech nor the understanding of human creativity nor according to the will of human composition, but according to this rule: that you reveal by interpreting the things you see and hear among heavenly matters from above, in the wonders of God, just as also a hearer receiving his teacher’s words makes them known according to the tenor of his speech, as he wishes, shows, and teaches. So then you also, o mortal – speak the things you see and hear; and write them not according to yourself or any other person, but according to the will of the One Who knows, sees, and disposes all things in the hidden places of his mysteries.’

[2] And again I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: ‘Therefore speak these wonderful things and write and say them in the manner they were taught.’

24 Unlike other “dynamic” (sanctifying) elements as prefaces of editors, commentaries, etc.

25 In contrast to various types of *allographic* sanctifying texts: a (scientific) “introduction” or a “testimony” by someone else (see for instance *The Testimony of the Three Witnesses* and *The Testimony of the Eight Witnesses* accompanying Josephs Smith’s auctorial sanctifying text in *The Book of Mormon*).

26 The *Rupertsberger Prachtkodex* (Wiesbaden, Landesbibliothek, Cod. 1) supposedly originated shortly after Hildegard’s death in 1179. For a thorough introduction see Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Die Miniaturen im ‘Liber scivias’ der Hildegard von Bingen: die Wucht der Vision und die Ordnung der Bilder*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1998.

27 *Hildegardis Scivias*, p. 1 (unpag.). – Among the existing research, there seem to be only two contributions focusing more or less closely on the preface: Kevin L. Hughes, “Visionary Exegesis: Vision, Text, and Interpretation in Hildegard’s ‘Scivias’.” In: *American Benedictine Review* 50/3 (Sept. 1999), pp. 311 – 326; SunHee Kim Gertz, *Poetic prologues. Medieval Conversations with the Literary Past*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996, pp. 113 – 119.

28 *Hildegardis Scivias*, pp. 3 – 6. – I gratefully make use of Abigail Ann Young’s (Toronto) thorough translation, to be found: <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~young/protest.html> (30.01.13). In brackets I add Hildegard’s technical vocabulary for the revelation process. References relate to number of the paragraph cited.

[3] This happened in AD 1141 when I was 42 years and 7 months old: A fiery light, of the greatest flashing brightness, coming out of a cloudless sky, flooded my entire mind and so inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast like a flame – yet it was not blazing but glowing hot, as the sun makes anything on which its rays fall hot. And I suddenly experienced the understanding of the exposition of books, that is, of the Psalter, the Gospel, and of the other orthodox volumes of both the Old and the New Testaments, but nevertheless I did not thereby enjoy the interpretation of the words of their text, nor the division of syllables, nor a knowledge of cases and tenses. But indeed I had already experienced (as I was still doing) in myself in a wondrous manner the power and mystery of hidden and wonderful visions from my girlhood, that is, from the time that I was five years old, right up until the present time. But I did not make that known to any person except to a certain few, also in the religious life, who were living the way of life as I was also myself. But in the meantime up to that time at which God desired this to be made manifest by His grace, I sank down beneath a quiet silence. But I have not received the visions [*uisiones*] that I saw in dreams, neither while I was sleeping nor in a frenzy; nor with bodily eyes nor with the ears of the outer person nor in hidden places. But I received them while waking and attentive, in a clear mind, with the eyes and ears of the inner person [*oculis et aribus interioris hominis*], in open places, according to God’s will. It is difficult for any one of flesh and blood to find out how this comes about.

[4] But to resume, when my girlhood was past, after I had come to the aforesaid age of full physical strength, I heard a voice from heaven saying:

[5] ‘I am the living yet obscure Light, enlightening the person whom I wish and whom I have searched out wonderfully according to My pleasure and placed among many wonders beyond the limit of the people of old [*antiquorum hominum*], who saw so many hidden things [*secreta*] in Me. But I have overthrown that one upon the ground that he may not rise up in any mental self-exaltation. Indeed the world does not have in him any joy or pleasure nor any activity in matters that belong to the world because I have drawn that one away from stubborn boldness, to be one who is fearful and trembling in his labours. For that person sorrows in the marrow and veins of his flesh, having soul and senses constrained and enduring great bodily suffering, so that no conflicting sense of peace may lie concealed in him but rather that that person may judge himself guilty in all his causes. For I have hedged about the clefts of his heart, lest his mind raise itself up in pride or glory but rather that in all these things it would have fear and sorrow rather than joy or exuberance. Therefore in my love this one searched in his soul for where to find the one who runs in the way of salvation. And he finds the other and loves him, recognising that that one too is a faithful person and like himself in any part of that labour that leads to Me. And holding one another fast, they strive together in all these things with the eagerness from above so that My hidden wonders may be revealed [*ut absonda miracula mea reuelantur*]. And that same person does not rely upon himself but turns with many sighs toward the one that he found in the approach to humility and the intention of good will. You therefore, o mortal, who receive this, not in the disquiet of deceit but in the purity of simplicity, having been directed toward the revealing of hidden things [*ad manifestationem absconditorum*] – write what you see and hear.’

[6] But I, although I did see and hear this, nevertheless because of doubt and a bad opinion and the diversity of men's words refused to write for a long time – not out of obstinacy but as an office of humility – until I lay on a bed of sickness, struck down by God's lash so that finally, compelled by many infirmities – as a certain noble young woman of good morals and that person whom I had sought secretly and found, as is explained above, can testify – I set my hand to write. While I was doing this, even while experiencing the deep profundity of the books' exposition [*altam profunditatem expositionis librorum*], as I said before, and receiving the strength to lift myself out of my illness, I scarcely closed this work, taking 10 years to do so.

[7] In the days of Henry, archbishop of Mainz and Conrad, king of the Romans, and Cuno, abbot of Disibodenberg, under Pope Eugenius, these visions and works took place. And I have spoken and written them not according to the imagination of my heart nor that of any mortal but just as I have seen, heard, and received them among heavenly things by the hidden mysteries of God [*in caelestibus uidi, audiui et percepi per secreta mysteria Dei*].

[8] And again I heard the voice from heaven saying to me: 'Cry out therefore and write this!'

### The Protestificatio as revelation narrative

I will now first present a brief application of the grammar model in the narratological dimension of *story*. In a second step I will concentrate on certain aspects of the *narrator* and *discourse*. This will finally lead me to a few observations concerning Hildegard's scene of writing, not only as it is represented in the sanctifying text but also in a, so to say, sanctifying illumination accompanying the *Protestificatio*. Before I turn my analysis I wish again to emphasize that whenever I speak about "Hildegard" (or other names) I do this strictly within the frame of the above outlined poetics of 'sacred text.' "Hildegard" thus refers to a character within a narrative and not – as usual within research – to a historical figure known by that name.

### The chain of revelation

The *revealer*: The origin of the revelations received by Hildegard is God – the God of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. With regard to the discourse of the narrative, it is remarkable that he doesn't identify himself as such. In his speeches he indirectly presents himself as omniscient and omnipotent ruler – as "the One who knows, sees, and disposes all things in the hidden places of his mysteries" (1), or as "the living yet obscure Light" (4). But the term "God" only appears in Hildegard's speeches (3, 6, 7). And this identification is clearly an interpretive one

insofar as God manifests himself in form of a "great splendour" (1) and a heavenly voice.

The *revealed content*: Just as with the profile of the revealer, also that of the revealed content is specified in Hildegard's speeches. What she gets is "the understanding of the expositions of books" (*intellectum expositionis librorum*, 3), insight into the sense of the sacred scriptures of Christianity. And she makes very clear what kind of insight it is: She receives *non autem interpretationem verborum* (not things such as "the division of syllables" or "a knowledge of cases and tenses" (3), all of which would also be accessible by other means), but *virtutem autem et mysterium secretarum*. So Hildegard is postulating at least a double meaning of the scriptures: a verbal one and a secret one, the latter being privileged. From a typological view, the *Liber Scivias* is therefore to be seen as a *subsidiary* 'sacred text', or more precisely: a subsidiary 'sacred text' in the form of a *commentary* (and not of a *sequel*) – a *self commentary* of God regarding his own work. But God too uses a number of terms for naming the revealed content leaving no doubt about its extraordinary status: "heavenly matters" (*in caelestibus*, 1), "wonderful things" (*mirabilia*, 2), "many wonders" (*magnis mirabilis*, 5), "beyond the limit of the people of the old" (*antiquorum hominum*, 5), "hidden things" (*secreta*, 5), "hidden wonders" (*absconda miracula*, 5).

The *revelation recipient*: The position of the recipient is in this case doubly cast. The revelation is received by a collective, a collaboration between Hildegard and the person introduced in par. 5. Historically, this anonymous man is usually identified as Hildegard's secretary and confessor Volmar (and to simplify matters I am going to call him that too). What his actual function is does not become wholly clear, but what is clear is that both share the same disposition, both are chosen by God, and both are specifically prepared for their task.

At first I will concentrate on Hildegard. It is crucial to see that the visions and auditions she talks about are neither the first ones, nor are they a unique event. She claims to have had higher insights since her childhood (3). But the auditions described here imply a new way to handle them: She doesn't keep quiet about her experiences any longer, but she follows the instruction *dic et scribe quae uides et audis* (1). In this sense, the content of these auditions is *meta-visionary*: Their use is not the transmission of spiritual or exegetical contents, but a new regulation of how to deal with them (we may speak of an *instructional vision*). Since Hildegard is a recipient of revelation, just a medium for revelation, it is interesting to observe in what state she is in while a vision/audition takes place. And she limits herself precisely against wrong conceptions of these modalities. As Hildegard stresses, she receives the visions not "in dreams," but "while waking and attentive, in a clear mind, with the eyes and ears of the inner person." What characterizes her higher perception is thus an *outward* aspect of normality; as the subject who experiences the revelation is "the *inner person*," outward circum-

stances (like daytime, Hildegard's whereabouts, her activity) are not only insignificant, but if a revelation happens it is also perfectly unnoticeable (unlike in the cases of trance or other ecstatic states).<sup>29</sup> When she mentions that this is hard to understand for "carnal man," she articulates an understanding and a pretension at the same time: since the event *is* hard for carnal man to understand, he cannot be criticized, but by stating this she requires a cognition that is clearly beyond that of carnal man.

Let me turn to Volmar: The way he is depicted is wholly in line with the representation of Hildegard – and, in a way, complementary to it. If in her case we find a characteristic combination of infirmity and illiterateness and, corresponding with these, a writing "not according to human speech nor the understanding of human creativity" (1), with regard to him, the scholar, the godly measures against the hubris of his profession tend to be represented at considerable length (5). These measures – a massive imposition of sicknesses – function as requirements to his collaboration with Hildegard, who in *this* section is characterized positively as someone "who runs in the way of salvation" (5). The highly privileged position both hold is finally made very clear when God himself announces they will be placed "among many other wonders beyond the limits of the people of old" (5).

The *medium of revelation*: As mentioned, God makes use of a combination of transient media; he reveals through *caelesti uisioni* and *vox de caelo* (1). Therefore, the task of Hildegard and her helper is to bring the messages to a stable form. But the task consists not only in the notation, but also in the proclamation. And this double job seems to be of the highest importance as it is repeated several times in the divine imperative: "Say and write [...], say and write [...], speak [...] and write" (1); "speak [...] and write" (2); "cry out [...] and write" (8). And finally Hildegard adopts the formula also in her own speech: "And I have spoken and written" (7).

Decisively seen is the fact that according to the double shape of the type of revelation, *scribe* designates two *different* activities. It refers to two *modes of writing* that are realized in one scene at the same time. The "heavenly voice" has a certain wording; it can be written down like that as a form of dictation. By contrast, the task the vision implies, according to Hildegard, is not simply to write down what she hears, but first of all to find her *own* words to express what she sees in the vision; what she perceives has first of all to be articulated in a different semiotic system. With a linguistic distinction we may talk side-by-side about a

29 Cf. Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Hildegard von Bingen oder die Zurückweisung des Traums." In: Alfred Haverkamp (ed.), *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld. Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Kongress zum 900jährigen Jubiläum*. Mainz: P. von Zabern 2000, pp. 351 – 373.

*medial* and a *conceptual* writing<sup>30</sup> – medial in the case of the *dictated writing*, conceptual in the case of the *descriptive writing*. The fuzziness likely to be found in descriptions of visual impressions (see for instance the beginning of the first vision "I saw *something* like an iron coloured mountain...") is alien to a "Wortoffenbarung." Vision and audition both are media for God's revelation. In order to be communicated to others, the visions need a more autonomous form of written fixation which is more open for mistakes. But here one more step is necessary: We can, of course, only talk side-by-side of a dictated and a descriptive writing with regard to the *event*, the actual process of revelation. With regard to the quality of what is revealed, the two modes appear in a strict hierarchy. The act of conceptual description is dominated by the act of medial dictation; the first is being authorized by the latter.

What remain open (as indicated above) are the modalities of Hildegard's and Volmar's collaboration, and unclear at first, is the actual contribution of the latter. According to the *Protestificatio*, the act of receiving a revelation includes two separate acts: on the one hand, "seeing and hearing" (as acts of perception), on the other, "writing" (as notation of the perceived), but both of these are left to Hildegard (see 5, last sentence). The seemingly superfluous presence of Volmar is astonishing, all the more so as the account of his vocation stands out in two regards. His speech is also represented in the mode of quoted figural speech – it actually is the longest direct quote. And compared to the length of the entire text, his person absorbs quite a large part. (We will get back to this aspect later.)

The *effect of revelation*: On this subject we may discuss several things. The most notable effect is clearly Hildegard's resistance to an immediate observance of the divine instruction. She cannot avoid seeing and hearing things, but what she can avoid, she avoids: writing. This calls for an explanation, and Hildegard does offer one, although it is not equally understandable in all its aspects. "[N]ot out of obstinacy" does she refuse to fulfil her task, but "because of doubt and a bad opinion and the diversity of men's words, [...] as an office of humility" (6). The rejection of a quite likely reason – obstinacy – is understandable, as are the positive reasons of the "doubts" and "bad opinions" regarding the higher pretensions of the sister. Irritating, on the other hand, is the hint to "diversity of men's words" in combination with the "office of humility." The most plausible explanation may be that this is due to an aspect mentioned above. Hildegard's resistance to the divine imperative could be connected with the specific double shape of the scene of writing: the necessity to find a correct wording for what she

30 Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher, "Schriftlichkeit und Sprache." In: Hartmut Günther and Otto Ludwig (eds.), *Schrift und Schriftlichkeit. Writing and Its Use. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch internationaler Forschung*. Vol. 1. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994 (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 10.1), pp. 587 – 604.



sees in the visions. The accent seems to lay on the diversity of *men's* words – in contrast to God's words as they come ready made in the auditions.

In any case, the effect of this (by the revealer) unwanted effect is that God insists on his demand by imposing sicknesses. And it is only this measure that finally makes Hildegard write down what she saw and heard. Remarkable, because it proves God's persistence, seems to be the fact that as soon as she starts writing, explicitly following the divine instructions (6), she gets better.

The second point regarding the effect is an absence, i. e. an effect observable only by contrasting this sanctifying text with others (one of the advantages of the grammar model). What is "missing" are remarks on the impact of the text on a larger audience – for instance of its power to provoke remorse and conversion. The focus stays exclusively on the intimate scene between the revealer, the revelation recipients, and the revelation media.

At this point, having followed the chain of revelation, we leave the dimension of *story* and turn to exemplary phenomena within *discourse*, beginning with a short glance at the narrator – as the instance connecting both dimensions (therefore always leading back to the phenomena we have just seen).

#### Narrator and discourse: exemplary aspects

##### *Narrator*

What we meet here with regard to the *logic of representation* is very often the case in revelation narratives: The relation between the narrator and the narrated world is, to use Genette's language, one of homodiegesis, or more precisely, autodiegesis.<sup>31</sup> Hildegard's discourse is an autobiographical one; the representation of the narrator is explicit. As readers, we learn quite a lot about her life: when and where she lived. First of all, we get an intimate insight in her worldview and feelings. In this case, the formation of the discourse has implicitly quite an effect on the narrator's profile. That she begins right away with the instructional vision and neglects a general self introduction (the fact that she is a religious sister, for instance, is mentioned only in par. 3), is crucial for her perception – both for her self-awareness and for that of others. Hildegard is first of all the person who, in her 43<sup>rd</sup> year, "saw a great splendour, in which a voice came from heaven" (1). This is the actual reason why she starts writing in the first place. The emphatic accent on this reason and, in connection with it, the profiling of the narrator, in a manner of speaking, 'push away' the complementary dimension of the recipient's representation. For whom the narrative actually is intended and who should become aware of the higher knowledge is not mentioned. And in a way, it does not have to be mentioned as the weight of the imperative to write

31 Gérard Genette, *Die Erzählung*. München: Fink 1998 (UTB 8083), p. 176.



implies the corresponding imperative to read. The promise of insight into the secret sense of scriptures is attractive at least for those readers who connect the scripture with the idea of a higher dignity.

With regard to the *logic of time* (i. e. the relation between the temporal place of the narrator and the events narrated), we are dealing with a retrospective narration, more precisely a retrospective narration of an uncompleted event. Hildegard claims to have perceived revelations "until the present time" (3). If in some (homodiegetic) revelation narratives we meet a significant division between what Spitzer calls "the mysterious interplay of the double I,"<sup>32</sup> a strong separation between the *experiencing I* and the (later on) *narrating I*, in Hildegard's case they remain a close unity. The temporal gap of ten years between the revelation experience and the account of this experience (see below) does not at all result in an emotional distancing. And the same goes for the narrative recourse to the temporal stage of early childhood. But more than that: The retrospective account proves young Hildegard's decision to keep quiet about her experiences was right. First of all, she must reach her "age of full physical strength" (4), and only then (and only following the explicit order) should she transmit what she has experienced to others through writing and proclamation.

### Discourse

The central aspect regarding discourse is – here as always – the temporal relation between story and discourse.<sup>33</sup> To be examined first is the double temporality, *vis-à-vis narrated and narration time*. As we can see, the narrated events cover a time span of approximately 48 years, viz. between the year 1103 (the first visionary experiences of the five year old) and roughly the year 1151 (the completion of her records according to the preface). The present of the actual narrating is the year 1151 or a little later. The 48 years are represented in a pretty narrow narration time, objectivised in a text of 1140 words, approximately two and a half pages. This little space is sufficient as she gives of course not 'just' an autobiographical account but one that concentrates almost exclusively on the life-altering event of the divine command. This concentration can be described as more closely referring to two of the three basic concepts of discursive time analysis: *order* and *duration*.<sup>34</sup>

Corresponding to the central position of the instructional vision, the narrative *order* is one of *ordo artificialis*. The narrator abandons chronology. The decisive event, the vision in 1141, is privileged and proleptically set in the very beginning

32 Leo Spitzer, "Zum Stil Marcel Prousts" (1928). In: *Stilstudien*. Bd. 2 (Stilsprachen). Darmstadt: WBG, 1961, pp. 365 – 497, p. 478.

33 Cf. Lahn and Meister, *Erzähltextanalyse*, pp. 133 – 138.

34 The third category – *frequency* – does not seem to be relevant in this case. Genette, *Erzählung*, pp. 217 – 218.

of the account. Only then – analeptically appended – follows the pre-history: the report of Hildegard's visionary power since early childhood. (We are dealing, more precisely, with an *internal* analepsis as the appended event dates before the beginning of the basic narrative.)

Regarding *duration*, Hildegard's account is characterized by a specific time condensing narration (narrated time > narration time) side-by-side with a time covering narration (narrated time = narration time). The account changes between a 'slow' and scenic representation and a 'fast' reporting one. The events of the pre-history and the overcoming of Hildegard's resistance through sickness appear condensed whereas the event of the vocational vision is narrated in real time (as the representation regarding speech is the most precise one: that of mimetic citation).<sup>35</sup> What Hildegard heard during her audition is represented in exactly that way, as citation of the heavenly voice. The cause of the writing – the instructional vision – is represented in a rather detailed way, while the actual act of writing (after all absorbing a time span of ten years, 6) is first narrated in a single summary sentence ("I set my hand to write", 6), and later on only one decisive clarification is made: that this writing followed exactly what she had "seen, heard, and received" and was "not according to the imagination" of her heart (7).

Now the mentioned chronology *ordo naturalis* calls attention to a problem, which may seem trivial. Hildegard's initial resistance to God's order raises the question of *what exactly* she writes once she starts writing. And, in fact, we are dealing with two questions: On the one hand it is debatable whether she is *catching up* by writing down older revelations. This question is barely answerable but – analytically speaking – it would mean a loss of revealed *mysteria* if this were not the case. On the other hand, there is the more fundamental question of whether Hildegard is writing down things seen and heard in that very moment or not. And it appears that the former is supposed to be the case. As explicitly mentioned, her experiences continue until the very present. If we were not dealing with a continuing *visio*, the situation would be completely different: Hildegard would in this case be writing down subsequently things perceived earlier. And regarding the mentioned ten years the notation lasts, the question arises of how she could capably reproduce verbatim texts of such length and complexity. Her astonishing capacity to remember functions here, as in other source material, as a strong indication of an unreliable narrator. All this gives rise to the necessity of further investigation into Hildegard's scene of writing.

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35 Cf. Lahn and Meister, *Erzähltextanalyse*, pp. 120 – 122 ("Drei-Stufen-Modell der Redewiedergabe").

# Revelation act and writing act

If it seems clear that Hildegard is not writing down revelations received years ago, but current ones, this does not say anything about the 'closer' temporal structure, the temporal relation between the revelation act and the act of writing. So far this question has remained open. Do they coincide – is Hildegard writing *while* she sees and hears – or is she writing right *after* she saw and heard? Are we dealing with a kind of *presential writing*, or do we have to take into account a certain delay?

Based on the indications of the *Protestificatio*, the question again is not definitely answerable. The sentences concerning this matter – "I set my hand to write" (6), "[a]nd I have spoken and written them not according to the imagination of my heart [...] but just as I have heard and received them among heavenly things [...]" (7) – can be interpreted either way.<sup>36</sup> At the most with regard to the extent of the sanctified text, it can be assumed that Hildegard wrote down simultaneously – granted that she had an exceptional capacity to memorize.

Although not answerable by analysing the source material, it is quite interesting to observe how this aspect is perceived in current research, especially in historically oriented contributions. And by doing so one immediately sees that the question is, without being addressed that way, a controversial one. We find both opinions: that of an immediate (e. g. Kurt Ruh)<sup>37</sup> and that of a later transcription (e. g. Saurma-Jeltsch).<sup>38</sup> And, of course, both positions are connected with certain ideas about the impact of the revelation on the text's quality (the immediate writing being more authentic). But very often the question also remains unanswered – either because it is hard to answer, or (and this is more likely) because it is not perceived as a question at all. Without regard to the possible causes of this issue, it is quite obvious that the *general* pretention of a visionary authorship easily pushes aside clarifications regarding the *concrete* circumstances of the actual visionary experience (this still being the case in the latest research).<sup>39</sup> As the poetics of 'sacred text' wishes to focus precisely on these aspects (insofar as they are part of the text's self description), I propose to look at the scene of writing again from a different angle.

36 Also the divine imperatives shed no light on the problem – God does insist on the act of notation but not on a certain way to perform it.

37 Cf. Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*. Vol. 2: Frauenmystik und franziskanische Mystik der Frühzeit. München: Beck 1993, pp. 64 – 75, p. 70.

38 Saurma-Jeltsch, *Miniaturen*, p. 2.

39 Cf. for instance Dinzelbacher, *Deutsche und niederländische Mystik*, p. 54.

### The seeress: an iconic scene of writing

As noted above, Hildegard's scene of writing is characterized by the juxtaposition of a medial dictated writing and a conceptual descriptive writing as a consequence of the bi-medial revelation mode. And also noted was the fact that Volmar's function does not become clear. This being the case, it seems fruitful to take into account the *iconic* representation of this scene of writing.<sup>40</sup> The analysis is hence expanded to a broader source-basis. By considering the illumination it also examines the "first trace of [the text's] *Wirkungsgeschichte*"<sup>41</sup> – a trace which is materially part of the text and thus an element of its sanctifying text. The illumination, usually named "The Seeress," is to be found on the first page of the Rupertsberg Codex in the left column right after the initial opening the *Protestificatio*.

Corresponding to the *Protestificatio*, the illumination can be called meta-visionary. Unlike the other illustrations, it does not show a singular vision but the regularities of the revelation process itself. It shows the author, or rather the writing collective in question, the three participants and their side by side collaboration, in a manner wide open to interpretation. But generally it must be stressed that the picture is not just a representation of the same story in a different medium. In various respects it lets us see more than Hildegard's account, and some of these respects are of a primary interest.

The illustration shows first of all that both Hildegard *and* Volmar are writing. That he writes as well was not observable in the text.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it makes apparent a significant difference in the instrumentality of writing. Hildegard and Volmar use diverse technical devices. While it is clearly visible for everyone observing the picture, the fact that Hildegard is using wax tablets (*three* wax tablets)<sup>43</sup> whereas Volmar makes use of parchment is probably only recognizable to those at least a bit familiar with medieval writing techniques.<sup>44</sup> It is this difference that allows us to name more precisely how the notation of the revelations following the pictorial interpretation of the text is to be perceived.

40 In the following I will focus only on the media-technical implications of the illustration in its relation with the *Protestificatio*. For detailed information concerning the illuminations (their iconography, dating, the possible involvement of Hildegard in their making etc.) see Saurma-Jeltsch, *Miniaturen*, p. 25 – 31; Keiko Suzuki, *Bildgewordene Visionen oder Visionserzählungen: vergleichende Studie über die Visionsdarstellungen in der Rupertsberger 'Scivias'-Handschrift und im Luccheser 'Liber divinatorum operum'-Codex der Hildegard von Bingen*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1998 (Neue Berner Schriften zur Kunst 5).

41 Saurma-Jeltsch, *Miniaturen*, p. 1 (translation mine).

42 Saurma-Jeltsch (*Miniaturen*, p. 26), on the contrary, assumes that according to the *Protestificatio* Hildegard is *not* writing, whereas Volmar is.

43 It is likely this number corresponds to the tripartite structure of the entire *Liber Scivias*.

44 Cf. Otto Ludwig, *Geschichte des Schreibens I: Von der Antike bis zum Buchdruck*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005, pp. 77 – 210.





Rupertsberg Codex, table 1; *Hildegardis Scivias*, p. 1 (unpag.): "Hildegardis igneo lumine inflammata, testimonio Volmari monachi, manus ad scribendum apponit."

If Hildegard writes on wax tablets, the product of this writing process is an ephemeral one. It is not laid out for posterity. Wax tablets are erasable and thus reusable. What Hildegard writes down is indeed an autographical original copy, but as such, due to the writing technology used, just the *draft* of an original copy. The *actual* original, the first valid wording, is written by a different hand: Volmar's. And his writing differs again clearly from the mentioned double form of Hildegard's writing. He writes *off* of what she wrote *down* (by dictation and freely describing). But his writing off of her original is not a simple copying, for he – and this is now his specific task – *revises* Hildegard's template. And to do so, in order to save the actual original wording, he reasonably uses parchment as a much more durable writing material.

But there is still more to say. Corresponding to Hildegard's double form of writing, Volmar's editorial writing offers two different forms too. The written auditions are, regarding their wording, untouchable; they can at the most be revised formally. In this domain, formal correctness is indeed Hildegard's weakness. She has no knowledge of "the division of syllables" or "cases and tenses" (3), and neither does she receive such knowledge. In the described visions, on the other hand, Volmar is allowed, where necessary, to intervene much more. As he is concerned with Hildegard's own formulations, neither the order nor the words themselves are taboo.

With all this I have interpretively named how the chain of revelation is depicted in the illustration. The temporal order of the individual writing acts does not become clear here either. Whether Hildegard receives the revelations and simultaneously writes them down or not cannot be decided. This fact has on the one hand to do with the medial logic of the single picture (diachronic events are in this case regularly transferred into synchrony), and on the other it is indebted to the concrete composition of the picture. Hildegard's hand indeed performs the gesture of writing, but her eyes are not directed towards the wax tablet. Nor are they (what could be presumed) directed upwards, towards the (symbolic) place of the revealer. In contrast, the next transfer seems to be rather clear with regard to temporality: Volmar's representation indicates that Hildegard's dictation occurs after having received and (simultaneously?) written down the revelation. Together with the illustrations this shows him *as a writer*, but not *writing*. He keeps the parchment, on which he is going to write, in his left hand. (Even if he was a left-hander we would, if he wrote, see a feather.) But even though Volmar is not writing in the depicted moment, he is closely related to the events of revelation and writing, respectively. His attempt to get from the outside as close as possible to the events inside and his wide opened eyes seem to emphasize less his status as a writer but – in accordance with the *Protestificatio* – as a *witness*.

But: a witness *of what*? If Saurma-Jeltsch assumes that Volmar, by his posture and look, demonstrates that he is a "witness of the text's heavenly descent,"<sup>45</sup> this thesis is, in its generality, certainly not correct. What he witnesses – and the *only* thing he truly can witness – is Hildegard's writing. He cannot see the connection between this writing and a revelation experience (a "text's heavenly descent") but can solely assign it interpretively. It's Hildegard's own suggestion in the *Protestificatio* that for her the revelations are accomplished as an invisible inward event. But even if the revelations were externally perceptible – be it as Pentecostal flames or ecstatic states – the claim to be a "witness of the text's heavenly descent" could only be verified under the condition that these flames or this ecstasy express exactly this event and nothing else. These considerations refer again to Hildegard's text. Also here Volmar is portrayed as a witness but in a much more restrained way. What he witnesses according to Hildegard's explicit statement is – and solely is – what he actually can witness: "I set my hand to write." (6)

## Conclusion: multiple writing, primacy of vision

By now it should be clear that in the given context the notion of witnessing is highly in need of further clarification. If scholars like Gertz declare that Hildegard serves as "God's pen,"<sup>46</sup> this characterization appears rather problematic. It is at least problematic if one, sensitized to the media-technical implications of "writing," is not willing to take it as a suggestive "*image*" or instrumental "*metaphor*."<sup>47</sup> Hildegard does serve by writing, yes, but she is not a pen. Writing instruments do not write themselves; they are written with. And writing instruments are, unlike Hildegard, not involved in the semantics of writing. And finally, writing instruments do not proclaim what is written, an act that also demands an understanding of the written.

The poetics of 'sacred text,' on the contrary, attempts to describe as exactly as possible the scenes usually referred to as "inspiration," "revelation," or expressions such as "the text's heavenly descents" (be it textual narratives or, as in this case, pictures). As we have seen, it can be fruitful to specifically focus on the phenomenon of writing, on explicitly named or implicitly deducible writing events. The common opinion, "Hildegard and/or Volmar writes down revelations from God," thus appears highly deficient. It elides the fact that what is

45 Saurma-Jeltsch, *Miniaturen*, p. 26 ("Zeuge der himmlischen Herabkunft des Textes"; translation mine).

46 Gertz, *Poetic Prologues*, p. 117.

47 For the field of aesthetics cf. Christian Begemann and David E. Wellbery (eds.), *Kunst – Zeugung – Geburt. Theorien und Metaphern ästhetischer Produktion in der Neuzeit*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2002.

being written, just like modes of writing, knows substantial differences. By interpreting the *Protestificatio* and its pictorial transposition, we have been able to identify no less than four different modes of writing. Two of them we extracted from the analysis of Hildegard's revelation narrative (and confirmed by the actual shape of the sanctified text), the other two were to be found by an interpretation that moves a little further from the source material but remains highly inspired by it: (1.) Hildegard's free *descriptive writing* of the visions; (2.) her *dictated writing* of the auditions (both on wax tablets); (3) Volmar's *formal editorial writing* of the already written auditions, and (4.) his possibly *wholesale editorial writing* of the written visions (both on parchment).

It's these four writing modes that in a specific temporal order actually realize the one imperative *scribe*. This complex result is a direct consequence of the aspect which seems to be crucial to Hildegard's 'sacred text': Her revelations have a remarkable affinity to the visual medium. They are foremost pictures and only secondarily words. The revelation in words follows the revelation in pictures, and this in a temporal just as in a media-hierarchical sense. It is only the primacy of vision that urges a multiple transposition of the seen into words.

There is no doubt that the proposed approach is a highly technical one. This dedication to the details of a revelation narrative and its scene of writing, without seeking its extra-textual relations, is of course not an end in itself. Paying attention to its peculiarities is only of interest because these texts make strong extra-textual claims and have a considerable real world impact. Ideally the poetics of 'sacred text' can help to identify differences that also make a difference in other perspectives, when the 'sacred text' is (historically, theologically, psychologically etc.) examined in relation with their respective communities, that is: as sacred scripture.



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## Forms and Functions of Midrashic Narrative in Modern Yiddish Literature in the Light of Itzik Manger and Hirsh Osherowitch

Before I offer a terminological distinction between Midrash-Epic and Midrashic Epic respectively and between Midrash-Narration and Midrashic Narration, I would start by giving my own understanding, in connection with the texts analyzed in this paper, of the term *Midrash*:

1.) I regard *Midrash* as going beyond a specific genre of rabbinic literature.

2.) In general terms, I agree with the idea that *Midrash* uses a passage of the Tanakh as a clear jumping-off point and, retelling *and* interpreting it in a certain way, as an example and/or a matrix for the arrangement of a (new) message and to provide an argument for a problem of immediate interest.

Thus, Lieve Teugels defines a text as Midrash if a verse is given, cited or alluded to, and the reader is informed of the solution to a problem which may or may not be enunciated. Its apparent message is given through a reinterpretation, and the distinction between the Scripture and its exposition remains clear.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently a Midrash can be a kind of interpretation of a text or rather a narrative exegesis of the Bible, a *hermeneutic system* (Daniel Boyarin), and a *literary genre* (Addison Wright).<sup>2</sup>

I therefore understand the term in a broad sense – so that I am able to agree with David Curzon, who says in the *Introduction* of his anthology, *Modern Poems on the Bible*: “Whether the poets knew it or not, and some of them did, they were writing Midrash. Their reaction to biblical texts is both strictly modern and within an ancient genre.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 See Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of “The Wooing of Rebekah” (Gen. 24)*. Leuven: Peeters, 2004, pp. 151 – 155 *inter alia*.

2 For the treatment of all these opinions see Joshua Levinson, “Literary Approaches to Midrash.” In: Carol Bakhos (ed.), *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*. Leiden-Boston 2006 (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 106), pp. 189 – 226.

3 David Curzon, “Introduction.” In: idem (ed.), *Modern Poems on the Bible – An Anthology*. Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994, pp. 3 – 27 at p. 3.

If we now contemplate Midrashic epic texts according to the above-given definition – viewed in a broader sense from balladic to shorter and longer epic texts – it is advisable to make the following differentiation:

1.) There is a genre called *Midrash-Epic* which is, in short, the poetical adaptation – more or less free – of a certain classical Midrash.<sup>4</sup>

2.) But if we have to deal with an epic text that itself wants to be a new Midrash, a Midrash newly written by a poet in which existing Midrashim are alluded to and motifs and themes are taken from them, and above all employs a Midrashic approach to (the) Scripture, I suggest we call such a text a *Midrashic Epic*.

In other words, *Midrashic Epic* isn't the poetical adaptation of a given Midrash (as the Midrash-Epic does), but is itself Midrash, which can be understood also in the sense of an interpretation or as the questioning of the present time or age with the aid of biblical motifs, themes, stories, images, etc. These texts are thus to be called midrashic – the recourse to the Bible is the recourse to that which we'll call in the sense of Jean-François Lyotard the Myth<sup>5</sup>: a *meta-narration* in a narrower sense, that is to say, a "narration with a legitimizing function." Myths give "specific legitimation to social institutions."

In the case of Midrashic Epic an examination of the Myth (in a discursive form) takes place – to continue with Lyotard – in the appearance of a Legend analyzing and interpreting topical problems. Legends are a kind of "model of positive or negative integration" and hence, so to speak, a collection of examples or cases of successful or unsuccessful integration. They are distinguished by a variety of forms of communication (language games) such as: denotative, deontic, interrogative, evaluating statements, etc.

Now, in this paper I want to demonstrate this in detail on the basis of the Midrashic epic adaptations ("Legend") of a certain biblical narration ("Myth"). This is to demonstrate how a given historic context can be updated using the matrix of a Myth (and its plot) and constructing above it, on a narrative and discursive layer, a new Legend.

For our narratological analysis we shall compare texts with the same theme but from diverse periods to show this transformation of a Myth into Legends. Our examples involve a Midrashic examination of the nearest past, and we shall proceed in the following way:

4 See Wulf-Otto Dreeßen (ed.), *Åkēdass Jizhak. Ein altjiddisches Gedicht über die Opferung Isaaks. Mit einer Einleitung und Kommentar kritisch herausgegeben von Wulf-Otto Dreeßen*. Hamburg: Leibniz-Verlag 1971 (Hamburger Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Juden 2); Wulf-Otto Dreeßen, "Jiddische Midraschepik im späten Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit." *Chilufim. Zeitschrift für Jüdische Kulturgeschichte* 6 (2009), pp. 3 – 15.

5 Jean-François Lyotard, *Das postmoderne Wissen. Ein Bericht*. Transl. Otto Pfersmann. Graz, Wien: Passagen Verl., 1986, pp. 68 f. (Translation into English by AE).

As biblical narration I choose the Binding of Isaac (Gen 22:1 – 19); it could have been just as easily the story of Sodom, Cain and Abel, the Great Flood, or any other one.

In Hebrew this biblical narrative is called *Akedat-Yitskhak* (the Binding or sacrificing of Isaac), in Yiddish: *Akeydes-Yitskhok* – and thus (or simply *Akeyde*) we shall call it here, where we are dealing with modern Yiddish Midrashic texts.

For the interwar period (and serving as the texts to be compared with) I have chosen the elaboration of the Akeyde-motif by Itzik Manger, who was born in 1901 in Czernowitz. He gained early fame as a poet and came to Warsaw in 1929. From there he was expelled in 1938 and died, after living in England, the USA, and Israel in 1969. He created most of his work before and during the Shoah.

For the postwar period, and here especially for the post-communist period, I make use of the Midrashic formulation of the same motif by Hirsh Osherovitch, born in 1908 in Poneviesh (Lithuania). During World War II he was exiled in Alma-Ata, from where he returned in 1944 to Lithuania. From 1949 to 1956 he was condemned to forced labor in Gulags because of anti-Soviet, nationalistic-Zionistic activity. In 1971 he was allowed to immigrate to Israel where he died in 1994 in Tel Aviv.

By the way, it is absolutely reasonable to posit the conviction that both poets are to a certain degree paradigmatic of their periods, that the poetical and narrative techniques and also structures they each make use of are traceable also to the Yiddish-literature of their contemporaries (when they are using the same or comparable themes) – but I have to leave this here as a possible assertion, because it is beyond the scope of this paper, which might offer some methodological stimulation to undertake such research.

But let us examine, first of all, in an abstract manner and roughly structurally the Akeyde-texts of both poets. We shall recognize at first the following ellipsis in the narrative: the omission of the Akeyde, the binding-scene on Mount Moriah itself. The proceedings between Abraham and Isaac and also God's Angel are totally ignored by them. It seems that they are not treated poetically, probably because they are considered pure Myth, not only generally known but also untouchable. That scene is so terrifying and, after all, incomprehensible, that it is unsuitable for the Legend (and for Midrashic shaping). What is of interest is the *Before* (focusing more on Abraham) and the *After* in so far as it leads to a modification of the Myth (focusing more on Isaac).

As already mentioned, the Akeyde itself is totally within the realm of the Myth, where it is all about the Law and its fulfilment. And at the same time it marks the turning point, asking for the Legend, which, generally speaking, depicts what is to be recognized and/or to be claimed with regard to transformation, to adaption to new sociological situations, to revision of opinions or beliefs.

Concerning our examples we can define them clearly as Midrashic narrations, describing a *situation before* and undertaking an analysis afterwards: In Itzik Manger's Akeyde-Poems we find the attempt to neutralize the *event* after the fact, the impossibility of reworking and reflecting on it and of finding deliverance. The Akeyde-event should seemingly be forgotten, and life should continue without reflection on it.

In Hirsh Osherovitch, we find intensive consideration, fundamental existentialist discussion, and criticism of religion and ideology.

Manger chooses for his treatment a narrative mode (with a narrator who presides over his figures); Osherovitch makes use of a dramatic mode with direct speech of the characters without a *verbum dicendi* (meaning that figures and narrator fall into one).

Now I want to present the analyzed text-corpus and give an interpretation of it according to the aspects drafted above (Legend as a critical reconsideration of a Myth respective of present time ideologies justified by "mythic" pretexts).

In Manger we find the following texts in which he takes up the Akeydes-Yitskhok<sup>6</sup>:

- *akeydes yitskhok* (manuscript dated Yassi, Nov. 1927; first published 1929 in *Shtern afn dakh* ['Stars on the Roof'], Bucharest).
- *akeydes itsik* (first published Warsaw 1937 in the book *Demerung in shpigl* ['Twilight in the Mirror']).
- *der ovnt tunklt* ([ 'The Evening darkens' ] written in 1938 in Warsaw; published in his volume *Volkns ibern dakh* ['Clouds over the Roof'], London 1942).
- *mayn zeyde* ([ 'My Grandfather' ] published in the same volume *Volkns ibern dakh*).
- And beyond that there are three poems in his book *Khumesh-lider* ['Biblical Poems'], published in Warsaw in 1935<sup>7</sup>:
- *di muter sore hot a shver gemit* ([ 'Mother Sarah feels depressed' ] p. 37 f.).
- *avrom ovinu sharft dos meser* ([ 'Our Father Abraham sharpens the Knife' ] p. 39 f.).
- *avrom ovinu fort mit yitskhokn tsu der akeyde* ([ 'Our Father Abraham goes to the Place of Sacrifice' ] p. 41 f.).

From Hirsh Osherovitch's works we shall analyze two extensive epical poems: *avroms korbn* ('Abraham's sacrifice/victim') and *nokh der akeyde* ('after the Akeyde') –

6 All quoted from Itzik Manger, *Lid un balade*. Tel Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets 1976: p. 39 (*akeydes yitskhok*); pp. 311 f. (*akeydes itsik*); pp. 366 f. (*der ovnt tunklt*); p. 383 (*mayn seyde*).

7 Cited from Itzik Manger, *Medresh itsik* [i. e. 'Itsiks (= I. Manger's) Midrash']. Tel Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets 1990 (Reprint of the 1951 Paris edition).

published in his book *Tanakh-poemen*, Tel Aviv 1979 (pp. 60 – 75, dated: “vilne, oktober-november 1965” and pp. 76 – 90; dated: “vilne, 7 – 17 februar 1969”).

Itzik Manger deals in all his Akeydes-Yitskhok-poems explicitly with the events *before the Akeyde*. In the *Khumesh-lider* in *Medresh itsik* where, as is known, the biblical events are transferred into the Eastern European Jewish shtetl, this narration means a temporary but passing obfuscation of the idyll. Striking in this transposition into the shtetl is the nearness of the myth! The authorial voice from an omniscient point of view of the narrator alternates with constantly diverse narrative voices: Sarah, Abraham, a tear and the shadow (in: *di muter sore ...*) and others. Mild irony indicates a barely relevant criticism on the order that determines the life in the shtetl. The constellation of the characters engaged in the proceedings can hardly be changed: God is above everything and everyone, Abraham is obedient to Him, Isaac has to obey Abraham, and a little outside but nevertheless embedded into this basic order stand Sarah and Eliezer.

In their own special way the other Akeyde-poems by Manger are of interest: There he models his own fears and frights, which were caused by his personal biography (his grandfather's name was Abraham – and the grandfather takes the place of the father in the poems), but more than that by history in the form of forebodings of a catastrophe, which he was still able to depict in some connection with his individual fears, drawing them back at the same time to the thousand years old invocation of the Akeydes-Yitskhok-narrative in prayer, *piut* (hebr. *Piyyut*), *selicha*, and so on.<sup>8</sup> The *visionary* aspect of his texts written in 1937 and the following years is of course connected with an old martyrdom motif (bGit. 57b)<sup>9</sup>. Still, there prevails a poly-perspectivism (one has always to be aware of who is speaking and to whom), but in the last poem dedicated to the Akeyde-motif (*mayn zeyde*), the perspective (point of view) gets tighter and tighter and narrows to one person whose voice is the only one in the end: it is Itsik himself, bound to the sacrificial altar:

der ovnt tunklt. vu bistu, alter zeyde?  
ikh lig a nisht derkoyleter af der akeyde,  
un ze bloyz di shotns fun dayne mide ferd ...<sup>10</sup>  
('The evening darkens. Where are you, old grandfather?')

8 See Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Hildesheim u. a.: Olms Verlag 1995 (Reprint of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, improved edition, Frankfurt am Main 1931), p. 335 and especially p. 229.

9 *Talmud*-Traktat Gittin 57b (*Der babylonische Talmud*. Aus dem Hebräischen von Lazarus Goldschmidt. Zwölf Bände. Vol. VI. Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verl., 1996, pp. 187 – 501, p. 374).

10 Manger, *Lid un balade*, p. 383.

Unslaughtered I lay at the altar of sacrifice  
and see only the shadows of your tired horses ...<sup>11)</sup>

And the time *after the Akeyde*? The poems in the book *Khumesh-Lider* continue the Akeyde-narration, but the dramatic proceedings at Mount Moriah seem to be willingly forgotten. The situation even seems changed for the better: Abraham sends his servant Eliezer to look for a wife for Isaac.

The other poems (out of the *Khumesh-Lider*-cycle) end in unsolved questions, in dark forebodings ... the event is obviously not yet completed! In *Akeydes-Itzik* the grandfather Abraham says, having heard again after thousands of years God's now irrevocable command to sacrifice Isaac:

"itsik, s'iz gut vos dayn mame iz toyt  
un si vet farshporn tsu veynen."<sup>12)</sup>  
(‘Itzik, it’s good that your mother is dead  
and she will not have to weep any more.’)

A kind of Zionist solution suggested in the beginning of that poem turns out to be somehow too late: A bird (which we already know from Bialik's famous poem *The Bird*) comes flying and carries in his beak

"efsher mayn zeydns kidesh-bekher  
mit erets-yisroel-vayn zisn?"<sup>13)</sup>  
(‘Perhaps my grandfather’s kidush-goblet  
full of sweet wine from the Land of Israel?’)

But the mention of the grandfather throws the lyrical subject into an abyss of fears and makes impossible the Zionist solution. Out of the fantasy emerges the grandfather incarnate to bring his grandson to the Akeyde. An interpretation of this scene is not easy: maybe it is meant that *the Old* (the lore and tradition) has a hindering effect on the needed initiative?

In Hirsh Osherovitch's epic poems dedicated to the Akeyde, the spheres before and after it are clearly elaborated. The Midrashic narration – freed from an authorial voice – is elevated to a level which maybe can be called "level of a moral discourse".

In the episode before the Akeyde the poetic Ego steps totally back behind the narrator Abraham; the text of *avroms korbn* consists of a single monologue of justification. Abraham talks himself out of his initial doubts and thoughts of rejecting obedience.

11 All translations into English by AE.

12 Manger, *Lid un balade* 1976, p. 312 (*Akeydes-Itzik*).

13 Ibid., p. 311. (A German translation of Bialik's poem "The Bird" in: Ch. N. Bialik, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*. Deutsche Übertragung von Ernst Müller. Wien und, Leipzig: R. Löwit Verlag, 1922, pp. 48 – 51.)

His submission to God (and his belief in Him as an unchangeable superior being) can also be understood as a hardening of his own soul: His own resemblance to God becomes more and more obvious: does God serve only as a projection for his own atrocity? Is He, God, only a kind of construction, and does the monologue point only to a mono-perspective (of an autocrat)? Is his referring to God's authority only an attempt to deceive or at least self-delude?

folgn dir iz zeyer zis –  
 men dershpiert zikh, men vert greser.  
 s'tsveyte mol in fleysh a bris  
 gey ikh shnaydn mit a meser.  
 demolt [baym ershtn bris; AE] kh'hob geshnitn zikh,  
*itster* kh'gey mayn zun farshnaydn.  
 frier: nor a teylkhl ikh,  
 itst: mayn ikh far ale tsaytn ...<sup>14</sup>  
 ('Obeying you is such a sweet thing –  
 one feels himself, one increases.  
 A second time I'm going to cut with a knife  
 into the flesh a sign of alliance.  
 Then [at the first circumcision of myself; AE] – I cut myself,  
 now I go to cut down my son.  
 At that time: only a part of the I,  
 Now: myself for all times ...')

The initial doubts are interpreted as a kind of faintness:

"gehat a sikhsekh kh'hob mit got?  
 neyn, kh'hob gehat a sikhsekh mit mayn shvakhkeyt!"<sup>15</sup>  
 ('I had an argument with God?  
 No, I had an argument with my weakness!')

And he dismisses the faintness also with other words: *iberkler* ('hesitation'), *kleyn-mutikeyt* ('faint-heartedness'), *kvenkltrer* (tear of hesitation), *sofek* ('doubt') ...<sup>16</sup>

Belief as a motive for murder constitutes protection from condemnation:

"ikh veys, az s'iz farurteylung nit khal  
 af mord, vos vert bagangen tsulib gloybn."<sup>17</sup>  
 ('I know that a murder cannot be sentenced  
 when committed because of faith/religion.')

God demands Abraham's *continuation* as a sacrifice:

14 Hirsh Osherovitch, *Tanakh-poemen*. Tel Aviv: Reshafim 1979. (*avroms korbn*, pp. 60 – 75), p. 72.

15 Ibid., p. 73.

16 Ibid., p. 74.

17 Ibid., p. 74.

“s’hot got farlangt mayn nokhmirdikn ikh,  
muz ikh im opgebn mayn libn hemshekh.”  
(‘God demanded my Self which comes after me,  
therefore I have to give away to Him my beloved continuation/sequel.’)

*Hemshekh* in Yiddish is an especially burdened word (e. g. *hemshekh-dor*) used in connection with tradition, the people, religion, language, and culture.

Even here, Abraham is willing to obey blindly – to remain the servant of God, the servant of

di groyskeyt, vos heyst got  
der vunder, vos getrayshaft heyst  
dos getlekhe gebot  
[...]  
ikh hob di groyskeyt funem makriv zayn banumen –  
di herlekhekeyt fun kenen opshekhtn a zun  
far dem, vos iz fun alemen un altsding greser,  
di shtarkeyt fun nit trakhtn, az s’iz krum [...] <sup>18</sup>  
(‘That great being called God,  
that wonder, called loyalty,  
that command of God.  
[...]  
I understood the greatness of sacrificing –  
the gloriousness of being able to butcher a son  
for Him, who is greater than everyone and everything,  
The strength of not thinking that it is crooked.’)

In the end, Abraham is relieved from all doubts:

“a harter un tsufridener tsum shekhtort kh’kleter.” <sup>19</sup>  
(‘A hard and content man I climb up to the place of slaughter.’)

In *nokh der akeyde*, as the second text is called, Isaac more and more emerges from passivity as an individual questioning the Old. He criticises Abraham’s acting ostensibly in agreement with God, his respectfulness, his unquestioning obedience.

Abraham tries to calm, to appease, and to lull Isaac. He enters – flatteringly – into a dialogue about the necessity of supersession and repression and the ability to forget. And he wants Isaac to believe that he, Abraham, is speaking with God’s authorisation – at first in long sweeping iambic verses:

“un mir, gelayterte, itst kern zikh zurik aheym.” <sup>20</sup>  
(‘And we, purified, return home now.’)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. (*nokh der akeyde*, pp. 76 – 90), p. 76.



He notices Isaac's silence and pensiveness with astonishment. Finally Isaac replies – in short iambic verses:

“ikh hob moyre far dayn blik!”<sup>21</sup>  
 ('I am afraid of your glare!')

Isaac cannot be convinced of Abraham's subsequent protestation – that he really loves him.

The poet uses an interesting word play to clear up the unsaid and the unspeakable:

“yitskhok: (...) ober kuk! du zest dem shotn,  
 vos geyt nokh hintern eyzl?”<sup>22</sup>  
 ('Isaac: But look! Do you see the shadow,  
 which follows the donkey?')

The *shotn* ('the shadow') (in Osherovitch's Lithuanian pronunciation spoken as *sotn*) indicates the presence of Satan, who is travelling with them. In Midrash Wayosher, for instance, we learn that he accompanied Abraham and Isaac on their way to the Mount Moriah.<sup>23</sup> Later (p. 84) the shadow can be identified as Abraham's.

More and more, Isaac insists – in his disillusionment – on the impossibility of forgetting, especially the wild, the evil:

“ayngehilt in blut un fayer  
 un farkrempevet mit shtrik ...”<sup>24</sup>  
 ('Wrapped in blood and fire  
 and fastened with ropes ...')

He demands that life be put above religion and ideology, and he asks for limits to obedience, for the end of referring to God to justify bloodshed. (It is surely unnecessary to explain in detail that behind all that stands a criticism not only of the ideologies of National-Socialism and Stalinism – both *experienced* by Osherovitch –, but also of the type (in general) of the docile and meek accomplice and executor.)

When Abraham starts to tell *a maysele a herlekhs* ('A long splendid story') about a rich man and his speaking mule to divert and lull his son<sup>25</sup>, Isaac abruptly interrupts him (p. 84): The old parables, myths (as discourses of justification) are of past use and worn out. He, Isaac, is agonised by post-traumatic symptoms (p.

21 Ibid., p. 76. Repeated on p. 77, 78, 84, 86, 88.

22 Ibid., p. 78.

23 See Dreeßen, *Akêdass Jizhak*, pp. 111 – 122.

24 Osherovitch, *Tanakh-poemen*, p. 80.

25 Ibid., pp. 81 ff.

85): among other things he remembers clearly the pains of the binding. Abraham still tries to soothe him:

“frey zikh mit der groyser shoh,  
vos s’iz got dernebn do.”<sup>26</sup>  
(‘Be glad about that great hour,  
in which even God is present [*or*: and that God is beside us].’)

But Isaac only wants to understand *jene shpil* (at Mount Moriah).

Abraham is only able to counter:

“got hot mir azoy geheysn!”  
(‘Thus God commanded me!’)

The father’s super-belief causes a negative relation with and odd ideas of God (what we call today “loss of religion through religious education”) in Isaac:

“shrek ikh dan zikh oykh far got.”<sup>27</sup>  
(‘If so, I’m also scared of God.’)

Abraham tries to develop a kind of theodicy: one should be content with *everything* sent by God. Though Isaac does learn that Abraham loves him, he also understands that Abraham loves God too – only much more.

In the end, when Abraham again tries to convince his son of God’s grace and good nature – God will compensate Isaac for his *lign afn shteyn* (‘lying on the stone’) with many good things – he receives the answer:

“yitskhok: foterl, vi ken zayn gut?  
du zogst: got, un ikh ze: blut ...”<sup>28</sup>  
(‘Isaac: Daddy, how it can be good?  
You say: God, and I see: blood ...’)

In Osherovitch’s *nokh der akeyde*, narration and discourse fall into one. Though only the speech is given, it is easy to reproduce the narrative scenery in which it takes place, precisely because of the omission of the description of the spatial, temporal and socio-cultural settings in the narration. Though the question of the exact setting of the narration remains unclear, the apparent biblical context becomes transparent for actualizing readings. The post-communist perspective (the question of guilt in connection with purges and so on) comes to the fore, as it is a discernible view taken by the poet, a viewpoint which is expressed in the poem through the dialogue and that can be reconstructed if one includes the author’s criticism of ideology as expressed in other texts such as in the book *In der velt fun*

26 Ibid., p. 86.

27 Ibid., p. 87.

28 Ibid., p. 90.

*akeydes*<sup>29</sup> ('In the World of Sacrifices') and others. The author thus does not limit his text only to his own social criticism, but he leaves it open – so to speak in a supra-temporal sense – for future reception. This makes it possible to find answers to questions about a certain time and about oneself in a process of seeking meaning in the re-told biblical narration.

The re-reading of the biblical Myth in the shape of a Legend accompanied with empathy and identification with Isaac and his point of view act as a stimulant for interpreting and actualizing reflection. This enables the shifting of perspective, for example, from Abraham's conception of God to Isaac's emphasis on the value of life in and of itself, or to the question about "Dogmatic/Correct Belief or Correct Practice", by which Isaac is judging his father exclusively.

For the present I want to come to an end: Midrashic Bible-based texts as described above could be defined using Lyotard's terminology in the following way: They are Midrashic, because they re-tell a Myth through a Legend (exegetically enlarging and actualizing it, giving it a new interpretation), raising it to other historic or supra-historical contexts, with the intention of taking issue with topical questions (e. g. of guilt).

Itzik Manger wrote his Akeyde-poems before those big historic Akeydes, of which he has a painful presentiment; but he is not yet able to take a retrospective point of view to reflect on it, which renders the scene even more terrifying!

In the case of Hirsh Osherovitsh, the big awful historic Akeydes already lie behind him. He went through them in a concrete sense, and they are already an experience which he, the poet, wants to develop, that is to say, he wants to depict them with the purpose of coming to terms with them. He does this in the guise of biblical narration, in a Midrashic form, which is maybe most appropriate, because its inherent form does not permit *the Mono-logic*. Instead of this it prefers discourse, analysis, and the quest for solutions. And by replacing *the Mono-logic* with discourse the latter is able to overcome the former and to spirit it away.

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29 Hirsh Osherovitsh, *In der velt fun akeydes. Lider un poemes*. Tel Aviv: Hamenora 1975. For an interpretation of the poem *anusim* (marranos), published in this book on pp. 23 f., see Armin Eidherr, "Die Darstellung des Marranen in der jiddischen Kultur." In: Anna-Dorothea Ludwig, Hannah Lotte Lund and Paola Ferruta (eds.), *Versteckter Glaube oder doppelte Identität? Das Bild des Marranentums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert / Concealed Faith or double Identity? The Image of Marranism in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag 2011 (Haskala – Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen 47), pp. 199 – 217.



## **Maqom als Figur der Profanierung bei Walter Benjamin**

Wie sehr die „Reflexion über die Geschichte eine der Konstanten im Denken Benjamins gewesen“ ist, hat Stéphane Mosès herausgearbeitet<sup>1</sup> und festgestellt, dass Benjamin zwei Bewegungen der menschlichen Geschichte beschreibe: Zum einen den Prozess der Dekadenz und zum anderen „ein Fortschreiten auf eine utopische Vollendung“<sup>2</sup>. Diese Grundfigur bei Benjamin lässt sich in verschiedenen Paradigmen nachvollziehen – sei es der Sprache, dem Kunstwerk, der Religion, der Politik usw. Mitunter teilt sich die Beschreibung der Bewegungskurve der menschheitlichen Entwicklung dabei auf zwei oder mehrere Texte auf, wie z. B. in dem frühen Aufsatz *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen*, der die Geschichte des Verfalls der Sprache des Menschen behandelt, während *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* die gegenläufige Bewegung beschreibt und auf den Prozess, der in der Erlösung gipfeln soll, zuläuft.

Im folgenden soll dem Gedanken nachgegangen werden, dass Benjamins Verknüpfung des Politischen und Theologischen eine Profanierung des hebräischen *maqom* ist, die sich besonders gut in den *Denkbildern* nachvollziehen lässt.<sup>3</sup> Benjamin erweitert die hebräischen Konnotationen in den letzten *Denkbildern* und dem 1936 verfassten Aufsatz *Der Erzähler. Zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows*, in dem er explizit als Erben der (religiösen) Tradition die Dichter benennt. Eine Auffassung, der sich Jahre später auch Gershom Scholem anschließen wird. Was Scholem allerdings im Anschluss an seine Untersuchungen über die jüdische Mystik ausdrücklich auf die Kabbala bezieht, verallgemeinert – bzw. „profaniert“ buchstäblich – Benjamin hinsichtlich des Erzählers.

In den *Denkbildern*, die zwischen 1925 und 1934 erschienen sind, finden sich beide von Mosès beschriebenen Bewegungen der Geschichte. Es sind kleine in sich

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1 Stéphane Mosès, „Walter Benjamin. Drei Modelle der Geschichte.“ In: Ders., *Der Engel der Geschichte. Franz Rosenzweig. Walter Benjamin. Gershom Scholem*. Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verl., 1994, S. 86 – 160, hier: S. 87.

2 Mosès, *Der Engel der Geschichte*, S. 93.

3 Für Stéphane Mosès stellt diese Brücke zwischen Politik und Theologie das Ästhetische bei Benjamin dar. Mosès, *Der Engel der Geschichte*, S. 92.

abgeschlossene Texte, die „ohne wissenschaftlichen Apparat auch auf Reisen zu bewerkstelligen und publizistisch zu vermarkten waren“<sup>4</sup> und die „zur charakteristischen Begleiterscheinung seines Lebenslaufs“<sup>5</sup> geworden sind. Liest man diese Miniaturen aber als Einheit – wie sie in dem von Tillman Rexroth herausgegebenen IV. Band der *Gesammelten Schriften* inzwischen vorliegen –, lässt sich durchaus ein inneres zusammenhängendes Band erkennen, das sich – so die Hypothese für die nachfolgenden Überlegungen – als Profanierung<sup>6</sup> der vielfältigen Bedeutung des hebräischen Wortes *maqom*<sup>7</sup> lesen lässt und das, wie in einem Brennglas, die von Mosès analysierte Gegenwärtigkeit der Reflexion der Geschichte, die von den sprachphilosophischen Überlegungen nicht zu trennen sind, demonstriert.

Für Benjamins Schreiben ist charakteristisch, dass er – genau wie Kafka, dessen Dichtung er sich auch nicht von ungefähr so nahe fühlte, – eine neuartige Verwendung und Profanierung religiöser Begriffe und Bilder vornimmt.<sup>8</sup> Benjamin bezieht sich damit auf das Dilemma der Moderne, in der der „erste Sprecher“ (Gott) verschwunden ist, und reflektiert in verschiedenen Texten über das sich daraus entwickelnde Kommunikationsproblem, das auch ein „Beiseiteschieben“ des traditionellen und individuellen Erfahrungsschatzes beinhaltet und das im Judentum außerdem tief in die Exegese der heiligen Texte eingreift. Die Frage der Säkularisation in der Moderne hatte somit für die jüdische Kultur vielfältige Folgen. Die Literatur stand dabei vor dem Problem, sich in das Konzept der Moderne so einzuschreiben, dass ihre Zugehörigkeit zum Judentum poetologisch dergestalt ausfällt, dass der Repräsentation des Heiligen – d. h. der Spuren der göttlichen Stimme und der damit vermittelten menschlichen Erfahrung – Rechnung getragen wird, ohne in die Prämoderne zurückzufallen.<sup>9</sup>

4 Roger W. Müller Farguell, „Städtebilder, Reisebilder, Denkbilder“. In: Burkhardt Lindner (Hg.), *Benjamin Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 2006, S. 626 – 642, hier: S. 626.

5 Müller u. a., „Städtebilder“.

6 „Profanierung“ wird hier im Sinne Giorgio Agambens verstanden, das anders als „Säkularisierung“, die für Agamben nur eine Verschiebung der Macht von der göttlichen auf die menschliche Sphäre vornimmt, nicht die Auslöschung des Heiligen meint, sondern die „Profanierung“ lässt das „Heilige wie in einem Suchbild entstellt oder verrätselt, aber auch mit Leichtigkeit fortleben. Vergleichbar dem Ritus im Spiel.“ Vgl. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanierungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005, S. 73.

7 *Maqom* bedeutet sowohl „Ort“, als auch „Kommentierung der schriftlichen Tora“ und ist eine der „Ersetzungen“ für den „Namen“ Gottes.

8 Siehe dazu den von Daniel Weidner herausgegebenen Band *Profanes Leben. Walter Benjamins Dialektik der Säkularisierung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010. Der Band rückt Benjamins „Ordnung des Profanen“, wovon er u. a. im „Theologisch-Politischen Fragment“ spricht, unter verschiedenen Blickpunkten in den Vordergrund für den Gedanken, die Säkularisierung, die bei Benjamin als Grenzphänomen gedacht wird, als „dringlichstes Konzept der Gegenwart“ (Weidner, *Profanes Leben*, S. 11) neu zu reflektieren.

9 Im Anschluss an Giorgio Agamben schlage ich für diesen Akt der „Profanierung“ in der jüdischen Literatur den Begriff der *performativen Intertextualität* vor. Das soll den für die

Das Problem der Säkularisierung in der jüdischen Moderne ließe sich daher so beschreiben: Ein Text, der nicht ruft, kann nicht mehr gelesen, kann nicht gehört werden, die Tradition wäre abgebrochen. Hebräisch werden die Wörter „hören“ und „gehören“ von derselben Wurzel gebildet: *sch-m-a*; und auch die Wörter „lesen“ und „rufen“ haben eine gemeinsame Wortwurzel: *k-a-ra*. Diesen Gedanken des „Hörens“ und „Lesens“ in der Bedeutung von „Wahrnehmen eines Lautes“ übernimmt Benjamin bereits in seinem frühen sprachphilosophischen Aufsatz, wenn vom Benennen des Menschen die Rede ist, der den Dingen ihre Namen ablauscht.<sup>10</sup>

Die (heilige) Schrift, die die Tradition in der jüdischen Kultur begründet, ist Aufzeichnung des göttlichen Wortes und wird außerdem von jedem Leser weiter bzw. neu geschrieben. Die Schrift – als heiliger Text – macht demnach das göttliche Wort, das direkt nicht zu hören ist, sichtbar, indem es auf die göttliche Präsenz *hinweist*. Das spiegelt sich in Benjamins Bildbegriff, worüber Weigel zurecht schreibt:

Denkbilder sind aber auch gelesene Bilder, geschriebene Bild-Lektüren, in denen sich der Schriftcharakter von Bildern – sei es von Gemälden, Erinnerungsbildern, Traumbildern, von in Architektur oder in Dingen materialisierten Wunschbildern – buchstäblich in Schrift transformiert. An den Denkbildern wird am deutlichsten, dass Schreib- und Denkweise bei Benjamin nicht zu trennen sind, dass sein Bilddenken der spezifischen Weise seiner Theoriebildung, seines Philosophierens und Schreibens das eigene Gepräge gibt, dass seine Schriften also nicht in Form und Inhalt zu trennen sind. Die Bildlichkeit seines Schreibens bedeutet also nicht eine (zusätzliche) literarische oder ästhetische Qualität seines Stils, sondern ist genuin für sein Denken und seine Theoriebildung.<sup>11</sup>

Die Transformation des Sakralen, d. h. die Figuren der Profanierung auf poetologischer Ebene vollzieht sich in zwei Schritten: Der heilige Text, der ursprünglich nur Stimme war, ist nunmehr als „Sagen-Wollen Gottes“ zu *übersetzen*. Das impliziert einen Leser, der bereit ist, „zu hören“ bzw. „wahrzunehmen“; denn von *seinem* Hörvermögen hängt ganz entscheidend sein Zugang zur Wahrheit ab. Das Thema des „Hörens“ und „Horchens“ auf die Vergangenheit resp. Tradition zeigt sich bei

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jüdische Texttradition wesentlichen Zusammenfall von Wort und Tat, von Stimme und Erfahrung markieren und in den Fokus der Textanalyse rücken. Die Betonung der inhärenten Performanz im Judentum hat nicht nur das Wortverständnis, sondern auch den Bildbegriff nachhaltig geprägt. Die Ebenbildlichkeit des Menschen mit Gott erfuhr dabei immer epochenspezifische Veränderungen, die vom *zelem elohim* bis *imago dei* changiert. Ebenbildlichkeit und Distanz bleiben in einer dauernden Spannung, die allein durch ein von Gott oder den Menschen in Gang gesetztes Geschehen überwunden werden kann. Den Ausgleich dieser Spannung der „Gottesrede“ und des „Redens über Gott“ hat gerade die Literatur, die sich nach der Haskala neu definieren musste, stark geprägt.

10 Walter Benjamin, „Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen.“ In: Ders., *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band II.1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991, S. 140 – 157, hier: S. 148 – 150.

11 Sigrid Weigel, *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit. Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1997, S. 60.

Benjamin im Wahrnehmen eines „chockartigen Aufblitzens“ einer Bedeutung, die aus weiter Ferne zu kommen scheint. Das spielt nicht nur für seinen „Aura-Begriff“ eine Rolle, sondern ist in vielen Texten gegenwärtig.

Michel de Certeau stellt hinsichtlich der Einstellung zur Vergangenheit fest: „die Moderne kommt dadurch zustande, dass man feststellt, dass dieses Wort nicht mehr vernehmbar ist und dass es sich durch die Entstellungen des Textes und die Wechselfälle der Geschichte verändert hat.“<sup>12</sup> Eine Schrift, in der es nicht mehr spricht, muss sich folglich selbst herstellen.

Diese neue Schrift ist zwar noch mit dem, was im Verschwinden begriffen ist, verbunden, sie hat noch eine Schuld gegenüber dem, was sich als etwas Vergangenes entfernt und immer noch ihren Ursprung bildet, aber sie muß jetzt eine Praktik sein, eine unendliche Produktion von Identitäten, die nur durch ein Tun zustande kommen, ein Vorgehen, das immer noch abhängig ist, was sich in seinem Vorfeld in dem Maße bietet, wie die eigene Stimme einer [...] Kultur zum Andenken der neuen Schrift wird und wie die ihr im Signifikanten verliehene Gegenwart (eben das ist die Definition der Stimme) sich in Vergangenheit verwandelt.<sup>13</sup>

Die Literatur nach der Aufklärung hat also die Möglichkeit, entweder „stimmlose“ Texte – im Sinne der Moderne wie von de Certeau skizziert – zu produzieren oder Formen zu finden, auf das Auditive hinzuweisen. Auch Ashaf Noor<sup>14</sup> hebt als zentrale Figur der Reflexion über die Moderne Erfahrung und Zäsur hervor, die gerade das Denken deutscher Juden kennzeichne:

Diskontinuität, der Verlust der Erfahrung, Atomisierung, andererseits die Bedeutung der ‚Konjunktion‘ des unwillkürlichen und des willkürlichen Eingedenkens, der individuellen und der kollektiven Vergangenheit, für den Begriff der Erfahrung, das Eingedenken –, sind Figuren, die in vielfältiger Weise dem deutsch-jüdischen Denken der Moderne eingezeichnet sind.<sup>15</sup>

Bei Benjamin sind sowohl das Eingedenken, das „Hören“ oder „Abhören der Natur“ auf der einen Seite und andererseits die „stumme“ oder „traurige Natur“ – wie z. B. in der Studie *Über das deutsche Trauerspiel im Barock* – häufig anzutreffen. In manchen Texten bleibt es bei dem Klagen über den Verlust, in anderen wird eine „Rettung“ oder theologische „Erlösung“ angedeutet.

Dieses Moment der Erfahrungs- bzw. Geschichtenweitergabe, das von dem Wiedererleben eines magischen Ereignisses lebt, sieht Benjamin in der Moderne zugunsten eines faktualen Erzählens, das weder „Rat erteilt“, noch für Deutun-

12 Michel de Certeau, *Die Kunst des Handelns*. Berlin: Merve, 1988, S. 250.

13 De Certeau, *Kunst des Handelns*.

14 Ashraf Noor, „Einleitung: Erfahrung und Zäsur.“ In: Ders. (Hg.), *Erfahrung und Zäsur. Denkfiguren der deutsch-jüdischen Moderne*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1999, S. 11 – 38, hier: S. 11.

15 Noor, „Einleitung“, S. 17.



gen offen ist, sondern stattdessen mit Erklärungen, eindeutigen Beurteilungen und Begrifflichkeiten kommt, einem Ende zugehen. Favorisiert demnach die „neue Zeit“ eine bestimmte Sprache der Erklärungen und Begriffe<sup>16</sup>, setzt Benjamin antipodisch die Bewahrung der Tradition durch erzählte Geschichten dagegen. Der konkrete Raum der modernen, lauten, grauen Großstadt verschwimmt in den Städtebildern, im Haschisch-Zustand oder in Traumbildern zu einem undeutlichen, nebelhaften Weichbild. Aus der scheinbar so präzisen Reportage wird zunehmend eine Prosa, die „der Lauschende [...] Ton für Ton in seinem Innern“<sup>17</sup> angesammelt hat.

So gelesen, scheinen die Städte- und Erinnerungsbilder *Neapel*, *Moskau*, *Weimar*, *Marseille*, *Ibiza*, die kleinen Skizzen über das Essen bzw. das Lesen und die Bücher wie *Frische Feigen*, *Café Crème*, *Falerner und Stockfisch*, *Borscht*, *Pranzo Caprese* und *Maulbeer-Omelette* sowie *Kriminalromane auf Reisen*, *Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus* und *Ausgraben und Erinnern* als konkrete Vorstudien für die kleineren Denkbilder, die auf abstrakterer und z. T. auf das Messianische vorausdeutender Ebene die zuvor gelegten Text- und Erinnerungsspuren zusammenführen. Es lässt sich durchaus auch hier wieder die Bewegung vom Buchstäblichen und Realen der Orte oder dem tatsächlichen Genuss des Essens, des Lesens, des Buches etc. hin zum Messianischen rekonstruieren, die schließlich in ein Plädoyer für die Poetik und die Rolle des Schriftstellers mündet, wie in den Texten *Der gute Schriftsteller*; *Erzählung und Heilung*; *Brezel, Feder, Pause, Klage, Firlefanz*; *Einmal ist keinmal*; *Gut schreiben*; *Romane lesen*; *Kunst zu erzählen* und schließlich *Nach der Vollendung*.

Teile dieser letzten Denkbilder werden im Aufsatz *Der Erzähler* wieder aufgenommen, die Ideen werden konkretisiert und ausgebaut. So beginnt *Der Erzähler* sogleich mit der Verfallskurve der menschlichen Geschichte, wenn es heißt, „dass es mit der Kunst des Erzählens zu Ende gehe“<sup>18</sup>, weil die gegenwärtige

16 Im *Moskauer Tagebuch* ist das einerseits anhand der Berichte über die Theaterszene abzu- lesen, wenn es z. B. über die Inszenierung des Gogol'schen *Revizor* im Meyerchol'd Theater heißt: „Man misst ihr [der Aufführung, D. G.] hier große Bedeutung bei, als der Adaption eines klassischen Stücks für das revolutionäre Theater, aber zugleich sieht man den Versuch als missglückt an. So hat auch die Partei Parole gegen die Inszenierung ausgegeben und die gemäßigte Besprechung des Theaterkritikers der ‚Prawda‘ ist von der Redaktion zurückge- wiesen worden. Im Theater war der Beifall spärlich und vielleicht geht auch das mehr auf offizielle Losung zurück als auf den ursprünglichen Eindruck des Publikums. Denn eine Augenweide war die Aufführung sicher.“ 19. Dez., W. Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, hrsg. von Gary Smith, mit einem Vorwort von Gershom Scholem. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980, S. 49. Oder über die vielen Kirchen in Moskau: „Am Vormittag in der Basiliuskirche. In warmen himeligen Farben strahlt die Außenseite über den Schnee. [...] Man hat das Innere nicht nur ausgeräumt, sondern wie ein erlegtes Wild es ausgeweidet, und der Volksbildung als ‚Museum‘ schmackhaft gemacht.“ 15. Dez., Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 37.

17 Benjamin, „In der Sonne.“ In: Ders., *Denkbilder*. GS. IV.1, S. 303 – 438, hier: S. 420.

18 Benjamin, GS II.2, 439.

Zeit an mitteilbaren Erfahrungen ärmer geworden sei. Hier schwingt aber – neben der u. a. von Dirk Hoeges beklagten Beschwörung der „Tragödie der Kultur“<sup>19</sup>, womit Benjamin sich in den Chor so vieler Intellektueller der Weimarer Republik einreihet – auch der gleichfalls schon oft zitierte Konflikt zwischen Mythos und Logos mit, den Benjamin hier im Sinne der Romantiker beschwört.<sup>20</sup> Sein Skeptizismus gegenüber dem Fortschrittsglauben, der hinsichtlich der Geschichtsschreibung in einer Ablehnung der Lehrmeinung des Historismus zum Ausdruck kommt, wie es z. B. in den Thesen *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* deutlich wird, manifestiert sich in *Der Erzähler* an den Antipoden Mythos und Logos.

Im Kontext der Beschäftigung mit dem Werk des russischen Dichters Leskov erfährt diese antipodische Darstellung von Mythos und Logos allerdings eine zusätzliche Rechtfertigung. Denn die kulturpolitische Debatte zwischen „Westlern“ und „Slavophilen“ wurde in Russland im 19. und auch noch im 20. Jahrhundert – bis Stalin sie beendete – um eben jene Abstufungen der Modernisierung erbittert geführt. Jene Debatte, die als Kampf zwischen Nihilisten und Religiösen nur oberflächlich charakterisiert ist, fand ihre topographische Zuschreibung in Russland selbst in den beiden Großstädten „Petersburg“ (als Repräsentant des nihilistischen Westens) und „Moskau“ (als Vertreter des altgläubigen Byzanz) und auf der größeren politischen Landkarte in „Europa“ und „Russland“. Neben der einen Variante, dass der „wahre“, der „echte“ Russe, der Russe aus dem einfachen und zumeist auch orthodoxen Volk ist – ein Modell, das auch Tolstoj favorisierte –, wurde der Konflikt aber auch philosophisch als Mythos vs. Logos-Debatte geführt. Die russische, stark religiös geprägte philo-

19 Hoeges stellt fest: „Im agonalen Extrem, den Widersacher zum Feind zu machen und den Feind vernichten zu wollen, indem seine Existenz der Lügenhaftigkeit verdächtigt und in Frage gestellt wird, spiegelt sich die intellektuelle Mentalität in der Agonie der Weimarer Republik. Die Absicht der Vernichtung kommt erst zur Ruhe, wenn alles vernichtet ist. So bildet sich der wachsende Wille zur tödlichen Lösung, der die Politik kennzeichnete, in den Kontroversen der Intelligenz ab; sie löscht sich damit am Ende selbst aus, wie die Politik. Die Selbstverbrennung der Intellektuellen ist ein Autodafé eigener Art.“ Dirk Hoeges, *Kontroverse am Abgrund: Ernst Robert Curtius und Karl Mannheim. Intellektuelle und „freischwebende Intelligenz“ in der Weimarer Republik*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verl., 1994, S. 226 f. Cassirer ist einer der Wenigen, der den Abgesang auf die „Tragödie der Kultur“ seiner Zeitgenossen nicht teilt. Vgl. Ernst Cassirer, „Die ‚Tragödie der Kultur‘“. In: Ders., *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften. Fünf Studien*. Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 1961, S. 103 – 127.

20 Auf die erstaunliche Parallelität der Ideen zwischen Benjamin und Rosenzweig, die häufig auf ihre gemeinsame Neigung zur Romantik und ihre Verbundenheit mit dem Judentum zurückgeführt wird, hat Jean-Michel Palmier hingewiesen. Eine weitere Gemeinsamkeit ist auch, dass die beiden auf der Suche nach einem erweiterten Begriff der Erfahrung sind, obwohl Benjamin nie „Gott, Mensch, Welt und Erlösung“ auftreten lassen würde. Jean-Michel Palmier, *Walter Benjamin. Lumpensammler, Engel und bucklicht Männlein. Ästhetik und Politik bei Walter Benjamin*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009, S. 312.

sophische Richtung, zu der u. a. Fedor Solov'ev entscheidende Impulse gab, veranlasste z. B. Aleksej Losev zur selben Zeit, zu der Benjamin seine *Denkbilder* und *Der Erzähler* schrieb, eine „Philosophie des Mythos“ zu entwickeln.<sup>21</sup>

Mit der Verknüpfung des Politischen und Theologischen, mit der Anspielung auf die Mythos-Logos-Debatte reiht sich Benjamin hier demnach auch in die russische aktuelle Kontroverse ein. Auch, wenn er selbst kein Russisch sprach, wissen wir doch, dass er nicht nur durch Asja Lacis mit den Diskussionen in Russland vertraut gewesen war.<sup>22</sup> Die Verknüpfung des Politischen mit dem Theologischen verbindet ihn somit über den Begriff der Erfahrung zusätzlich mit den Vertretern der russischen Religionsphilosophie wie Fedor Solov'ev, Nikolaj Berdjaev und Lev Šestov, aber er unterscheidet sich auch wieder in einem wesentlichen Punkt von ihnen: Die Remythisierung der russischen Philosophie kam nicht ohne die starke Betonung der Religion aus, sodass die Remythisierung oft zu einer einseitigen „Retheologisierung“ führte.<sup>23</sup> Für Benjamin hingegen vermittelt die Religion zwar einen Begriff der Erfahrung, die letztlich zu einer neuen Erkenntnis führen soll, der dabei aber auf die religiösen Anthropomorphismen verzichten will.<sup>24</sup> Er schreibt:

21 Vgl. u. a. Aleksej Losev, *Dialektika mita*. Moskau 1930 (russische Erstausgabe. Dt.: *Die Dialektik des Mythos*, hrsg. von Alexander Haardt. Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), in der er sich ganz explizit für eine Remythisierung Russlands ausspricht.

22 Inwieweit Benjamin auch mit den Arbeiten der Russischen Formalisten – insbes. Viktor Šklovskijs und Boris Ejchenbaums – vertraut war, hat Jurij Striedter zu analysieren versucht. Striedter konnte auf Überschneidungen zwischen dem „Erzähler“-Aufsatz und Ejchenbaums *Leskov und die moderne Prosa* (1927) hinweisen. Allerdings konnte Striedter keine direkte Verbindung zwischen beiden feststellen und musste sich mit der Bemerkung begnügen: „zwei verwandte Geister hätten unabhängig voneinander gearbeitet.“ Jurij Striedter, „Zur formalistischen Theorie der Prosa und der literarischen Evolution.“ In: Ders. (Hg.), *Texte der russischen Formalisten*. Bd. 1. München: Fink, <sup>5</sup>1969, S. IX – LXXXIII, hier: S. LVII. Dass Benjamin aber gleichwohl Kenntnisse über den Russischen Formalismus hatte, ergibt sich aus einem Bericht, den Benjamin über eine Diskussionsveranstaltung anlässlich einer Inszenierung von Gogols *Revisor* im Moskauer Meyerchol'd-Theater verfasst hat, an der auch Viktor Šklovskij teilgenommen hatte und auch anhand einer Rezension zur französischen Übersetzung Šklovskijs Autobiographie *Sentimentale Reise*, die er 1928 publiziert hat. Über die Inszenierung des Gogol'schen Stücks berichtet er auch im *Moskauer Tagebuch* am 19. Dezember. Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 47 – 50. Dass Benjamin aber auch mit den Debatten der russischen Religionsphilosophie und deren Bestrebungen einer Remythisierung Russlands bekannt gewesen sein könnte, zeigt sich daran, dass er in der Zeitschrift *Kreatur* publizierte, die nicht nur ein Organ für Bubers Religionsphilosophie war, sondern auch Nikolaj Berdjaev und Lev Šestov einen Publikationsort bot.

23 Das ist besonders stark bei Solov'ev ausgeprägt.

24 Siehe hierzu die Untersuchung von Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, *Der frühe Walter Benjamin und Hermann Cohen. Jüdische Werte, Kritische Philosophie, vergängliche Erfahrung*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8 2000. Darin insbesondere der Abschnitt „Bild und Symbol und Bilderverbot und Erkenntniskritik“, S. 90 – 106.

Diese Erfahrung umfasst denn auch die Religion, nämlich als die wahre, wobei weder Gott noch Mensch Objekt oder Subjekt der Erfahrung ist, wohl aber diese Erfahrung auf der reinen Erkenntnis beruht als deren Inbegriff allein die Philosophie Gott denken kann und muß. Es ist die Aufgabe der kommenden Erkenntnistheorie für die Erkenntnis die Sphäre totaler Neutralität in Bezug auf die Begriffe Objekt und Subjekt zu finden; mit anderen Worten die autonome ureigene Sphäre der Erkenntnis auszumitteln in der dieser Begriff auf keine Weise mehr die Beziehung zwischen zwei metaphysischen Entitäten bezeichnet.<sup>25</sup>

## Die Übersetzung *maqom* in den *Denkbildern*

Benjamins „Profanierungsprozess“ der Tradition wird in dem Aufsatz *Der Erzähler* um das Archisem „Erfahrung“ herum gruppiert und dabei gewissermaßen midraschisch ausgelegt. So sind beide zuvor beschriebene geschichtliche Prozesse hier beteiligt: Die Übersetzung ins profane Leben verläuft „absteigend“ mittels säkularisierter Begriffe, die Methodik ihrer Kontextualisierung der „neugefundenen“ Bedeutungen aber folgt einem theologischem Prinzip.<sup>26</sup>

Dieser Fokussierung auf Midrasch, in der es keine Originalbedeutung von Texten mehr gibt, sondern nur ständige Interpretation, sodass Midrasch zum Modell für alles Lesen und Schreiben wird, ist im Kontext der Benjamin-Lektüre eine weitere Komponente hinzuzufügen. Es geht um die Frage, ob sich die Art der

25 Walter Benjamin, „Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie.“ GS II.1, S. 157 – 171, hier: S. 163.

26 Der Begriff Midrasch ist von dem hebräischen Verb *d'rasch* abgeleitet, das „suchen“, „fragen“, oder auch „forschen“ bedeutet. In der rabbinischen Literatur bezeichnet Midrasch zum einen den „Prozess des Forschens“ (das Auslegen des Tanach [das sind die 5 Bücher Mose, die Propheten und die Schriften]) und ist daher auch als *Kommentar* zu einem bestimmten Text zu verstehen, d. h. als „*Ergebnis*“ dieses Interpretationsprozesses. In einer zweiten Bedeutung kann Midrasch aber auch einen ganz konkreten Text, d. i. die Auslegung einzelner Schriftverse, bezeichnen, und drittens versteht man Midrasch als rabbinische *Gattung*, als Bezeichnung für die „spezifische rabbinische Schriftinterpretation“. Methodisch ist Midrasch folgendermaßen charakterisiert: Der Midrasch ist fokussiert auf die *Irregularitäten im Text*. Es werden Textprobleme, Widersprüche oder Worte, die nicht in den Kontext zu passen scheinen, auch ungewöhnliche Worte oder ungewöhnliche Schreibung diskutiert. Dabei hat der Midrasch durchaus die Problemlösung im Auge, auch wenn man das aufgrund der häufigen Ausschmückungen und Verzweigungen manchmal kaum noch wahrnehmen kann. Entscheidend ist dabei, dass es im Midrasch nicht um Synthesen geht, sondern gerade um die Widersprüchlichkeiten im Text oder der eigenen Exegese. Als kleinste Grundeinheit konzentriert sich die Midrasch-Exegese auf den Vers, nicht auf einen ganzen Text. Die Verse, die dabei zur Erläuterung herangezogen werden, können aus sehr verschiedenen Büchern des Tanach stammen. Doch auch wenn der Midrasch zunächst verszentriert ist, wird in der Interpretation immer der weitere Kontext mitaufgerufen, sodass in der Erklärung von Schriftziten völlig zusammenhangslose Texte problemlos nebeneinander gestellt werden können. Mit anderen Worten: Midrasch ist im Grunde ein Spiel mit dem geschriebenen Text, allerdings nach bestimmten rabbinischen Regeln.

Traditionsvermittlung, wie sie im Bilderdenken des Midrasch und der Kabbala zum Ausdruck kommt, mit Benjamins „Denkbildern“ vergleichen lässt. Die Bildersprache des Midrasch als „Sehen jenseits der Sinne“ eröffnet einen Ort der Bilder, der sich als idealer Ort der vielfältigen Erscheinungsformen von Wahrheit andeutet, an dem sich Intertextualität und Interpiktualität überkreuzen. Das, was Weigel allgemein über Benjamins *Denkbilder* schreibt, wenn sie sagt:

Seine Denkbilder sind gleichsam geschriebene dialektische Bilder, buchstäblich Schriftgewordene Konstellationen, in denen sich die Dialektik von Bild und Denken entfaltet und sichtbar wird. Es sind zunächst sprachliche Darstellungen jener Ähnlichkeiten, in denen ‚die Welt mit Figuren des Wissens‘ zusammengehalten ist. [...] Es sind (geschriebene) *Darstellungen von Vorstellungen*, die auf dem Wege einer sprachlichen Nachahmung der Vorstellung die darin stillgestellte Bewegung wieder verflüssigen<sup>27</sup>,

lässt sich anhand der Kontextualisierung *maqoms* in den *Denkbildern* und der „Erfahrung“ im *Erzähler*-Aufsatz konkretisieren.

Maqom – in der Bedeutung „Kommentar“

Alle Themen und Aspekte – der Weg der Rede und der Geschichte vom Göttlich-Religiösen, über Erinnerung und Gedächtnis, eine wiederkehrende Zeitvorstellung bis hin zu Märchen und Mythos –, die im *Erzähler*-Aufsatz beschrieben werden, haben auch schon in den *Denkbildern* eine Rolle gespielt. Wenn Benjamin in *Der Erzähler* wiederholt das Moment der Oralität hervorhebt, das für ihn ein wesentliches Charakteristikum der Geschichten bzw. der Erzählungen ausmacht, und das auch buchstäblich meint als Geschichten – d. h. Erfahrungen –, die ausgetauscht werden, von Mund zu Mund, von Generation zu Generation gehen, denen gelauscht und deren Erzählerstimme gehört wird, wie Kinder den Märchen lauschen und wie die Menschheit den Mythen zuhört, dann beschreibt er jenen Prozess der Traditionsweitergabe, mit dem auch Scholem seine Darstellung über die jüdische Mystik abgeschlossen hat. Scholem endet mit einer Geschichte, die ihm Schmuël J. Agnon erzählt hat, deren Kerntext aber aus einer chassidischen Sammlung von Geschichten über Rabbi Israel von Rischin stammt:

Wenn der Baal-schem etwas Schwieriges zu erledigen hatte, irgendein geheimes Werk zum Nutzen der Geschöpfe, so ging er an eine bestimmte Stelle im Walde, zündete ein Feuer an und sprach, in mystische Meditation versunken, Gebete – und alles geschah, wie er es sich vorgenommen hatte. Wenn eine Generation später der Maggid von Meseritz dasselbe zu tun hatte, ging er an jene Stelle im Walde und sagte: ‚Das Feuer können wir nicht mehr machen, aber die Gebete können wir sprechen‘ – und alles ging nach seinem Willen. Wieder eine Generation später sollte Rabbi Mosche Leib aus

<sup>27</sup> Weigel, *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit*, S. 58.

Sassow jene Tat vollbringen. Auch er ging in den Wald und sagte: ‚Wir können kein Feuer mehr anzünden, und wir kennen auch die geheimen Meditationen nicht mehr, die das Gebet beleben; aber wir kennen den Ort im Walde, wo all das hingehört, und das muß genügen.‘ – Und es genügte. Als aber wieder eine Generation später Rabbi Israel von Rischin jene Tat zu vollbringen hatte, da setzte er sich in seinem Schloß auf seinen goldenen Stuhl und sagte: ‚Wir können kein Feuer machen, wir können keine Gebete sprechen, wir kennen auch den Ort nicht mehr, aber wir können die Geschichte davon erzählen.‘ Und – so fügt der Erzähler [Agnon, D. G.] hinzu – seine Erzählung allein hatte dieselbe Wirkung wie die Taten der drei anderen.<sup>28</sup>

Gegen die „Veräußerung“ und Äußerlichkeit der neuen Zeit, die die Magie verloren hat, setzt Benjamin in einem der letzten Denkbilder die *Kunst zu erzählen*:

Die Information hat ihren Lohn mit dem Augenblick dahin, in dem sie neu war. Sie lebt nur in diesem Augenblick. Sie muß sich gänzlich an ihn ausliefern und ohne Zeit zu verlieren sich ihm erklären. Anders die Erzählung: sie verausgabt sich nicht. Sie bewahrt ihre Kraft im Innern und ist nach langer Zeit der Entfaltung fähig.<sup>29</sup>

Die Kunst des Erzählens bekommt hier eine „heilende“ Funktion wie in dem Abschnitt *Erzählung und Heilung*. Dort heißt es:

Und so entsteht die Frage, ob nicht die Erzählung das rechte Klima und die günstigste Bedingung manch einer Heilung bilden mag. Ja, ob nicht jede Krankheit heilbar wäre, wenn sie nur weit genug – bis an die Mündung – sich auf dem Strome des Erzählens verflößen ließe?<sup>30</sup>

Es ist das Vorbild des Erzählens, das auch im Chassidismus eine Rolle spielt, worauf im Essay *Der Erzähler* nicht nur mit der Figur des „Gerechten“ bei Leskov angespielt wird, sondern auch, wenn es heißt:

Die *Erinnerung* stiftet die Kette der Tradition, welche das Geschehene von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht weiterleitet. [...] Sie stiftet das Netz, welches alle Geschichten miteinander am Ende bilden. Eine schließt immer an die andere an, wie es die großen Erzähler immer und vor allem die orientalischen gern gezeigt haben. In jedem derselben lebt eine Scheherazade, der zu jeder Stelle ihrer Geschichten eine neue Geschichte einfällt. Dieses ist ein episches *Gedächtnis* und das Musische der Erzählung.<sup>31</sup>

Wobei Benjamin hier mit der Verbindung von Erinnerung und Musik auf den Gesang, die Urform der Sprache anspielt, worüber Vico schreibt:

Die Ägypter schrieben Erinnerungssprüche an ihre Verstorbenen in Versen auf Syringen oder Säulen, die nach ‚sir‘ genannt sind, was ‚Gesang‘ heißen will; von daher

28 Gershom Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980, S. 384. Scholem weist darauf hin, dass der Kern dieser Anekdote sich in einer Sammlung von Geschichten über Rabbi Israel von Rischin, Kenesseth Jisrael, Warschau 1906, S. 23, finden lasse.

29 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 437.

30 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 430.

31 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 453 f.

kommt der Name ‚Sirena‘, eine zweifelsohne wegen ihres Gesanges berühmte Gottheit; und wegen ihres Gesanges war, sagt Ovid, die Nymphe namens Syrinx nicht minder berühmt als wegen ihrer Schönheit.<sup>32</sup>

In *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie*<sup>33</sup> verbindet Benjamin das Trauerspiel mit Musik:

Das Wort in der Verwandlung ist das sprachliche Prinzip des Trauerspiels. Es gibt ein reines Gefühlsleben des Wortes, in dem es sich vom Laute der Natur zum reinen Laute des Gefühls läutert. Diesem Wort ist die Sprache nur ein Durchgangsstadium im Zyklus seiner Verwandlung und in diesem Worte spricht das Trauerspiel. Es beschreibt den Weg vom Naturlaut über die Klage zur Musik.<sup>34</sup>

Benjamin folgt damit einem Verständnis von Narrativität, das in der talmudischen Tradition wurzelt.<sup>35</sup> Zu der besonderen Spannung zwischen dem Wort als göttlicher Offenbarung oder Stimme und der Schrift als nachträglichem Menschenwerk tritt als weitere Komponente der Rezipient als Produzent und Akteur des Textes hinzu. In der Auffassung der Erzählerkette tritt somit die erste Bedeutung *maqoms* als „Kommentar des Textes“ hervor. Diese Gedankenfigur der Bedeutung des Kommentars wird bei Benjamin nun in die Konzeption der Kritik umgedeutet, die die Texte der Vergangenheit und dem Vergessen entreißen könne.<sup>36</sup>

Anders als in den „Informationen“, die die „neue“ Zeit verbreitet, ist in den erzählten Geschichten noch Raum für andere, „merkwürdige“<sup>37</sup> Erklärungen. Wie in dem Kinderspiel *Brezel, Feder, Pause, Klage, Firlrefanz*, in dem Wörter ohne Bindung und Zusammenhang in einen neuen, schlüssigen Kontext zusammengesetzt werden, folgt die Lektüre heiliger Texte demselben Prinzip. Das Element des „Spiels“, das hier beschrieben wird, wird in *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie* konkretisiert, wenn es heißt:

32 Giambattista Vico, *Prinzipien einer neuen Wissenschaft über die gemeinsame Natur der Völker* [1725], übersetzt von Vittorio Hösle und Christoph Hermann. Hamburg: Meiner, 2009, S. 235. In Kafkas kleinem Text *Das Schweigen der Sirenen* ist folglich die Erinnerungskette gestört und die Weitergabe der Tradition nicht mehr garantiert.

33 Benjamin, GS II.1, S. 133 – 140.

34 Benjamin, GS II.1, S. 138.

35 Das sich offenbarende Gotteserlebnis erfolgt auch im Chassidismus nicht über die erzählten Geschichten, sondern über Tanz und Gesang, den Nigunim, den Liedern ohne Worte.

36 In „Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik“ heißt es: „Kritik ist also, ganz im Gegensatz zur heutigen Auffassung ihres Wesens, in ihrer zentralen Absicht nicht Beurteilung, sondern einerseits Vollendung, Erlösung im Absoluten.“ In: Benjamin, GS I.1, S. 11 – 122, hier: S. 78. Und in dem Essay „Über Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften“ greift er das wieder auf und verbindet es mit der Differenz zwischen „Wahrheits- und Sachgehalt“: „Die Kritik sucht den Wahrheitsgehalt eines Kunstwerks, der Kommentar seinen Sachgehalt.“ In: Benjamin, GS I.1, S. 124 – 201, hier: S. 125.

37 Benjamin, GS I.1, S. 436.



Geschichte wird zugleich mit Bedeutung in der Menschengsprache, diese Sprache erstarrt in der Bedeutung [...]. Es durchdringen sich die beiden metaphysischen Prinzipien der Wiederholung im Trauerspiel und stellen seine metaphysische Ordnung dar: Cyklik und Wiederholung, Kreis und zwei. Denn es ist der Kreis des Gefühls, der in der Musik sich schließt, und es ist die Zwei des Wortes und seiner Bedeutung, welche die Ruhe der tiefen Sehnsucht zerstört und Trauer über die Natur verbreitet.<sup>38</sup>

Was in diesem Kinderspiel „auratisch“ aufscheint, ist eine Methodik des Midrasch, zur Erläuterung einer Textstelle nämlich auch weit auseinander liegende Verse, die scheinbar nichts miteinander zu tun haben, hinzuzuziehen, um auf diese Weise die Bedeutung der auszulegenden Textstelle zu erweitern, bzw. – wie Benjamin es nennt – um auf den „Wahrheitsgehalt“ des Textes hinzuweisen.<sup>39</sup>

Wenn die Kindersprache, die Sprache des kindlichen Spiels, an die Magie der Ursprache, an die Magie der heiligen Texte rührt, so folgt die Erneuerung der Sprache Benjamin zu Folge nicht von außen (wie es z. B. der Sozialismus der Avantgarde in Russland versucht hat, der gleichermaßen gegen die Rationalisierung der westlichen Welt und gegen das eigene Erbe der mythischen Zeit angetreten war und den politischen Subtext in dem Aufsatz über Leskov kennzeichnet), sondern müsste von innen, von der Weitergabe der Tradition (*l'dor vador*) her erfolgen. In seinem berühmten Bild vom Engel der Geschichte heißt es, dass dieser „der Zukunft den Rücken zukehre“<sup>40</sup> (meine Hervorhebung). Legt man jedoch hier die hebräische Etymologie zugrunde, ließe sich der Satz auch so lesen: „er kehrt der Zukunft sein Inneres zu.“<sup>41</sup> Das ist die Aufgabe der „Kritik“, worauf Benjamin wiederholt sowohl mit der Figur des „umgekehrten Strumpfs“<sup>42</sup> als auch mit der

38 Benjamin, GS I.1, S. 139.

39 Das demonstriert er u. a. eindrucklich im Essay „Über Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften“, in dem er den „mythischen“ Sachgehalt des Romans vom Wahrheitsgehalt, der „Hoffnung auf Erlösung“ trennt. Benjamin, GS I.1, S. 121 – 201, hier: S. 122.

40 Benjamin, GS I.2, S. 698.

41 Das hebräische *gav* bedeutet „Rücken“, aber auch „Inneres“.

42 In der *Berliner Kindheit* findet er für das Verhältnis von Form und Inhalt das Bild des eingerollten Strumpfs, das er auch schon im Proust-Essay erzählt hat: „Jedes Paar hatte das Aussehen einer kleinen Tasche. Nichts ging mir über das Vergnügen, die Hand so tief wie möglich in ihr Inneres zu versenken. Ich tat das nicht um ihrer Wärme willen. Es war ‚Das Mitgebrachte‘, das mich immer im eingerollten Innern in der Hand hielt, was mich in die Tiefe zog. Wenn ich es mit der Faust umspannt und mich nach Kräften in dem Besitz der weichen, wollenen Masse bestätigt hatte, begann der zweite Teil des Spieles, der die Enthüllung brachte. Denn nun machte ich mich daran, ‚Das Mitgebrachte‘ aus seiner wollenen Tasche auszuwickeln. Ich zog es immer näher an mich heran, bis das Bestürzende sich ereignete: ich hatte ‚Das Mitgebrachte‘ herausgeholt, aber ‚Die Tasche‘, in der es gelegene hatte, war nicht mehr da. Nicht oft genug konnte ich die Probe auf diesen Vorgang machen. Er lehrte mich, dass Form und Inhalt, Hülle und Verhülltes dasselbe sind. Er leitete mich an, die Wahrheit so behutsam aus der Dichtung hervorzuziehen wie die Kinderhand den Strumpf aus ‚Der Tasche‘ holte.“ Benjamin, GS VII, S. 416. Weigel kommentiert das Bild: „Soll diese ‚Struktur der Traumwelt‘ in der Strumpfgeschichte veranschaulicht werden, so besetzt der



Ver- oder Umkehrung der Zeit zusätzlich hinweist. So läuft beispielsweise in den Miniaturen *Selbstbildnisse des Träumenden* die Zeit rückwärts. Benjamin findet dafür das Traumbild der Großmutter, die in ihrem Bett liegt und beim Näherkommen ein „Baby“ ist, „das wie ein Erwachsener gekleidet war“.<sup>43</sup> In den *Selbstbildnissen des Träumenden* im Abschnitt *Der Seher* tritt die Umkehrung der Zeit auch in Gestalt des Propheten Daniel auf, der die Träume – also die Zukunft – deuten kann und der ein „Gespenst im Innern des Hauses“ sieht.<sup>44</sup> Auch hier wird wieder die „Zukunft sehen“ mit dem Inneren verbunden.

Bei dem von Ovid überlieferten Pygmalion-Mythos wird das durch die Performanz hervorgebrachte Ereignis umgekehrt: In *Der Liebhaber* erwacht mit der Berührung des Liebhabers die Geliebte nicht zum Leben, sondern erstarrt im Gegenteil zu Elfenbein.<sup>45</sup> Klarer kann man die verlorengegangene Magie in der nachmythischen Zeit der Moderne kaum beschreiben. Die Hand des modernen Menschen erweckt nicht mehr zum Leben oder berührt Lebendiges, sie stößt nur noch auf tote, kalte Materie. Die einstige Performanz des göttlichen Wortes ist gestört. Die „Magie ist liquidiert“ heißt es im *Mimetischen Vermögen*.<sup>46</sup> Diese Umkehrung der Zeit wird noch deutlicher in seinem letzten Werk, den Thesen *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, formuliert.

Dies ist eine Bewegung der Anamnesis, welche dennoch nicht zu einer ‚sinnlichen Repräsentation der Bilder‘ zurückführt; im Gegensatz zur platonischen Erinnerung, die grundsätzlich visueller Natur ist, ist die Anamnesis, auf welche Benjamin anspielt, akustischer Natur. Wie bei der biblischen Offenbarung ist es nicht die Sichtbarkeit [...], durch die sich die Wahrheit der menschlichen Wahrnehmung zeigt, sondern die Hörbarkeit als ‚innere Sinnesform‘. Das Hören muß hier im physikalischen Sinne des Wortes verstanden werden,

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Strumpf darin die Position des Dritten, an deren Stelle dann ‚das Bild‘ tritt, wenn von der Analogie der Strumpfgeschichte wieder zum Thema von Prousts Bilderbegehren hinübergeleitet wird. [...] Das Bild – als Drittes, als nicht-materielle Erscheinung einer Ähnlichkeit, die der Struktur des Traumbildes vergleichbar ist – ist für Benjamin jene Gestalt, in der Erfahrungen, Geschichte und Wirklichkeit erkennbar werden, in der sie in Erscheinung treten wie in einem Erinnerungsbild.“ Weigel, *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit*, S. 53 f.

43 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 421. Kafka hat die gleiche Thematik in *Das nächste Dorf* beschrieben. In Gesprächen, die Benjamin mit Brecht über Kafka führt, lässt sich ablesen, wie Benjamin diesen kleinen Kafka-Text verstand. Während Brecht zunehmend eine ablehnende Haltung gegenüber Kafka einnahm und Benjamin vorhielt, sein Aufsatz über Kafka leiste dem jüdischen Faschismus Vorschub, weil er das Dunkle um diese Figur noch vermehre statt es zu zerteilen, folgte Benjamin hingegen Kafkas Bildlogik in der Erzählung und erklärte: Das wahre Maß des Lebens sei die Änderung, sie durchlaufe es rückschauend und blitzartig wie man ein paar Seiten zurückblättert. Aus dieser Auslegung gewinnt er dann für seinen Essay so zentrale Bilder vom Leben, das sich, rückwärts gelesen, in Schrift wandelt und kommt zu der Bemerkung: „Umkehr ist die Richtung des Studiums, die das Dasein in Schrift verwandelt“. Benjamin, GS II.2, S. 437.

44 Benjamin, GS II.2, S. 422. Vgl. dazu auch Martin Buber, *Daniel*. Leipzig: Insel-Verl., 1913.

45 Benjamin, GS II.2, S. 422.

46 Benjamin, GS II.1, S. 210 – 213, hier: S. 213.

nämlich als Fähigkeit, die lautlichen Klänge der Worte durch das Ohr aufzunehmen. Das Ursprüngliche zu kennen bedeutet demnach, ein erstes Hören wieder zu vernehmen, die ursprüngliche Bedeutung der Sprache von neuem zu hören, jenseits ihrer durch Wiederholung und Gewohnheit erlittenen Abnutzung.<sup>47</sup>

Erinnerung ist auch bei Benjamin mit dem Hören verbunden.<sup>48</sup> In *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie* heißt es: „ja endlich kommt alles auf das Ohr der Klage an, denn erst die tiefst vernommene und gehörte Klage wird Musik. Wo in der Tragödie die ewige Starre des gesprochenen Wortes sich erhebt, sammelt das Trauerspiel die endlose Resonanz seines Klanges.“<sup>49</sup>

### Maqom in der Bedeutung „Ort“

Ist in den Städtebildern der innere Raum der Häuser äußerlich sichtbar – ganz konkret in *Neapel*, dessen „Porosität“ der Wände und Mauern überall betont wird – sodass „die privateste Angelegenheit [...] Kollektivsache“<sup>50</sup> wird mit dem Ergebnis, dass „die Stube auf der Straße wiederkehrt, mit Stühlen, Herd und Altar, so, nur viel lauter, wandert die Straße in die Stube hinein“<sup>51</sup>, so ist dieses dort noch sichtbare innere Leben, das nach außen gekehrt war, nun vollständig ins Innere verlegt.<sup>52</sup> Vom Äußeren der klaren Konturen, Buchstäblichen, auch Begrifflichen geht auch in den Städtebildern die Bewegung ins Innere, wo die Konturen zwar schwächer oder undeutlicher werden, aber dafür die Stimmen lauter. Auch in *Weimar* ist die Duplizität von innen und außen präsent: Das „Zimmer wird zur Loge“.<sup>53</sup> Benjamin spielt damit auch auf den Beginn von Goethes *Dichtung und Wahrheit* an, wo es heißt:

47 Mosès, *Der Engel der Geschichte*, S. 99.

48 Womit er indirekt auch auf das „Schma Israel“ anspielt.

49 Benjamin, GS II.1, S. 140.

50 Benjamin, GS IV, S. 314.

51 Benjamin, GS IV, S. 314.

52 Szondi hat auf die seltsame Ähnlichkeit der Schilderungen hingewiesen, die Benjamin von den Wohnungen Moskaus und Neapels gibt: „Während Benjamin im Süden [...] auf den Gegensatz jener Vereinzelung stieß, die er am Anfang der *Nordischen See* eisig beschreibt, auf ein Kollektivleben, das sich seinem Ursprung noch nicht entfremdet hat, konnte er im Sowjetrussland des Jahres 1926 eine Gesellschaft in statu nascendi beobachten. Archaisches und Revolutionäres schienen verwandter, als es die gängige Unterscheidung von konservativ und progressiv wahrhaben möchte. Dabei ging es nicht nur um jene Vorstellung vom Urkommunismus, die das Russland der dreißiger Jahre auf dem Weg zum Polizeistaat, mit einer Positivität, die der dialektischen Lehre hohnspricht, verraten hat. [...] Das Privatleben, das der Süden gar nicht sich ausbilden ließ, hat der Bolschewismus abgeschafft.“ Peter Szondi, „Benjamins Städtebilder.“ In: Ders., *Schriften II*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, S. 295 – 309, hier: S. 301.

53 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 353.

Für uns Kinder [...] war die untere weitläufige Hausflur der liebste Raum, welche neben der Türe ein großes hölzernes Gitterwerk hatte, wodurch man unmittelbar mit der Straße und der freien Luft in Verbindung kam. Einen solchen Vogelbauer, mit dem viele Häuser versehen waren, nannte man ein Geräms. Die Frauen saßen darin, um zu nähen und zu stricken [...], und die Straßen gewannen dadurch in der guten Jahreszeit ein südliches Ansehen.<sup>54</sup>

Goethe ist derjenige, der in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* noch buchstäblich die Welt zum Klingen bringt – „An einem schönen Nachmittag, da alles ruhig im Hause war, trieb ich im Geräms mit meinen Schüsseln und Töpfen mein Wesen, und da weiter nichts dabei herauskommen wollte, warf ich das Geschirr auf die Straße und freute mich, dass es so lustig zerbrach...“<sup>55</sup> Im Erinnerungsraum *Weimar* ist das dann nur noch im übertragenen Sinn gemeint:

in der Anordnung der vier Stuben, in denen Goethe schlief, las, diktierte und schrieb, die Kräfte, die eine Welt ihm Antwort geben hießen, wenn er das Innerste anschlug. Wir aber müssen eine Welt zum Tönen bringen, um den schwachen Oberton eines Innern erklingen zu lassen.<sup>56</sup>

Mit der Parallelisierung des „Romane Lesens“ und des „Verschlingen des Essens“, wird Essen und Lesen so überdeutlich gleichgesetzt, wird die „Muse des Romans zur Küchenfee“, die „die Welt aus dem Rohzustande [erhebt], um ihr Essbares herzustellen, um ihr ihren Geschmack abzugewinnen“<sup>57</sup>, dass das Essen buchstäblich zur wenig rätselhaften Metapher der geistigen Nahrung wird.

In mehrfachen kreisförmigen Bewegungen verlaufen die Konnotationen vom realen Ort über den Topos oder mythischen Ort (wofür z. B. *Weimar* und sein Mythos Goethe steht) hin zum nebulösen Traum- oder Rauschbild, in dem die klaren Konturen der materiellen Welt sich auflösen. Das ist die zweite Bedeutung *maqoms* – als „Ort“ –, die hier thematisiert wird. Das ist in den Städtebildern genauso zu beobachten – *Neapel, Moskau, Weimar, Marseille* bis hin zu *Haschisch in Marseille* – wie in den Erinnerungsbildern, in denen es um das Essen geht: *Frische Feigen, Falerner und Stockfisch, Borscht* bis es in die märchenhafte Sequenz *Maulbeer-Omelette* mündet. Die Traum- bzw. Denkbilder hingegen lesen sich dann wie Gegenentwürfe zu den in den Städte- bzw. Erinnerungsbildern angedeuteten Themen. Sie vermitteln Zustände, in denen Offenbarungen, Visionen, Erscheinungen sich ereignen: Traum, Schatten, verschwommene Wahrnehmung und immer wieder das Zusammenfließen von Ort und Zeit, von außen und innen. Benjamin vollzieht also in den *Denkbildern* eine Bewegung vom Sehen zum Hören und schließlich zum Sagen, d. h. von der Offenbarung zur

54 Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1975, S. 16.

55 Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, S.16.

56 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 355.

57 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 436.

Sprache, vom Sehen der Rückseite zum inneren Sprechen, und spielt damit auf das Sinaierlebnis an, bei dem alle drei Konnotationen *maqoms* präsent sind: Mose verhüllt sein Angesicht, zieht die Schuhe aus, denn der *Ort*, auf dem er steht, so wird ihm gesagt, sei heiliges Land, und vernimmt die *Stimme* Gottes, die ihm schließlich ihren *Namen* offenbart.<sup>58</sup> Dieses Nebeneinander von Wort und Bild, wovon auch der Midrasch lebt, ist im Titel der Textminiaturen bereits angedeutet. Mit dem Weg vom Sehen zum Sagen wird aber auch die Möglichkeit der Erlösung, das Messianische angedeutet, die in der Sprache, im Namen liegt, womit die dritte Bedeutung *maqoms* – als „Gottesname“ aufgerufen ist.

### Maqom in der Bedeutung „Name“

*Maqom* unterliegt in seiner Funktion als einer der Gottesnamen dem Prinzip der „Ersetzung“, das bei Benjamin – ähnlich wie bei Kafka – zum produktiven Element der „Entstellung“ der tradierten Begriffe und Bilder wird. *Maqom* ist nun der topographische „Ort“, der Benjamins *Passagenwerk* und den *Denkbildern* zugrunde liegt. *Maqom* bezeichnet aber auch den Raum der schriftlichen und mündlichen Tradition, die bei Benjamin als „Kritik“, d. h. als „Kommentar“ das Wesen seiner Literaturlektüre bestimmt, und schließlich bezeichnet *maqom* das inhärent Messianische, das im Gottesnamen mitklingt, das in Benjamins Sprach- und Geschichtsauffassung als Figur der Erlösung präsent ist und schon in seiner frühen Sprachkonzeption<sup>59</sup>, aber auch in den letzten *Denkbildern* wie: *In der Sonne*, *Der Enkel*, *Der Seher*, *Kurze Schatten II* und *Denkbilder* zum Ausdruck kommt.

Lässt sich in den *Denkbildern* eine Profanierung *maqoms* rekonstruieren, liegt dem *Erzähler*-Aufsatz keine explizit hebräische Vokabel zugrunde. Und doch wird auch hier der Text von einem „Leitwort“<sup>60</sup> bestimmt: dem Archisem „Erfahrung“. Es entwickelt eine überaus multiple Konnotation und steht sowohl für Göttliches, Mündlichkeit, Traditionsweitergabe, Lauschen (der Natur), für Deutungsoffenheit und für lebendige Rede. Es ist Sinnbild für Erinnerung und Gedächtnis, aber zugleich ist „Erfahrung“ auch wortwörtlich ein „Handwerk“, denn es ist mit der Tat (einen Rat geben) verbunden. Zeitlich verstanden meint es eine Wiederkehr, denn es führt schließlich zu Märchen, Kindersprache und Mythos und grenzt sich vom faktualen

58 3. Mose 3.

59 Vgl. den 1916 verfassten Aufsatz „Über die Sprache des Menschen und über Sprache überhaupt.“ Benjamin, *GS* II.1.

60 Buber benutzt diesen Begriff und meint damit: „Es geht somit um jenes Strukturprinzip, dessen prägnanteste Erscheinung ich als ‚Leitwort‘ bezeichne. Man vergegenwärtige sich nur diese Sprecher, lehrende Wahrer mündlichen Urguts und Träger des Wortes im geschichtlichen Augenblick.“ Martin Buber, „Zur Verdeutschung des letzten Bandes der Schrift.“ In: Martin Buber und Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift*. Heidelberg: Schneider 1986, S. 21.

Erzählen des Augenblicks ab. Die Erfahrung übernimmt hier also die Funktion, die im „Trauerspiel“ die Klage einnimmt.

Das Plädoyer Benjamins in beiden Texten für die Aufbewahrung der Tradition in den poetischen Texten führt noch einmal zurück zu Scholems frühem Text über die *Klage und das Klagelied*<sup>61</sup>. Scholem hatte von Benjamin nicht nur den Gedanken der „Klage“ übernommen, sondern auch die damit einhergehende Unterscheidung zweier Aspekte der Sprache, die Benjamin 1916 in seinem ersten sprachphilosophischen Traktat *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen* formuliert hat: Die Sprache ist Namen, insofern in ihr sich der geistige Gehalt der Dinge mitteilt; und die Sprache ist zugleich Symbol des Nicht-Mittelbaren.<sup>62</sup> Diese zwei Reiche der Sprache, zwischen dem „des Offenbaren, Aussprechlichen, und des Symbolisierten, Verschwiegenen“, das der Kabbala inhärent ist, fordern folglich eine *Sprache auf der Grenze*. Und diese Grenze zwischen den beiden Sprachreichen zeigt sich auch für den frühen Scholem in der Klage und im Klagelied.

Denn bedeutet jede Sprache sonst immer einen positiven Ausdruck eines Wesens, und liegt ihre Unendlichkeit in den zwei angrenzenden Ländern des Offenbaren und Verschwiegenen, dergestalt, dass sie über beide sich ausdehnt im eigentlichsten Sinn, so ist dies in dem Fall jener Sprache anders, die dadurch bezeichnet ist, dass sie *durchweg* auf der Grenze, genau auf der Grenze dieser beiden Reiche liegt. Sie offenbart nichts, denn das Wesen, das sich in ihr offenbart, hat keinen Gehalt (und darum zugleich kann man sagen, dass sie *alles* offenbart) und verschweigt nichts, denn ihr ganzes Dasein beruht auf der Revolution des Schweigens. Sie ist nicht symbolisch, sondern *deutet nur hin* aufs Symbol, sie ist nicht gegenständlich, sondern vernichtet den Gegenstand. Diese Sprache ist die Klage.<sup>63</sup> (Meine Hervorhebung)

Die Sprache der Klage, sagt auch Scholem, hat als Gegenüber nicht die Menschensprache. Deshalb gibt es auch keine Antwort auf die Klage, sondern nur das

61 Gershom Scholem, „Über Klage und Klagelied“, Januar 1918, 18-seitiges handschriftliches Manuskript, Arc, 4° 1599/277-II/20, im Scholem-Nachlass in der Handschriften- und Archivabteilung der Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, in der Druckfassung: Gershom Scholem, „Über Klage und Klagelied.“ In: *Tagebücher*. Bd. 2: 1917 – 1913. Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verl., 1995, S. 128 – 133.

62 Benjamin, GS II.1, S. 156 f. Mitteilung meint hier nicht die kommunikative Funktion der Sprache. Noch ausführlicher geht Benjamin auf die Unterscheidung zwischen Wort, Begriff und Namen in „Zur Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik“ ein, indem er sich mit Russels Sprachphilosophie auseinandersetzt. Dort heißt es u. a.: „Der Grund der intentionalen Unmittelbarkeit, die jedem Bedeutenden, also zunächst dem Worte, eignet, ist der Name in ihm. Das Verhältnis von Wort, Name und Gegenstand der Intention ist folgendes: 1. Weder das Wort noch der Name ist identisch mit dem Gegenstand der Intention. 2. Der Name ist etwas (ein Element) am Gegenstand der Intention selbst, was sich aus ihm herauslöst; daher ist der Name nicht zufällig. 3. Das Wort ist nicht der Name, jedoch kommt im Wort der Name gebunden an andere Elemente oder an ein andres Element [...] vor.“ Benjamin, GS VI, S. 9 – 53, hier: S. 11.

63 Scholem, „Über Klage und Klagelied“, S. 128.

Verstummen. Das Gegenteil der Sprache kann also nur die Offenbarung selber sein, „und darum kann sie auch auf keine andere Weise überwunden, transformiert werden als durch *Hinführung* auf die Offenbarung.“<sup>64</sup> (Meine Hervorhebung) Etwa 50 Jahre später ersetzt Scholem in seinem Werk über die *Jüdische Mystik*, das er dem Andenken Walter Benjamins widmet, die Klage durch Kabbala. Allerdings argumentiert er jetzt in der umgekehrten Richtung:

Hier der Anfang als Geburt von Dichtung und Tradition aus einer Figur des Erlöschens, dort die Reflexion eines Endes, gegen das – als Rettung – die Dichter aufgebeten werden. Und während sich mit der Thematisierung der unmöglichen Antwort auf die Klage die Dichtungstheorie des Klagelieds *an Gott* adressiert, geht es in der Sprachtheorie der Kabbala um die Frage, ob der Nachhall des Namens Gottes, der sich aus der Sprache zurückgezogen hat, noch gehört, ob die Adressierung *durch ihn* noch vernommen wird, – ob in der Lektüre noch ein Echo der Stimme wirksam sei.<sup>65</sup>

Es ist eben das Thema, das sich auch bei Benjamin findet. Bei ihm ist es die „Natur, die klagen würde, wenn ihr denn Sprache verliehen wäre“<sup>66</sup>, doch der Naturlaut führt dann über die Klage hin zur Musik: „Das Spiel muß aber die Erlösung finden, und für das Trauerspiel ist das erlösende Mysterium die Musik; die Wiedergeburt der Gefühle in einer übersinnlichen Natur.“<sup>67</sup>

In *Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin* übernimmt die Dichtung jetzt als Gesang – und nicht mehr ausschließlich in klagender Funktion – diese Rolle:

Offenbar ist, dass der Tod in der Gestalt der ‚Einkehr‘ in die Mitte der Dichtung versetzt wurde, dass in dieser Mitte der Ursprung des Gesanges ist, als des Inbegriffs aller Funktionen, dass hier die Ideen der ‚Kunst‘, des ‚Wahren‘ entspringen als Ausdruck der beruhenden Einheit.<sup>68</sup>

Scholems Sprache der Klage auf der Grenze ist bei Benjamin das Singen auf der Schwelle.

Bei Benjamin bestimmen diese zwei Momente – die Mosès als die zwei Bewegungen der menschlichen Geschichte beschrieben hat, – die Aspekte des Erzählens. In dem Text *Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus. Eine Rede über das Sammeln* wird das sehr deutlich: Das Auspacken der Bibliothek weckt Erinnerungen, und das „Sammeln ist nur *ein* Verfahren der Erneuerung. [...] Die alte Welt erneuern – das ist der tiefste Wunsch des Sammlers, Neues zu erwerben, und darum steht der Sammler älterer Bücher dem Quell des Sammelns näher als der

64 Scholem, „Über Klage und Klagelied“, S. 128.

65 Sigrid Weigel, „Scholems Gedichte und seine Dichtungstheorie: Klage, Adressierung, Gabe und das Problem einer biblischen Sprache in unserer Zeit.“ In: S. Weigel und St. Mosès (Hgg.), *Gershom Scholem. Literatur und Rhetorik*. Wien u. a.: Böhlau, 2000, S. 16 – 47, hier: S. 32.

66 „Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie“ in Benjamin, *GS II.1*, S. 138.

67 Benjamin, *GS II.1*, S. 139.

68 Benjamin, *GS II.1*, S. 105 – 126, hier: S. 124.

Interessant für bibliophile Neudrucke.<sup>69</sup> Buch, Bibliothek, Literatur stehen dem Lesen der Bücher gegenüber: „...eine Eigenart der Sammler, Bücher nicht zu lesen...“<sup>70</sup>. Wenn die Bibliothek der Ort ist, an dem die Erinnerung aufbewahrt wird, ist das Lesen der Vorgang, diese Erinnerung in Gang zu setzen und weiterzugeben: „...so ist die eigentliche Erbschaft die triftigste Art und Weise zu einer Sammlung zu kommen. [...] Den vornehmsten Titel einer Sammlung wird darum immer ihre Vererbbarkeit bilden.“<sup>71</sup> Die hebräische Etymologie unterstützt Benjamins Dialektik: Aus der Wurzel für „lesen“ *kara* leitet sich die Bezeichnung für die „Bibel“ *mikra* (wörtlich: „das zu Lesende“) ab, das im Piel „lokalisieren“ oder „einen Ort bestimmen“ heißt. Die Bibel wäre demnach ein „Ort der Benennung“, der gelesen werden kann, während „erzählen“ *safar* ein Vorgang ist, der ein Schrifttum, eine Literatur *sifrut*, eine „Erzählung“ *sipur* und eine „Bibliothek“ *sifrija* schafft.<sup>72</sup>

So wie Ort und Erinnerung in den *Denkbildern* bzw. Erzählung und Erfahrung im *Erzähler*-Aufsatz verknüpft werden, werden auch Bild und Wort, sehen und gehen midraschisch verbunden, indem die einstige Magie „blitzartig aufscheint“.<sup>73</sup> Die Profanierungen *maqoms*, deren jeweilige Bedeutung nicht scharf voneinander getrennt, sondern ineinander verwoben sind, markieren alle eine Wahrnehmung, eine Topographie und einen Namen. Alle drei Bedeutungen weisen dabei auf das Messianische hin, geben seine Präsenz performativ zu sehen. In diesem performativen „Zu-sehen-geben“ steht Benjamin in der Tradition einer Textexegese, die von der Säkularisierung der Moderne unberührt bleibt. Die theologische Gewissheit oder Verankerung der Kultur ist aus Benjamins Texten nicht nur nicht geschwunden, er hat auch die Methode selbst ihres exegetischen Umgangs in die Moderne „übersetzt“. Wenn er – wie Mosès sagt –

69 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 390.

70 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 390.

71 Benjamin, GS IV.1, S. 395.

72 Dieser Schriftbegriff wird im „Passagenwerk“, dessen einzelne Abschnitte alphabetisch geordnet sind, weiter ausgearbeitet. Das Durchschreiten der Stadt Paris wird mit dem Genre des Abecedariums verbunden. Witte bemerkt zur Form des Alphabet-Texts zurecht: „Der Buchstabe gewinnt seine Aura aus der Heiligkeit, neutraler ausgedrückt: aus der Autorität des Texts bzw. des texterzeugenden Mediums (wenn man Schrift im doppelten Sinne von Buchstabeninventar und mittels dessen realisiertem Text versteht). Und in dieser Eigenschaft vermag er nun symbolisch die besondere Dignität jener Schrift zu behaupten. [...] diese Texte [sind] als Metaphern für ein *Prinzip Text* selbst [zu verstehen], für eine bestimmte Auffassung vom Text, die diesem einen extraordinären Wahrheitsanspruch zuschreibt. Der alphabetisch organisierte Text demonstriert seine eigene Textwürde, die Schrift hypostasiert sich in diesem veredelnden Spiegel zum ‚Buch‘, zur ‚wahren Schrift‘.“ Georg Witte, „Katalogkatastrophen – Das Alphabet in der russischen Literatur.“ In: Susi Kotzinger und Gabriele Rippl (Hgg.): *Zeichen zwischen Klartext und Arabeske*. Amsterdam u. a.: Rodopi, 1994, S. 35 – 55, hier: S. 36.

73 Vgl. „Über das mimetische Vermögen“, Benjamin, GS II.1, S. 210 – 213.



eine „Umdeutung der jüdischen Vorstellungen in säkulare Begriffe“<sup>74</sup> vornimmt, betätigt er sich als Praktiker der Intertextualität *avant la lettre*. Was Renate Lachmann für die russische Literatur herausgearbeitet und mit der Kultursemiotik Jurij Lotmans verbunden hat<sup>75</sup>, findet sich bei Benjamin hinsichtlich der religiösen Texttradition. Insofern bietet sich hier zum Abschluss die Frage an: War Benjamin hinsichtlich der Bewahrung bzw. Transformation der „Väter-Kultur“ auch von den Diskussionen und Positionen der russischen Avantgarde Szene beeinflusst? Benjamin verbringt den Winter 1926/27 in Moskau und kommt damit mitten hinein in die Neuorientierungen der russischen Intellektuellen und ihre zahlreichen Debatten über das Verhältnis zur russischen Kultur.<sup>76</sup> Er besucht Meyerchol'ds Theater<sup>77</sup> genauso wie die kulturpolitischen

74 Stéphane Mosès, „Benjamins Judentum.“ In: Weidner, *Profanes Leben*, S. 141 – 151, hier: S. 148.

75 Die Intertextualität unterscheidet drei grundsätzliche Modi der Verweisung von Texten zur Beschreibung der Art der semantischen Relation zum fremden Text und Transposition im neuen Text: „Kontiguität“ bezeichnet die Teilhabe an der Tradition und wird verstanden als eine Form, deren Weiterschreibung, „Similarität“, als Wiederholung der Tradition durch Neu- und Überschreiben der kulturellen Zeichen verstanden wird und „Tropik“ bezeichnet eine Form des Wegwendens vom Vorläufer, den Versuch einer Überbietung, als Abwehr oder auch als Löschen der Spuren des Vorläufertextes. Ausführlich siehe dazu: Renate Lachmann, *Gedächtnis und Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995. Neben der Analyse der intertextuellen Verfahren in der modernen russischen Literatur, analysiert Lachmann außerdem anhand der Avantgarde-Bewegungen in Russland – Symbolismus, Futurismus und Akmeismus – auch deren jeweilige Einstellung zur Tradition. Sie beobachtet dabei, dass bei den Futuristen (u. a. Majakowski) das intertextuelle Verfahren der Tropik dominiert, während die Akmeisten (u. a. Mandel'stam) die Similaritätsbeziehung zum Text favorisieren und im Symbolismus (u. a. Bel'ij) eher die Verfahren der Kontiguitätsintertextualität überwiegen.

76 Was Benjamin von der von der Partei propagierten Literatur hält, wird in seinem Aufsatz „Neue Dichtung in Russland“, GS II.2, S. 755 – 762, deutlich: „...die russischen Autoren müssen heute schon mit einem neuen und mit einem sehr viel primitiveren Publikum, als die früheren Generationen es kannten, rechnen. Ihre Hauptaufgabe ist, an die Massen heranzukommen. Raffinements der Psychologie, der Wortwahl, der Formulierung müssen völlig an diesem Publikum abprallen. Was es braucht sind nicht Formulierungen sondern Informationen, nicht Variationen sondern Wiederholungen, nicht Virtuosenstücke sondern spannende Berichte. [...] in Russland [ist] der freie Schriftsteller auf dem Aussterbe-Etat [...], der breite Durchschnitt aller Schreibenden in dieser oder jener Form [ist] dem Staatsapparat verbunden [...] und als Beamter oder anders durch ihn kontrolliert wird, so hat man ein Gradnetz der herrschenden Zustände.“ Benjamin, GS II.2, S. 756 f.

77 Über Meyerchol'd schreibt er: „Wsewolod Meyerhold arbeitete ebenfalls unter dem Zarismus als Theaterdirektor. Stellte als erster das Theater in den Dienst der Revolution. Durch einige kühne Neuerungen suchte er eine neue Ehrlichkeit, eine Absage an den Mystizismus der Rampe, einen breiten Kontakt mit der Masse zu finden. Er spielt ohne Vorhang, ohne Rampenbeleuchtung, mit verschiebbaren Dekorationen, die auf der offenen Bühne so gehandhabt werden, dass man Ausblick auf den Schnürboden hat. Er liebt einen Einschlag von Zirkus, Variété, Exzentrik in seinen Stücken.“ Benjamin, „Neue Dichtung in Russland.“ In: GS II.2, S. 757 f.



Versammlungen, auf denen auch Majakovskij<sup>78</sup>, Staruchin<sup>79</sup> oder Bel'ji<sup>80</sup> auftreten, wie sein *Moskauer Tagebuch* belegt. Zu der zeittypischen, in Russland zu beobachtenden politisch propagierten und instrumentalisierten „Sprachzerstörung“ – der sich in der Literatur der Futurismus verschrieben hatte<sup>81</sup>, in der Kunst Malevič mit seiner „Ikone der Moderne“, dem *Weißten* bzw. *Schwarzen Quadrat*, auf dem Theater Meyerchol'd mit der Entwicklung der Biomechanik<sup>82</sup> – auf der einen Seite kommentiert Benjamin zunehmend enttäuscht:

ich verwies ihn [gemeint ist Bernhard Reich, D. G.] auf die Polarität aller sprachlichen Wesenheit: Ausdruck und Mitteilung zugleich zu sein. Hier musste anklagen, was über ‚Sprachzerstörung‘ als eine Tendenz der gegenwärtigen russischen Literatur von uns schon oft war berührt worden. Denn die rücksichtslose Ausbildung des Mitteilenden in der Sprache führt eben unbedingt auf Sprachzerstörung hinaus. Und auf anderem Weg endet dort, nämlich im mystischen Schweigen die Erhebung ihres Ausdruckscharakters ins Absolute. Die aktuellere Tendenz von beiden scheint augenblicklich die auf Mitteilung mir zu sein.<sup>83</sup>

Dem setzt er eben jene profanierte Bedeutung *maqoms* als Erfahrung der Vergangenheit entgegen und entwickelt bereits in Moskau einen Gedanken, den er 1931 in *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie* schließlich „Aura“ nennen wird:

78 Eintragung am 3. Januar im *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 93. Und in „Neue Dichtung in Russland“ heißt es: „Wladimir Majakowski war ein nicht unbekannter Dichter bereits unter dem Zarismus. Ein exzentrischer Frondeur etwa wie Marinetti in Italien. Ein kühner Neuerer in formalen Dingen, verleugnete er damals nicht völlig seine Bestimmtheit durch die romantische Dekadenz. Egozentrischer Dandy, rückt er sich selber gern in den Mittelpunkt seiner hymnischen Dichtungen und bewies damals schon jenes Talent fürs Theatralische, das er um 1920 in den Dienst der Revolution stellt. [...] Die Redeweise der Straße, phonetischer Krawall, ein phantastievolles Rowdytum feiern die neue Epoche der Massenherrschaft. Den Höhepunkt seiner Erfolge bezeichnet ‚Mysterium buffo‘, eine Vorführung mit Tausenden von Mitwirkenden, Sirenengeheul, Militärmusik, Lärmorchester unter freiem Himmel.“ Benjamin, GS II.2, S. 757.

79 Direktor des Revolutionstheaters, siehe Eintragung 13. Dez., Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 31.

80 Eintragung am 3. Januar, Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 93.

81 Mit der Bemerkung: „Wer von den Konstruktivistinnen sich eine Vorstellung machen will – einer Schule, die sich bemüht, das bloße Wort als solches zur höchstgesteigerten Wirkung zu bringen.“ (Meine Hervorhebung), in „Neue Dichtung in Russland.“ In: GS II.2, S. 758, spielt Benjamin auf das futuristische Manifest *Slovo kak takovoe* (Das Wort als solches) an, das Velimir Chlebnikov und Aleksej Kručnych 1913 verkündet haben, in dem sie das Recht des Dichters auf sprachschöpferische Freiheit forderten. Sie entwarfen eine auf Neologismen beruhende „transmentale Sprache“ (*zaumnyj jazyk*), und Fremdwörter aus westlichen Sprachen wurden russifiziert. Aus „Futurismus“ wurde so *budetljanstvo*.

82 Meyerchol'd glaubte, dass Emotionen auf physische Abläufe folgen und verlangte von den Schauspielern, dass sie bestimmte Posen auf der Bühne einnehmen sollten, die darzustellenden Gefühle werden sich dann ganz von allein einstellen. Benjamin war von dessen Theaterarbeit, die aber 1926/27, als er sich in Moskau aufhielt, bereits zunehmend als politisch unkorrekt in Ungnade fiel, sehr beeindruckt.

83 Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, Eintragung am 27. Dez., S. 70.

Vor einem außerordentlich schönen Bilde von Cézanne kam mir der Einfall, wie die Rede von ‚Einfühlung‘ sprachlich schon falsch ist. Mir schien, soweit man ein Gemälde erfasst, dringt man durchaus nicht in seinem Raum ein, vielmehr stößt dieser Raum, zunächst an ganz bestimmten, unterschiednen Stellen, vor. Er öffnet sich uns in Winkeln und Ecken, in denen wir sehr wichtige Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit glauben lokalisieren zu können; es ist etwas unerklärlich Bekanntes an diesen Stellen.<sup>84</sup>

Mit dieser Konzeption der Aura und ihrer Bedeutung für die Kunstwerke vollzieht Benjamin deutlich den Bruch mit derjenigen Richtung der Avantgarde, deren Einstellung Lachmann als „intertextuelle Tropik“ bezeichnet hat. Denn die „Avantgarde akzeptierte die Zerstörung der Welt als eines Werks der göttlichen Kunst, sie nahm sie als vollendete und unabänderliche Tatsache, die es galt, so radikal wie möglich und in all ihren Folgen zu begreifen, um in der Lage zu sein, den erlittenen Verlust zu kompensieren.“<sup>85</sup> Dieses Festhalten an der Kultur, das bei Benjamin zu beobachten ist, bei gleichzeitiger Transformation gewisser Grundfiguren, ist das Prinzip, das der Kontiguitäts-Intertextualität zugrunde liegt. Wobei die Berührungen zwischen dem Referenztext und dem gegenwärtigen (manifesten Text) durchaus auch nur punktueller Natur sein können (wie durch thematische, narrative, strukturelle, phonologische Zitate usw.). Es wird dabei stets der Prätext als Ganzes aufgerufen und weitergeschrieben.<sup>86</sup> Aber Benjamin nimmt auch hier wieder eine Umdeutung vor: Zielt der Fortschritts-gedanke der Avantgarde in den ersten Jahren der Sowjetmacht auf eine Umsetzung und Unterstützung der Politik mit künstlerischen Mitteln<sup>87</sup>, wendet sich

84 Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, Eintragung am 24. Dez., S. 61 f. In „Kleine Geschichte zur Photographie“ heißt es: „Was ist eigentlich Aura? Ein sonderbares Gespinnst von Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag. An einem Gebirgszug am Horizont oder einem Zweig folgen, der seinen Schatten auf den Betrachter wirft, bis der Augenblick oder die Stunde Teil an ihrer Erscheinung hat – das heißt die Aura dieser Berge, dieses Zweiges atmen.“ Benjamin, *GS II.1*, S. 368 – 385, hier: S. 378. Diesen Satz übernimmt er wörtlich in dem Aufsatz „Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit“ (1936), in dem er bereits den Verlust der Aura deutlich beklagt. Benjamin, *GS I.2*, S. 431 – 469, hier: S. 440.

85 Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gesplittene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*. München u. a.: Hanser, 1988, S. 20.

86 Ist es in diesem Zusammenhang ein Zufall, dass Benjamin von den neueren Autoren in Russland einzig die Symbolisten positiv hervorhebt? „Bei weitem der bedeutendste unter ihnen ist der vor einigen Jahren verstorbene Waleri Brussow. [...] Er ist der Schöpfer des russischen Symbolismus und wird in Russland mit George verglichen. Er ist der einzige unter den großen Dichtern der alten Schule, der sofort sich auf den Boden der Revolution stellte, ohne deshalb mit proletarischer Dichtung hervortreten.“ Benjamin, „Neue Dichtung in Russland.“ In: *GS II.2*, S. 760.

87 Groys kritisiert: „So versuchte die Avantgarde in den ersten Jahren der Sowjetmacht nicht nur, ihre künstlerischen Projekte auf der praktischen Ebene in Politik umzusetzen, sondern sie entwickelte auch einen bestimmten Typ des künstlerisch-politischen Diskurses, in dem jede Entscheidung hinsichtlich der ästhetischen Konstruktion eines Kunstwerks als politische Entscheidung gewertet wird und, umgekehrt, die Einschätzung jeder politischen Entschei-

Benjamin von dieser einseitigen Politisierung der Kunst ab und findet stattdessen seine eigene Form für den Umgang mit der Kultur, mit der Tradition, in der in Zeiten der Moderne das Theologische seinen Platz nicht be- oder wiedererhält, sondern neu zugewiesen bekommt. Es ist sicher übertrieben, zu behaupten, dass Benjamin in seinem kulturphilosophischen Konzept von der Entwicklung in Russland beeinflusst war, dennoch kann man wohl davon ausgehen, dass sie seine eigene Einstellung unterstützt und gefestigt hat.

Ohne Schrift- und Sprachkenntnisse des Russischen studiert Benjamin stattdessen die bilderreiche Kultur Russlands. Von den Ikonen – deren wesentliches Moment für die Verbreitung der Orthodoxie ihr erzählender Charakter ist<sup>88</sup> – über die Genremalerei<sup>89</sup> bis zu dem sich immer mehr ausbreitenden Bilderkult Lenins, dessen Porträt buchstäblich an die Stelle der Heiligenbilder gesetzt wird<sup>90</sup>, beobachtet er die Umformung der Bildkultur und deren Zerfall unter der Herrschaft der Sowjetmacht. Benjamins neue Ordnung, die Profanes und Heiliges nicht gegeneinander ausspielt, enthält damit auch den Vorschlag, Kultur und Kulturphilosophie neu zu betrachten. In seinen Umdeutungen leuchtet nicht nur die Geschichtlichkeit der einzelnen Begriffe oder Gegenstände auf, sondern sie weisen zugleich auch auf den Weg hin, dem ihre Deutungen unterlagen und -liegen. In seinen Umdeutungen der Begriffe wird nicht Sakrales durch säkulare Konnotationen *ersetzt*, sondern das Sakrale wird der Gegenwartigkeit *angepasst*, womit er auch deutlich macht, dass wir uns inmitten einer laufenden (kulturellen) Debatte befinden.

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dung von ihren ästhetischen Folgen ausgeht – dieser Diskurstyp setzte sich im ganzen Lande durch und führte später im Zuge seiner Entwicklung übrigens auch zum Untergang der Avantgarde.“ Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, S. 27.

88 „Neben den heiligen Namen sind es die Legenden, in denen die Ikonen ihre Schriftabhängigkeit verkünden: Randglossen oder Unterschriften, die den durch das Bild dargestellten Text wiedergeben. Häufig etwa im Falle von Heiligenikonen, diese schriftlich vorformulierte Geschichte in doppelter, Bild und Schrift vermittelnder Weise dokumentiert: in der Form der Randikonen, die wie eine Bildergeschichte das Zentralportrait des Heiligen umlaufen und zusätzlich mit erzählenden Unterschriften versehen sind.“ Günter Hirt und Sascha Wonders (Hgg.): *Präprintium: Moskauer Bücher aus dem Samizdat*. Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 1998, S. 10.

89 Über die Tretjakov-Galerie heißt es: „Denn das Museum besteht zur Hälfte aus Bildern russischer Genremalerei [...]. Was ich sah, lässt mich annehmen, dass die Russen unter den europäischen Völkern die Genremalerei am intensivsten ausgebildet haben. Und diese Wände voll erzählender Bilder, Darstellungen von Szenen aus dem Leben der verschiedensten Stände, machen die Galerie zu einem großen Bilderbuch.“ Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 113 f.

90 „Die Landkarte ist ebenso nahe daran, ein Zentrum neuen russischen Bilderkults zu werden wie Lenins Portraits. Indessen geht der alte in den Kirchen fort.“ Benjamin, *Moskauer Tagebuch*, S. 76.



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