

Tzvi Novick

Piyyut and Midrash

Form, Genre, and History



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Tzvi Novick: *Piyyuṭ* and Midrash

Tzvi Novick

Piyyuṭ and Midrash

Form, Genre, and History

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A note on citations and translations: For the Hebrew Bible, I make use of the NJSJ translation, but often diverge from it, typically for the sake of forefronting the features of the verse that are of interest to the rabbinic or liturgical text. For rabbinic texts and *piyyuṭim*, I cite parenthetically to the page number of the standard (critical) edition. Unless otherwise indicated, the texts themselves either come from the cited edition or have been modified in accordance with the evidence of the best manuscripts, typically as transcribed in the online database of the Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (Maagarim). For the Dead Sea Scrolls I use Qimron's edition. The editions that I have used are listed in the bibliography. The translations of all post-biblical texts are my own.

צור עומד / משתל במועד / ידי תלמד / ולך אוֹדָה.
 בנות פְּזוּיִת / בָּנִים בְּמִרְבֵּית / חָטוּב כְּתַבְנִית / ולך אוֹדָה.
 יוֹשְׁבֵת גָּנִים / כְּאֵלֶּף מְגָנִים / שָׂא לָהּ פָּנִים / ולך אוֹדָה.

Chapter 1

Piyyuṭ as Performance: Voices in Midrash and *Piyyuṭ*

Introduction

The Jewish community of late antique (Roman and Byzantine) Palestine produced two great corpora, rabbinic literature and *piyyuṭ* (liturgical poetry). Neither corpus is exclusively exegetical in form or aim, but biblical exegesis and allusion loom large in both, and the Bible is the connective tissue that binds them. *Piyyuṭ* has deep roots, tracing back to the Second Temple period, but it flourished and acquired its distinctive character in what the dean of *piyyuṭ* studies, Ezra Fleischer, called its classical period, between roughly the sixth and ninth centuries, when *piyyuṭ* made a formal break from poetic tradition by adopting rhyme.¹ *Piyyuṭ* in this period also began to incorporate rabbinic literature, especially rabbinic exegetical and homiletical literature (“midrash”), to a massive and unprecedented degree.² It is this development that underlies the questions at the heart of this book: How does classical *piyyuṭ* receive midrash? How is classical (and to a lesser extent, pre-classical) *piyyuṭ* continuous with midrash, and in what characteristic ways does it adapt or otherwise diverge from midrash in engaging with the biblical text and the interpretive tradition? What does the reception of midrash in *piyyuṭ* reveal about the midrash corpus itself?

Formidable obstacles stand in the way of this project of reception and comparison. The generic differences between the corpora present one such obstacle. In part, the generic differences are precisely what motivate the project: The fact that *piyyuṭ*, as poetry, is more formally constrained than midrash, and that *piyyuṭ*, as prayer, is directed, at least *prima facie*, to a very different audience than midrash texts, makes it interesting to ask how *piyyuṭ* integrates and adapts traditions from rabbinic literature. But generic differences also stand, at least in part, in the way of comparison. In the case of *piyyuṭ*, we possess scripts for performance, complete with deictics that gesture to the speaker, the addressee,

1 See Ezra Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 115–36.

2 The identification of the sources of *piyyuṭ* is of course a fraught undertaking, and even when a *piyyuṭ* includes substantive and formal features familiar from a particular rabbinic text, it is possible that the *piyyuṭ* depends not on the rabbinic text itself, but on a different expression of the tradition to which the rabbinic text witnesses.

and the circumstances. Rabbinic texts, by contrast, preserve the rare transcript (or purported transcript) of specific performances, and more commonly, in the case of the homiletical literature that is particularly important for classical piyyuṭ, material that may have been employed in homiletical performances, but that clearly does not offer scripts for or transcripts of performances. Insofar as the project centers on the narrow question of the ways in which piyyuṭ receives midrash texts, these differences become relatively unimportant, but the broader comparative project runs the risk of assigning too much weight to differences that stem largely from incidental aspects of transmission history.

Another important obstacle is the internal variety of both corpora. Classical piyyuṭ incorporates numerous different genres and sub-genres, and the most important macroform in classical piyyuṭ, the *qedushta*, itself divides into units that differ starkly from one another. In the case of Yannai's *qedushta*, the One typically features stately (metrical) prayer, the Five often has a homiletical character, the Six looks something like an expanded targum, and the Eight approaches ecstatic prayer.³ In the case of Qillir, Yannai's great successor, there are also characteristic differences among the units, but these differences are different again from those in Yannai's *qedushta*. The internal variation of the piyyuṭ corpus becomes still larger when we include in our purview the roughly contemporaneous corpus of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic poems, which feature not only a different language of composition but also, in general, a distinct *Sitz im Leben*, more distant from prayer proper.⁴ The midrash corpus is just as varied, encompassing exegetical texts that hew closely to the lemma-comment form, exegetical narratives that rewrite rather than annotate, and homiletical texts that include, as in the case of the *qedushta*, internally differentiated macroforms.

Dating poses a third obstacle. We may be relatively confident that the *payṭanim* of the period of classical piyyuṭ knew tannaitic collections as collections, and probably also—but here with less confidence—early amoraic collections of exegetical and homiletical material like *Genesis Rabbah* and *Pesiḳta de Rab Kahana*. But midrash production continued into the period of classical piyyuṭ and beyond, and many later midrash texts rework earlier ones, or otherwise innovate, in ways

3 For a helpful introduction to Yannai's *qedushta*, see Laura S. Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2010).

4 On this corpus see Michael Sokoloff and Joseph Yahalom, *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity: Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999), 204–19. On points of contact between this corpus and classical piyyuṭ see Michael Rand, "Observations on the Relationship between JPA Poetry and the Hebrew Piyyut Tradition—The Case of the Kinot," in *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into its History and Interaction* (JCPS 15; ed. Albert Gerhards and Clemens Leonhard; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 127–44.

that in certain respects evoke *piyyuṭ*.⁵ These later texts are difficult to date, both absolutely and in relation to classical *piyyuṭ*.⁶

Both because of these methodological challenges and, more importantly, because it better suits the project of reception and comparison, at least at this stage, the chapters that follow involve case studies, close readings, and cataloguings, as much as arguments, and only on occasion venture generalizations. The two parts of the book are designed, from a methodological perspective, to complement each other. The first part, encompassing the first three chapters, begins with generic features of *piyyuṭ* that to one degree or another distinguish it from the midrash corpus, and considers how these features become manifest in points of contact between the corpora. The starting point of the first part is thus difference.⁷ The second part, encompassing the final four chapters, takes up a specific literary genre (or macroform), the serial narrative, which is attested in late biblical and Second Temple literature but becomes far more prevalent in rabbinic literature and in *piyyuṭ*. I devote one chapter to an overview of aspects of serial narratives in midrash and *piyyuṭ*, and subsequent chapters to sub-genres that trace to late biblical literature. The starting point of the second part thus occurs outside midrash and *piyyuṭ*, and considers the two corpora alike as links in a biblically determined chain of interpretive composition.

Following the current chapter, the second and third chapters of the first part of the book consider the extent and import of two major differences between *piyyuṭ* and midrash texts, both briefly noted above. First, *piyyuṭim* are poetic, to one degree or another, while midrash texts are, to one degree or another, in prose, so that formal constraints loom larger in *piyyuṭ* than in midrash. Second, *piyyuṭim*

5 Consider, e.g., the greater salience of mythic motifs in later *Tanḥuma* midrashim, per Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “From Mythic Motifs to Sustained Myth: The Revision of Rabbinic Traditions in Medieval Midrashim,” *HTR* 89 (1996), 131–59, in relation to the prominence of myth in Qillir’s poetry, on which see Joseph Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), 226–58.

6 For cases where late midrash texts manifest dependence on classical *piyyuṭ* see Shulamit Elizur, “From *piyyuṭ* to *midrash*,” in *Rabbi Mordechai Breuer Festschrift* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992), 383–97; Yehoshua Granat, “Before ‘In the Beginning’: Preexistence in Early Piyyuṭ Against the Background of its Sources” (Ph.D. diss.; Hebrew University, 2009), 70–82; Eden Hakohen, “On the Relationship Between Midrashim on Esther and Qillir’s Expansion-Piyyuṭim *asaperah el ḥok* and *amal ve-ravakh*,” *Netu’im* 7 (2000), 45–74; Tzvi Novick, “Liturgy and Law: Approaches to Halakhic Material in Yannai’s *Kedushta’ot*,” *JQR* 103 (2013), 487–88; and especially Joseph Yahalom, חוגו ובני חוגו של מדרש חדשא ובני חוגו [“The *Paiyyuṭ* Background to Midrash *Tadshé* and the Members of its Circle”] (forthcoming).

7 The third part of Granat, “Before ‘In the Beginning,’” especially the third chapter therein, identifies characteristic ways in which *piyyuṭ* texts rework earlier exegetical traditions about things created before the world: extension, selection, and combination. Insofar as I am interested in this book in differences, my focus is on differences attributable to the distinctive generic features of *piyyuṭ*. Granat attends to such differences less systematically elsewhere in the dissertation, especially in chapter 5.

belong, as a general rule, to the genre of prayer, even if elements within and outside of large *piyyuṭ* macroforms are better understood in other ways. The current chapter focuses on the topic of performativity.⁸ It sidesteps the question of how performances of *piyyuṭ* before synagogue audiences resembled and differed from homiletical performances recorded or assumed in rabbinic texts, even if the tradition of *piyyuṭ* performance derives in part from homiletical performance practices in which rabbis participated. There is too little evidence about homiletical performance, and still less about a continuous tradition of performance, to put this question front and center. Only in the next two sections does the chapter aim seriously to get behind the homiletical texts to the circumstances of their performance. The first section briefly introduces the *petiḥta*. The second argues that a salient feature of the homiletical midrashim that seems clearly to distance them from their performative context may in fact be a reflection of that context, and thus that the midrash texts may be a better window into homiletical performance than is sometimes supposed.

The remainder of the chapter maps out, with a comparative eye, the performative elements indicated in the texts themselves, and especially the element of voice. Each section considers a different set of voices, or of narrative circumstances impacting voice. The analysis in these sections sets the stage for the final section, a case study centered on a *piyyuṭ* that features a voice at once related to but notably different from that of the rabbinic homilist.

The *Petiḥta*

As noted above, rabbinic Palestine of the amoraic period has bequeathed to us edited exegetical collections known in rabbinics scholarship as “homiletical midrashim.” In contrast with all of the exegetical works of the tannaitic period, and some of the amoraic period, which proceed through the relevant biblical book (more or less) verse by verse, explicating each in turn, the homi-

8 In a series of recent articles, Laura Lieber has addressed many aspects of *piyyuṭ* performance in late antiquity. See Laura S. Lieber, “The Rhetoric of Participation: Experiential Elements of Early Hebrew Liturgical Poetry,” *Journal of Religion* 90 (2010), 119–47; *eadem*, “Setting the Stage: The Theatricality of Jewish Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity,” *JQR* 104 (2014), 537–72; *eadem*, “Theater of the Holy: Performative Elements of Late Ancient Hymnography,” *HTR* 108 (2015), 327–55; *eadem*, “On the Road with the Mater Dolorosa: An Exploration of Mother-Son Discourse Performance,” *J ECS* 24 (2016), 265–91; *eadem*, “Stage Mothers: Performing the Matriarchs in *Genesis Rabbah* and Yannai,” in *Genesis Rabbah in Text and Context* (TSAJ 166; ed. Sarit Kattan Gribetz et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 155–73. See also Loren Roberts Spielman, “Sitting with Scorners: Jewish Attitudes toward Roman Spectacle Entertainment from the Herodian Period through the Muslim Conquest” (Ph.D. diss., The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 329–61.

letical midrashim—*Leviticus Rabbah* and *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* paradigmatically—appear to be structured by the (or a) synagogue lection, either from the Pentateuch (the *seder*) or from the Prophets (the *haftarah*). The typical unit in a homiletical midrash begins with a series of subunits centered on a verse that has usually been understood to represent the first or close to the first substantial verse of the lection (to the exclusion of quotation-marking verses, e.g., “And the Lord spoke to Moses saying”). These subunits all share the same form, which goes in the scholarship (not in the rabbinic corpus itself) by the Aramaic term *petiḥta* (“opening”), on which more momentarily. After the *petiḥta* series comes a relatively brief collection of comments on (some of) the verses of the lection, in verse order. This section is called (in the rabbinic texts themselves) the “body” or *gufa*. The unit concludes, in most cases, with a messianic peroration. This account of the homiletical midrashim and their characteristic macroform is rough and loose, and we will have occasion in the continuation to nuance it.

The *petiḥta* is by far the most common homiletical form to have emerged from rabbinic Palestine of the classical period. It begins with a “distant verse,” not from the lection, often from Proverbs, Psalms, or the Song of Songs. After quoting the distant verse, the homilist expounds upon it in such a way that he eventually arrives at the first substantial verse of the lection. Below is an example.

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה את אברהם נתתה ליריאך נס להתנוסס ניסיון אחר ניסיון אחר
 ניסיון גידלון אחר גידלון אחר גידלון בשביל לנסותן בעולם בשביל לגדלן בעולם כנס הזו שלספינה כל
 כך מפני קושט סלה בשביל שתתקשט מידת הדין בעולם שאם יאמר אדן למי שהוא רוצה מעשיר למי
 שהוא רוצה הוא מעני למי שרוצה הוא עושה מלך אברהם כשרצה עשאו עשיר כשרצה עשאו מלך
 יכול אתה להושיבו ולאמר לו יכול אתה לעשות כמה שעשה אבינו אברהם הוא אמר לך מה עשה
 ותמר לו ואברהם בן מאת שנה בהולד וגו' ואחר כל הצער הזה נאמר לו קח נא את בנך ולא עיכב
 נתתה ליריאך נס להתנוסס [והאלהים נסה את אברהם]

“And it was after these things, and God tested (נסה) Abraham” (Gen 22:1). “You gave those who fear you a banner to be bannered about (נס להתנוסס) (Ps 60:6a). Raising (ניסיון) after raising after raising, i.e., enlarging (גידלון) after enlarging after enlarging, to raise them in the world, i.e., to enlarge them in the world, like the mast (נס) of a ship. All of this “because of truth (קשט) (Ps 60:6b),” in order that the measure of justice might be adorned (תתקשט) in the world. For if a person should say: Him whom he wishes he makes wealthy, him whom he wishes he makes poor, him whom he wishes he makes king; when he wished, he made Abraham wealthy, and when he wished, he made Abraham king—then you can respond to him: Could you do what our father Abraham did? He will say: What did he do? And you will tell him: “And Abraham was one hundred years old [when Isaac was born to him]” (Gen 21:5) And after all this trouble, it was told

him: “Take now your son” (Gen 22:2), and he did not delay. “You gave those who fear you a banner to be bannered about.” [“And God tested Abraham.”]⁹

This homily attaches to the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. If we set aside the opening quotation of Gen 22:1, which is extraneous to the *petiḥta* form, the homily begins with a quotation from Ps 60:6. The homilist takes the verse to convey a general rule, that God elevates the righteous in the world for the sake of justice. That is to say, he gives the righteous occasions to prove their righteousness, so that no one will accuse God of whimsy when he rewards them.¹⁰ After this general opening, the homily shifts to Abraham in particular, and imagines someone wondering what justifies God’s decision to enrich Abraham, and to make him king.¹¹ God gives “you” the response to this challenge: You can point to the fact that Abraham was willing to sacrifice the son born to him after years of barrenness.¹² The homily ends by quoting the begin-

⁹ *Gen. Rab.* 55:1 (584–85).

¹⁰ The exegesis reads the forms of נס in Gen 22:1 and Ps 60:6 in their plain senses, to indicate a test, and a banner or mast, but also as instantiations of נשא (“to raise”). The threefold “raising” (“Raising after raising after raising”) corresponds to the three forms of נס in Ps 60:6: once in the word נס, and twice, implicitly, in the two letters ס of the word לַהֲנִיחַס. Cf., e.g., the dual interpretation of the duplication in וַיִּתְמַחְמַח in *Gen. Rab.* 50:11 (528), with the same exegetical construction and the same morphology: וַיִּתְמַחְמַח אַחַר תְּמַחוֹן “‘And he delayed’ (Gen 19:16). Wonderment after wonderment.” The word קָשַׁט in Ps 60:6 is also cashed out twice, first as a form of the verb הִתְקַשֵּׁט (“to adorn”), and second, via the plain sense of the word—“truth, rightness”—as the measure of justice, i.e., God’s judicial capacity. Cf., e.g., the term דִּינָא דְקִישָׁט “judgment of truth,” meaning strict justice, in *Lev. Rab.* 10:1 (196).

¹¹ That Abraham was wealthy is clear enough from Gen 12:16; 13:2, 6, and see especially 14:23. The subtler basis for Abraham’s kingship lies chiefly in Gen 23:6, and secondarily in 14:17. On the latter verse see *Gen. Rab.* 43:5 (419).

¹² I think it likely that the homily represents a secondary reflection upon a tannaitic debate recorded in the continuation of the same unit of *Genesis Rabbah*, in *Gen. Rab.* 55:6 (588). Commenting on the word נסה in Gen 22:1, R. Yose the Galilean and R. Akiva disagree. R. Yose the Galilean says: גידלו כנס הוא שלספינה “He elevated him like the mast of a ship.” This language—elevation (גידולו), the mast of the ship—is incorporated almost unchanged into our *petiḥta*. R. Akiva says thus: ניסה אותו וודי שלא יהו אומי הממו עירבבו ולא היה יודע מה לעשות: “He tested’ him, in the plain sense, so that they shouldn’t say: He rattled him, he confused him, and he did not know what to do.” According to R. Akiva, the Torah specifies that God tested Abraham in order to refute the charge that Abraham did not obey God out of piety, but only because God flustered and discomfited him. (The attribution of this view to R. Akiva correlates with the finding of the first chapter of Dov Weiss, *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016], that opposition to protest against God in the tannaitic period attached especially to the figure of R. Akiva.) How, precisely, the words “and God tested Abraham” represent a response to this charge is unclear. Perhaps R. Akiva takes these words to convey that God had tested Abraham previously, and so gave him experience (ניסיון) as one tested, so that Abraham was not flustered by this most difficult test. In any case, our *petiḥta* appears to borrow from R. Akiva’s opinion the view that Gen 22:1 is intended as a refutation of

ning of Genesis 22. The closing quotation from Genesis 22 is in fact missing from the manuscripts, but Joseph Heinemann, in one of his treatments of the *petiḥta* form, nevertheless classifies this homily as a *petiḥta*, and with reason.¹³ Whether the homily ends by quoting Gen 22:1, it typifies the *petiḥta* form in its movement from a distant verse (here Ps 60:6) to the topic at hand (Genesis 22). We will have more to say about the nature of the *petiḥta*, and this passage in particular, below.

As Heinemann and other scholars have noted, the effect of the *petiḥta* as a rhetorical exercise seems to turn on the gap between the starting point and the destination: The distant verse that opens the unit must be opaque. Interesting evidence for a conscious attempt to produce opacity comes from another *petiḥta* later in *Genesis Rabbah*, on the beginning of the Joseph story (Gen 37:1).

בזעקך יצילוך קיבוציך וגו' תני כינוסו וכינוס בניו הצילוהו מיד עשו ואת כלם ישא רוח יקח הבל זה עשו והחוסה בי נחל ארץ וירש הר קדשי זה יעקב וישב יעקב וגו'

“In your cry your gatherings will save you, etc.” (Isa 57:13). It was taught: His gathering and the gathering of his sons saved him from Esau. “They shall all be borne off by the wind, snatched away by a breeze” (*ibid.*). This is Esau. “But one who trusts in in me will inherit the land and possess my sacred mountain.” (*ibid.*). This is Jacob; “And Jacob dwelled [... in the land of Canaan]” (Gen 37:1).¹⁴

This brief homily links Gen 37:1, on Jacob in Canaan, to the previous chapter, Genesis 36, which describes Esau’s departure to Seir. The relationship between the distant verse and the lection verse is obscure to the point of inscrutability. Although the last unit of Isa 57:13 refers, like Gen 37:1, to the faithful coming into possession of God’s land, there appears to be nothing about Isa 57:13 that would seem particularly to evoke the story of Jacob and Esau. How did the homilist come to seize upon this verse? There is evidence that Isa 57:13 served at least for some Jews in late antique Palestine as the opening of the *haftarah* for the *seder* beginning with Num 26:52, on the division of the land among the tribes.¹⁵ This practice might have contributed to the verse’s salience for the homilist, but does not suffice to explain the decision to employ the verse in relation to Gen 37:1.

one who would challenge Abraham’s greatness, but it modifies the challenge so as to synthesize R. Akiva’s view with R. Yose the Galilean’s.

13 Joseph Heinemann, דרשות בציבור בתקופת התלמוד [Public Homilies in the Talmudic Period] (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1982), 39–40.

14 *Gen. Rab.* 84:1 (1002).

15 See the Three of Yannai’s *qedushta* for this *seder* (2.117), which leads into a quotation of Isa 57:13.

An exegetical unit later in the same chapter of *Genesis Rabbah* (*Gen. Rab.* 84:5 [1005]) enables us to answer this question more satisfactorily.

מה כת' למעלה מן העניין ואלה המלכים וגו' וישב יעקב ... אמר ר' לוי לנפח שהיה פתוח באמצע פלטייה ובנו זהבי פתוח כנגדו ראה נכנסות למדינה חבילות חבילות שלקוצים אמר חבל למדינה מה שנכנס לתוכה היה שם פקח אחד אמר ליה מאילו את מתיירא גן אחד משלך וגן אחד משלבנך ואתם שורפים אותם כך כיון שראה יעקב עשו ואלופיו נתיירא אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא מאילו את מתיירא גן אחד משלך וגן אחד משלבנך ואתם שורפים אותם הה"ד והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה ובית עשו לקש ודלקו בהם

What is written above the matter? “And these are the kings, etc.” (*Gen* 36:31), “And Jacob dwelled, etc.” (*Gen* 37:1). ... Said R. Levi: [It is comparable] to a blacksmith who was open in the middle of the square, and his son, the goldsmith, was open across from him. He saw bundles upon bundles of thorns entering the province. He said: Woe to the province, that such is entering it. There was an intelligent man there. He said to him: Of these you are afraid? A spark of yours and a spark of your son, and you can burn them. Likewise, when Jacob saw Esau and his princes, he was afraid. Said to him the Holy One, blessed be He: Of these you are afraid? A spark of yours and a spark of your son, and you can burn them. Thus is what is written: “And the house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau straw, and they shall burn it.” (*Obad* 1:18)

Like the *petihṭa*, this passage interprets the juxtaposition of chapter 36 (in particular, in this case, Esau’s genealogy) and chapter 37 (in particular, the occurrence of Jacob and Joseph in *Gen* 37:1–2). For R. Levi, it is *Obad* 1:18 that explains the juxtaposition: Esau and his descendants, however seemingly daunting, are naught but straw, destined to be burned by Jacob and Joseph.¹⁶

There is an obvious resemblance between R. Levi’s “a spark of yours and a spark of your son” and the *petihṭa*’s “his gathering and the gathering of his sons,” but only *Obad* 1:18 provides a sound exegetical basis for the pairing of Jacob with his son(s). More importantly, there are only two passages in the Bible that speak of inheritance or possessing in relation to the “holy mountain”: *Obad* 1:16–17 and *Isa* 57:13. What has evidently occurred, then, is that a homilist or editor transferred R. Levi’s exegesis (or something like R. Levi’s exegesis) of the *Obadiah* passage from its native biblical soil to *Isa* 57:13. Perhaps he transferred the

¹⁶ R. Levi’s exegesis seems to be in dialogue with a different use of *Obad* 1:18 in *Gen. Rab.* 77:2 (912), in reference to Jacob’s nighttime struggle with the “man,” understood to be the angelic prince of Esau. As R. Levi has God say מאילו את מתיירא “Of (lit. from) these you are afraid?” so in this other passage, Jacob tells the angel לי מדחל לי “With (lit. from) these you frighten me?”

exegesis in part to explain this challenging verse. But as or more likely, he also did so precisely because Isa 57:13, as a secondary hook for the exegesis, does not transparently convey the exegesis, and so better suits the rhetorical purposes of the *petiḥta* form.

Multiple *Petiḥta* Units

One of the questions that has bedeviled scholars of rabbinics is how the forms preserved in the homiletical midrashim—the macroform composed of the *petiḥta* series, the commentary collection, and the messianic peroration, and also each of the microforms separately, especially the *petiḥta*—correspond to what occurred “on the ground” in rabbinic Palestine. Might a homilist have delivered something like the typical macroform found in the homiletical midrashim? How do we account for the occurrence of multiple *petiḥta* units in most macroforms, and the relative lack of interest in the *gufa*? Is it possible that the proper *Sitz im Leben* of these forms is the academy, not the synagogue?¹⁷ And how homiletical are these forms, really? Questions of this sort abound, and remain largely unresolved, in part for lack of data: The rabbinic corpus contains precious few records of real homilies, or homilies alleged to be real, or the conditions under which aggadic exegesis in general occurred.¹⁸

More than a century ago, Julius Theodor contended that the entire macroform, including its multiple *petiḥta* units, represents more or less what a homilist would have spoken in a synagogue, even possibly a rough transcription thereof.¹⁹ Heinemann critiques this view as “absurd,” and it is easy to see why.²⁰ The entire rhetorical force of the *petiḥta* lies in the fact that the homilist begins as it were unexpectedly, with a distant verse. Once, however, he has wound that verse back toward the lection, it would make no sense for him to introduce another distant

17 I use “academy” and “synagogue” very loosely, with appreciation for the ambiguity of the signifiers (which refer to spaces in the first instance, but also, metonymically, to people and praxes) and for the slipperiness of the range of distinctions that they implicitly convey. On the “academy” see most recently Paul D. Mandel, *The Origins of Midrash: From Teaching to Text* (SJSJ 180; Leiden: Brill, 2017). Mandel’s book appeared too late to inform the discussion below, but its findings (beyond those already introduced in his earlier work, cited below) do not appear substantially to impact my own.

18 For a summary of the data and scholarship see Marc Hirshman, “Aggadic Midrashim” in *The Literature of the Sages: Second Part* (ed. Shmuel Safrai et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 122–26.

19 See J. Theodor, “Zur Komposition der agadischen Homilien,” *MGWJ* 30 (1881), 505.

20 See Joseph Heinemann, “The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim: A Form-Critical Study,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), 106.

verse, and play the same game again.²¹ This problem is easily solved by supposing that the synagogue homily opened with a single *petiḥta*, then moved on to the *gufa*, and finally to a messianic conclusion. Heinemann himself goes a step further, and separates the *petiḥta*, in its original, oral context, from the continuation of the macroform. The *petiḥta*, he avers, was in fact a self-standing synagogue homily, and it concludes with the first substantial verse of the lection because its function was to “open” (*pataḥ*) or introduce the lection.²²

Some recent scholarship has questioned the degree to which the *petiḥta*, and the macroform that it heads, have any connection to the synagogue, or even to homiletics.²³ The term *petiḥta*, which, as noted above, does not occur in rabbinic literature, derives from the occurrence in many *petiḥta* homilies of the verb *pataḥ* (“He opened”), as in “Rabbi so-and-so opened,” in the incipit preceding the quotation of the distant verse. The verb has often been understood, in context, as a transparently rhetorical term, signaling the beginning of a speech. But as Paul Mandel has recently clarified, the basic sense of the verb is exegetical, not rhetorical: One “opens” a mysterious verse by decoding its meaning. There is no reason to think that the verb has anything other than an exegetical function in the phrase “Rabbi so-and-so opened.”²⁴

It does not follow from this conclusion, however, that, as Burton Visotzky would have it, “there was no *petihah* or *petihah* homily”—Vitsotzky employs the Hebrew equivalent of Aramaic *petiḥta*—or that the *petiḥta* units at the beginning of the macroform represent no more than “a redactor’s device to organize

21 In his recent book, *Rabbis as Greco-Roman Rhetors: Oratory and Sophistic Education in the Talmud and Midrash* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), Richard Hiday defends Theodor’s view by observing that in Greco-Roman rhetoric, an epideictic orator might preface the main body of the argument with multiple *prooemia*, each introducing a different strand of the argument. (My thanks to the author for sharing a draft of the book with me.) In the continuation, I too will argue for the proximity of the literary macroforms of the homiletical midrashim, with their multiple *petiḥta*ot, to actual homiletical performance, but on different grounds. Hiday’s view is not incompatible with my own, and is attractive in itself, but in my view, it too readily overlooks the differences between the *petiḥta* and the *prooemion*, and in particular, first, the way in which the form of the *petiḥta* desposits the audience directly at the lection (the *gufa*), and second, the fact that, in a passage like *Song Rab.* 2:3, analyzed below, the *petiḥta* can occur (to all appearances) independently from a subsequent, longer disquisition.

22 See Heinemann, “Proem,” 100–122, and the convenient summary of older scholarship, with abundant bibliography, in H. L. Strack and Günter Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 243–46.

23 For an excellent summary of much of this research see *idem*, “The Derashah in Rabbinic Times,” in Alexander Deeg et al., *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (SJ 41; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 7–21.

24 Paul Mandel, “On ‘Pataḥ’ and the *Petihah*: A New Investigation,” in *Higayon L’Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyut in Honor of Professor Yona Fraenkel* (ed. Joshua Levinson et al.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 49–82.

his materials.”²⁵ Mandel himself does not take this position, even though he, like Visotzky, supposes that the homiletical midrashim are a product of the academy rather than the synagogue. Following Jonah Fraenkel, Mandel suggests that the occurrence of *petiḥta* units at the beginning of the macroform attests to a practice of marking the beginning of a new curricular unit of exegesis—and the demarcation of the unit might have been determined by the lection, or by the interests and pacing of the academy—with “something a little festive,” a homily linking a distant verse to the first verse of the new unit.²⁶

The *petiḥta* form is indeed undoubtedly homiletical in essence. What makes the *petiḥta* essentially homiletical is that it begins with the quotation of a verse that is not immediately determined by the occasion at hand. If—to take as an example the first *petiḥta* analyzed above—a rabbi is engaging with his students in serial exposition of the book of Psalms, and has reached Psalm 60, then for him to quote Ps 60:6, and then identify the case of Abraham in Genesis 22 as an illustration of the principle encoded in this verse, is for him to engage not in homiletics but in exegesis. The literary context of the above *petiḥta* is what makes it instead homiletical: It occurs in the context of serial exegesis of the book of Genesis, not of Psalms, which is to say that it occurs, from a formal perspective, out of the blue. It is the technique of beginning with a verse out of the blue that determines the *petiḥta* form, and makes it homiletical, even if, in the case of the *petiḥta* in *Genesis Rabbah*, the homily is literary.²⁷ So defined, this form—and perhaps it would be best, for the sake of avoiding confusion, to call the form, defined in this minimal way, by some name other than *petiḥta*—can occur outside the context of scriptural interpretation, as we will see below, and there seems to me no reason to

25 Burton L. Visotzky, “The Misnomers ‘Petihah’ and ‘Homiletic Midrash’ as Descriptions for Leviticus Rabbah and Pesikta de-Rav Kahana,” *JSQ* 18 (2011), 21, 26. It is worth noting that while Visotzky points to Richard Sarason’s article on redacted *petiḥta* units (“The Petihtot in Leviticus Rabbah: Oral Homilies or Redactional Compositions?” *JJS* 33 [1982], 557–67) as a starting point for his own far-reaching conclusions (Visotzky, “Misnomers,” 21), Sarason himself never denied a homiletical setting for the *petiḥta*. Sarason’s more recent work draws on *piyyuṭ* to root the *petiḥta* more firmly in the synagogue, and likewise to corroborate the (by no means uncomplicated) connection between *piyyuṭ* and the homiletical midrashim. See “*Petiḥta* and *Piyyuṭ*: Examining the Connections,” in *Jewish Prayer: New Perspectives* (ed. Uri Ehrlich; Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 99–160. I thank Dr. Sarason for sharing a pre-publication copy of the paper with me.

26 The quotation is from Jonah Fraenkel, דרכי האגדה והמדרש [*The Ways of Aggadah and Midrash*] (Givatayim: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), 447, cited in Mandel, “*Patah*,” 72.

27 Mandel, “*Patah*,” 68, links the phrase “Rabbi so-and-so opened” to the practice of serial exegesis of the book from which the distant verse was drawn. I see no compelling reason to posit such an original *Sitz im Leben*, though it is not impossible. In any case, my point is that, as the phrase occurs in the homiletical midrashim—i.e., as it occurs in the *petiḥta*—it occurs, necessarily, outside the context of serial exegesis of the distant verse.

assume that the homiletical midrashim do not attest, implicitly, to the pervasive use of the *petiḥta* as a prelude to an exegetical discourse.

But what—and here I shift from the work of ground-clearing and clarification to the novel argument of this section—are we to make of the fact that the macroform characteristic of homiletical midrash generally includes multiple *petiḥta* homilies? Fraenkel appears to assume that this aspect of the macroform has no correlate in the practices of the academy, but reflects instead the commitment of the editors of the homiletical midrashim to gathering and preserving material.²⁸ In principle, however, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the homiletical event marking the beginning of a new exegetical unit in the academy (or elsewhere) often involved multiple speakers, each of whom would deliver a *petiḥta* homily. Evidence for such a possibility comes from the fact that texts about other occasions, outside the academy, can imagine multiple rabbis, each, in succession, delivering a *petiḥta* homily.²⁹

Thus an extended passage in the major aggadic work on the Song of Songs, *Song of Songs Rabbah*, tells the story of seven rabbis who gather other rabbis and students to themselves in Usha around the middle of the second century. Upon departing Usha, the rabbis offer a series of public blessings, the first, by R. Judah, of the rabbis in attendance, and the other six, of their Ushan hosts. Each rabbi, in turn, “enters” and “expounds.” The exposition begins, without exception, with a citation from a verse. The rabbi interprets the verse in such a way that he comes round, in the end, to addressing the Ushans (or in the first case, the attending rabbis) directly in praise.³⁰ Below is an example.

נכנס ר' נחמיה ודרש לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ה' תני שתי אומות גדולות פרו מלבא בקהל ה'
למה על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים וכי צריכין היו ישראל באותה שעה והלא כל ארבעים
שנה שהיו ישראל במדבר היה הבאר עולה להם והמן יורד להם והשלו מצוי להם ועני כבוד מקיפין
אותם ועמוד ענן נוסע לפניהם ואת אמר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים ואמר ר' אלעזר דרך ארץ
הוא שהבא מן הדרך מקדמין לו במאכל ומשתה בא וראה מה פרע להם הקב"ה לאלו שתי אומות
כתיב בתורה לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ה' ואתם בני אושא שקדמתם רבותינו במאכלכם ומשקיעם
ומטותיכם הקב"ה יפרע לכם שכר טוב

28 See Fraenkel, דרכי, 447.

29 Mandel, “Patah,” 72, points to rabbinic exegesis at a wide range of public events—at circumcisions, weddings, funerals, etc.—to support Fraenkel’s position on the academy rather than the synagogue as the *Sitz im Leben* of the *petiḥta*, but he does not take up the question of the multiplicity of *petiḥta* homilies.

30 Despite the fact that the last exposition, like the preceding five, praises the Ushans, not the rabbis, it achieves closure vis-à-vis the first exposition because only the first and the seventh cases do the verses expounded not directly concern hospitality, but instead refer to hearing the law from Moses. In the very different version of the passage in *b. Ber.* 63b-64a, the seventh unit is moved up, and follows directly after the first.

R. Nehemiah entered and expounded: “An Ammonite or a Moabite may not enter the assembly of the Lord” (Deut 23:4a). It was taught: Two great nations stood apart from entering the assembly of the Lord. Why? “On account of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water” (Deut 23:4b). And was Israel in need at that time? Is it not the case that all forty years that Israel was in the wilderness, the well rose for them, and the manna fell for them, and the quail was available to them, and the clouds of glory encircled them, and the pillar of cloud traveled before them, and yet you say “that they did not greet you with bread and water”? And R. Eleazar said: It is proper conduct (lit. “the way of the land”) that one greet someone coming from travel with food and drink. Come and see: How did the Holiness, blessed be He, repay them? It is written in the Torah: “An Ammonite or a Moabite may not enter into the assembly of the Lord.” And you, sons of Usha, who greeted our masters with your food and your drink and your beds, the Holiness, blessed be He, will repay you with good reward.³¹

There is no question that this and the other speeches in the passage are editorial inventions. Indeed, R. Nehemiah’s entire discourse, minus the concluding address to the Ushans, occurs more or less verbatim in an earlier text, *Leviticus Rabbah*, where it forms part of a carefully constructed amoraic discourse—by R. Simon b. R. Eleazar—on biblical figures who do kindness to others by offering them food.³² What is important for our purposes, however, is that *Song Rabbah* could imagine such a scene, with such speeches, and it is important for two reasons. First, the passage sets in an oral context what we must call, on the definition offered above, a *petiḥta*. The verse occurs out of the blue: R. Nehemiah is not in the midst of a serial exposition of the book of Deuteronomy. The destination of the *petiḥta* is not the first verse of a lection, or indeed any sort of verse, but a speech act of thanksgiving or praise, but this distinction need not be construed as categorical, and indeed, we gain considerable insight when we appreciate that the *petiḥta* form need not attach to a verse. What is important, rather, is that R. Nehemiah’s destination is well known—the speech act of thanksgiving—but he gets there via citation and exposition of a verse.³³ Second, and as importantly, the passage depicts—imagines—the delivery of a whole series of *petiḥta* discourses, by one rabbi after another. It would indeed make no sense for a single rabbi, having

31 *Song Rab.* 2:3. The text is from the Vilna printed edition, as transcribed in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project. I have checked it against the online synoptic edition produced by Tamar Kadari (<http://www.schechter.ac.il/schechter/ShirHashirim/5.pdf>) and have found no important differences.

32 *Lev. Rab.* 34:8 (786).

33 It may be notable that in the Bavli version (*b. Ber.* 63b), the rabbis do not “enter and expound” but “open (פתח) and expound.” On the distinctive profile of the root פתח in the Bavli see Mandel, “*Patah*,” 63–65.

wound his way from the opening verse to his ultimate destination, here the act of praise, to then introduce, out of the blue, another verse. For another rabbi to take the floor and do so is, however, entirely reasonable.³⁴

But the possibility that multiple *petiḥta* homilies reflect a practice involving multiple speakers provides a basis for returning the *petiḥta*, and indeed the macroform as a whole, to the synagogue. There is abundant evidence that the standard practice in many churches in fourth century Palestine and its environs was for the presbyters who were present in the church to deliver homilies, each in turn, prior to the bishop's sermon. The pilgrim Egeria, in her diary, reports that such was the practice for the Sunday liturgy in the church at Golgotha, just beside Jerusalem.

At daybreak the people assemble in the Great Church built by Constantine on Golgotha Behind the Cross. It is the Lord's Day, and they do what is everywhere the custom on the Lord's Day. But you should note that here it is usual for any presbyter who has taken his seat to preach, if he so wishes, and when they have finished there is a sermon from the bishop. The object of having this preaching every Sunday is to make sure that the people will continually be learning about the Bible and the love of God. Because of all the preaching it is a long time till the dismissal, which takes place not before ten or even eleven o'clock.³⁵

The same practice is attested in the work of Jerome for Bethlehem, of John Chrysostom for Antioch and Constantinople, in the *Apostolic Constitutions* for other parts of Syria, and elsewhere.³⁶ To my knowledge, there is no preserved instance from the Christian context of a macroform consisting of homilies by the pres-

34 Consider likewise *Gen. Rab.* 35:3 (330–32). (A different version of the story occurs in *b. Mo'ed Qat.* 9a.) This passage tells the story of three rabbis who, having learned from R. Shimon b. Yoḥai, take leave of him, but then tarry another day. They raise among themselves the question: Before they depart, must they take leave of their rabbi again? The continuation is complex and layered. It appears that each of the three introduces a verse connected with leavetaking and blessing. The interpreter then shows that the leavetaking was a second leavetaking, and that the blessing was all the greater for it having been the second. The conclusion in each case is the same: הברכה האחרונה היתה גדולה מן הראשונה "The last blessing was greater than the first." The story probably means to convey that these homilies occurred in the presence of R. Shimon b. Yoḥai, for the story reports that he recognized that the three were "men of persuasion" (בני אדם שלישיב). The homilies about leavetaking are thus themselves leavetaking performances, as in *Song Rab.* 2:3. And like *Song Rab.* 2:3, this passage involves rabbis serially introducing verses and wending their way, via exegesis, to a conclusion of blessing.

35 John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels: Newly Translated with Supporting Documents and Notes* (3rd ed.; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 145 (25.1).

36 See Joseph Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae, or the Antiquities of the Christian Church* (8 vols.; London: William Straker, 1834), 5.93–95; Paul Bradshaw, *Liturgical Presidency in the Early Church* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1983), 17, and the references cited there; Robert F. Taft, S.J., *Through Their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw It* (Berkeley, CA: InterOrthodox Press, 2006), 81–82. For the reference to Bradshaw's book I thank my colleague Max Johnson.

byters followed by the bishop's sermon, and little evidence on whether, and if so how, the presbyters and bishop coordinated their remarks, but the following passage, from a homily by Chrysostom, conveys what one might in any case have supposed, that the presbyters' homilies were conceived of as preludes to the main event that was the bishop's sermon.

Certainly there remains much more to say, but even these words are enough for the correction of the sober ones. It is necessary for me to finish the discourse, since I now have the desire to hear our father's voice. For we, like the little shepherds, play our small shepherd's pipe, sitting in the shadow of these sacred buildings as if under an oak tree or a poplar tree. But he like an excellent musician arouses the entire theater with the harmony of his golden cithara and, with the harmony of his words and actions inspires us to great benefit.³⁷

Chrysostom counts himself as a shepherd, playing upon his humble shepherd's pipes, in contrast to the bishop to follow, a genuine musician who handles the golden cithara.

Evidence that similar homiletical arrangements pertained in the ancient synagogue comes from a report about the "congregation" or "assembly" of R. Yoḥanan.

רבי לוי ויהודה בר נחמן הוון נסבין תרתין סילעין מיעול מצמתה קהלא קומי רבי יוחנן

R. Levi and Judah bar Nahman would take two *selas* to enter and gather the assembly before R. Yoḥanan.³⁸

The continuation clarifies that R. Levi and Judah would "gather" the assembly by offering their own remarks before ceding the floor to R. Yoḥanan. But it is also clear from the continuation that in this case, the two would alternate in this role at any given (Sabbath?) assembly.

I suggest that the multiple *petiḥta* units at the beginning of the typical macroform in the homiletical midrashim may be indirect evidence that in some synagogues in Palestine, the homiletical practice was the same as that attested in neighboring churches, and partly in the above rabbinic text: One or more individuals, presumably of lower rank or reputation, delivered *petiḥta* homilies, and

See also 1 Cor 14:26–32, and the reference to it in Jerome's letter to Nepotian (F. A. Wright, trans., *Selected Letters of St. Jerome* [London: William Heinemann, 1933], 210–11 [lii.7]).

³⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving* (Fathers of the Church 96; trans. Gus George Christo; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 68. I thank my colleague Blake Leyerle for this reference.

³⁸ See the parallel versions in *Gen. Rab.* 98:13 (1261–62); *y. Suk.* 5:1 (55a). The word ציבורא "congregation" occurs in the first version, and קהלא "assembly" in the second; I reproduce the latter.

the last of them yielded the floor to the chief homilist, who delivered the subsequent sermon, perhaps something corresponding to the *gufa* and the peroration.

Usha was a gathering of sages. Could a synagogue on a typical synagogue in fourth or fifth century Palestine have furnished enough speakers for multiple *petiḥta* homilies and a main sermon? We are well into the realm of speculation, of course, but the recent pushback in rabbinic scholarship against the bold position of Seth Schwartz, that the rabbinic movement was for many centuries a miniscule, embattled group, has underscored, on the contrary, that while rabbis did not “control” Palestinian Jewish society, there is good reason to think that, even from the beginning of the amoraic period, they exerted substantial influence, beyond what the number of individually named rabbis might suggest.³⁹

In any case, we need not assume that every synagogue could have supported a full panoply of learned homilists of the sort implied, according to my argument, by the macroform, but only that some could: that there were some synagogues in which rabbis and their affiliates congregated in numbers, or that the homiletical midrashim reflect the practice in academies that doubled as synagogues.⁴⁰

A synagogue or synagogue-like setting is in any case to be preferred over an academic one as the *Sitz im Leben* for the homiletical midrashim. The academic setting favored by Fraenkel and Mandel has trouble accounting for the fact that the structure of *Pesiḳta de Rab Kahana*, if not *Leviticus Rabbah*, is determined entirely by the liturgical calendar.⁴¹ More importantly, their reconstruction cannot easily explain why the macroform units in *Leviticus Rabbah* and *Pesiḳta de Rab Kahana* very commonly devote half or more of their space to *petiḥta* homilies. Why should the editors of these works have lavished so much attention on the incidental “festive” introductions to new exegetical undertakings, and so little, in relative terms, to the work of aggadic exegesis itself? If, however, we posit a synagogue setting, along the lines I have suggested, the ratios make more sense: *Petiḥta* homilies were sermons too, even if prefatory, and their combined length might easily have exceeded that of the “main event” that followed.

39 See Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and for the response, see, e.g., Stuart S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in the Talmud Yerushalmi* (TSAJ 111; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

40 On the numerous classes of synagogue leaders attested in late antiquity, at least some of whom surely possessed some rhetorical competence, see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 412–53.

41 For an excellent recent treatment of *Pesiḳta de Rab Kahana* that emphasizes its homiletical elements, and identifies general points of contact with contemporary Christian preaching, see Rachel A. Anisfeld, *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes: Peskita de Rav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism* (SJSJ 133; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Voices in the Biblical Past

The previous section suggested that the homiletical midrashim may more closely preserve the form of homiletical performances than scholars have heretofore assumed. Against this background, we now turn to comparative reflection on performance in midrash and *piyyuṭ*. The representation of speech or voices is constitutive of drama.⁴² A dramatic text, a text with voices, need not be a script meant for performance, but the more prominently a text features speech, the closer it is, in form and perhaps in *Sitz im Leben*, to the framework of performance. In this and the following sections, I consider aspects of voice in *piyyuṭ* in relation to related midrash texts.

Midrash texts regularly feature the voices of biblical characters, typically in their biblical setting.⁴³ In *piyyuṭ*, too, biblical characters speak, and also, in general, in the biblical past. Consider the following example. In Deut 31:14, God informs Moses that his time has come to die, and that he should call to Joshua and have them both stand in the tent of meeting, so that God might instruct Joshua there (והתיצבו באהל מועד ואצוו) “and station yourselves at the tent of meeting, and I will command him”). In Deut 31:15, God appears at the tent in a cloud, which stands at the entrance of the tent. The rabbinic reader is sensitive to numerous oddities in these verses. First, why should God tell Moses to summon Joshua to the tent of meeting? Why does God not appear to Joshua himself? Second, why should Moses stand with Joshua in the tent of meeting, if God wishes to instruct only Joshua? Third, Moses and Joshua are supposed to be *in* the tent, and yet God’s cloud stands at the *entrance* to the tent. Finally, after a section break, the biblical text continues with God’s instructions to Moses to write a song (Deut 31:16–22), followed by God’s encouragement to Joshua that he be strong in leading Israel (Deut 31:16:23). These verses seem (or so the rabbinic interpreter could construe them) to belong to a different event, both because God did not say anything in Deut 31:14 about commanding Moses, and because there is a section break between Deut 31:15 and Deut 31:16. But if this is true, then at what point does God command Joshua, as he promised to do in Deut 31:14?

42 Thus, e.g., in a Homeric scholion: “Plato says that there are three forms of literary art: the dramatic, where the poet constantly distinguishes himself by means of the characters represented; the amimetic, such as Phocylides’; the mixed, such as Hesiod’s.” For the quotation (slightly modified) and discussion see René Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 95.

43 On character speech in midrash texts in relation to the perspective of the narrator see Joshua Levinson, *The Twice Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 172–91.