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JOSHUA LEVINSON

> Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile
>
> S. Greenblatt[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

"MAGIC (*KESHAPHIM*)," said R. Yochanan, "contradicts (*makḥishim*) the heavenly household" and opposes the divine will. So begins one of the major talmudic discussions of magic (bSan 67b). Punning aside, this conception of magic bestows tremendous power in the hands of the magician, creating a seemingly autonomous domain where the human and divine vie for supremacy.[2] How did the rabbis imagine this domain and

I wish to thank Y. Harari, S. Fraade, G. Bohak, and N. Dohrmann, who provided me with generous criticisms and substantial insights to earlier drafts of this essay. Unfortunately, Gideon Bohak's meticulous and erudite book, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, 2008), could not be fully incorporated herein. An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Tarbitz* 75 (2006): 295–328.

1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), 9.

2. R. Yochanan's midrash is, of course, a *notarikon*, as Rashi explains. This concept of magic was prevalent in Late Antiquity, as Dickie has commented: "For most Greeks and Romans it looks as though the defining characteristic (i.e., what they would have said if asked what magic was) was that the magician, in contrast to a priest or worshipper following the practices of proper religious observance, did not humble himself before the gods, but treated them as creatures who could be bent to his will, as beings to whom he was prepared to apply force and coercion" (Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* [London, 2001], 26). See also Valerie Flint's definition (*The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* [Princeton, N.J., 1991], 3): "Magic may be said to be the exercise of power of a preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they."

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what brought them to so empower their adversaries? This is the question I wish to address by examining some of the contest narratives between rabbis and magicians in rabbinic literature. Although magic and its practitioners do not occupy a particularly prominent position in this literature as a whole, sometimes the culturally peripheral can be symbolically central.[3] It is only by cruising the back alleys of a culture, the "rag and bone shop of the heart," as Yeats said, that we can get a fuller picture of its hopes and fears.

Rabbis and magicians are a powerful pair, and because they both manipulate unearthly powers for various ends, one could say that they compete over the means of production of sacred power and prestige. It is not surprising, therefore, that rabbinic literature contains, as does the contemporary Christian hagiography, numerous tales of this sort. As Peter Brown has remarked, "Long and intimate duels with the local sorcerer were almost *de rigueur* in the life of a successful saint."[4] Since the magician was a type of rabbinic doppelgänger, he constituted a serious challenge to rabbinic authority and identity, and no one was more aware of this challenge than the rabbis themselves. "The idea that *magoi* could dispense power on matters of central importance to human life," as John Gager has succinctly summarized the threat posed by magicians to the custodians of legitimate power and authority, "the idea that any private person, for nothing but a small fee, could put that power to use in a wide variety of circumstances . . . presented a serious threat to those who saw themselves as jealous guardians of power emanating from the center of that society, whether Greek, Roman, Antiochene, or rabbinic. Here was power beyond their control, power in the hands of freely negotiating individuals."[5]

Though it seems that the threat of magic is ubiquitous in Late Antiquity, its relation to other sites of cultural power and authority is historically contingent, and the modes by which it was represented and

3. Barbara A. Babcock's introduction to *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. B. A. Babcock (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978), 32.

4. Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), 67. See also Matthew W. Dickie, "Narrative Patterns in Christian Hagiography," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 40 (1999): 83–98; Harry J. Magoulias, "The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries A.D.: Sorcery, Relics and Icons," *Byzantion* 37 (1967): 228–69; Alexander Kazhdan, "Holy and Unholy Miracle Workers," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, D.C., 1995), 73–82.

5. John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York, 1992), 24.

contested were continually reproduced within the hegemonic process. Within the confines of this essay I will not be addressing rabbinic magic as a whole, nor even the subgenre of contest narratives. Rather, I wish to concentrate upon a few narratives of contest, most of which appear in the Palestinian Talmud (ySan 7:12 [25d]), and its Babylonian parallel (bSan 67b–68a). I suggest that there are marked differences between how the two talmudic discussions represent magic and its menace.[6]

II. JERUSALEM TALMUD

On the whole, it would seem that the Bible condemns magical praxis in no uncertain terms, proscribing capital punishment for its practitioners. It is presented as the religious practice of the ethnic and religious other, the Canaanite, and because Israel abstained from these abhorrent prac-

6. Kimberly Stratton has recently attempted to present a comprehensive understanding of the different conceptions of magic found in the two Talmuds ("Imagining Power: Magic, Miracle, and the Social Context of Rabbinic Self-Representation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73 [2005]: 361–93). (Unfortunately, her recent book *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology and Stereotype in the Ancient World* [New York, 2007] arrived too late for me to incorporate here in any substantial manner.) "The Babylonian sources," she suggests, "consistently depict rabbis as powerful, even superior magicians. Palestinian sources, on the other hand, conceive of magic in predominantly negative terms—as the dangerous practice of an Other. This is true of Palestinian opinions recorded both in the Bavli and in texts compiled in Palestine, such as the Jerusalem Talmud and the Tosefta" (377). While her scope is much more ambitious than mine, covering all of classical talmudic literature, I believe that she has missed the mark on several important points. Certainly as far as the Palestinian texts discussed here are concerned (and for some reason she does not discuss them), it is the Palestinian sages who are depicted as powerful and superior magicians. As I will try to show, it is here, and not in the Babylonian Talmud, that the rabbis perform real and powerful magic. Although her article contains some fine comments and valuable insights which I happily adopt, it is plagued by a certain mishandling of the talmudic materials. For example, in her attempt to prove the "Palestinian tendency to eschew magic or anything resembling it and to attribute power to piety or asceticism reflects the Hellenistic social context of Palestinian sages" (379), she quotes the tale at the beginning of the Babylonian discussion concerning the special "merits" of R. Hanina that protected him from a magic attack. According to her understanding, R. Hanina acquired these merits because his father dedicated him as a Nazirite while still a child (as recounted in bNaz 29b); hence, "austerities and abstinence were held to be sources of charismatic power in the ancient Mediterranean" (373). However, the Hanina who was a Nazirite was an early second-century sage (ca. 125), while the story mentioned concerns R. Hanina (bar Hama) of the third century, who was not a Nazirite. Furthermore, it seems extremely unlikely that this tale, told in Aramaic (she says Hebrew) and with no Palestinian parallel, reflects a Palestinian provenance.

tices they merited dispossessing them from their land (Deut 18.9).[7] However, in spite of the supposed blanket prohibition against magic recorded here and in Ex 22.17, Gideon Bohak has recently pointed out that the biblical attitude toward magic is far from unambiguous. While some texts seem to ban it outright, others seem to condone or even praise it (Ex 15.25; Num 21.8; 1 Sam 28.6). He insightfully concludes that not only is it far from clear what exactly is forbidden but the principle target of the biblical proscription seems to be directed more against certain practitioners than certain practices, and "what the Pentateuch did provide its readers was a partial list of magical and divinatory practitioners to whom one may not turn, or whom one should not let live, and occasional references to such practices which are forbidden to Jews and which (if we may take Balaam's words for it) they indeed did not practice."[8]

The Mishnah (ca. 200 C.E.) turns from practitioners to practice by introducing a wholly new category when it distinguishes between magic and illusion: "A sorcerer (is culpable only if he actually) performs an act (of magic), and not one who creates an optical illusion."[9] To be culpable the magical act must affect an actual change in the world, and therefore

7. Brian B. Schmidt, "Canaanite Magic vs. Israelite Religion: Deuteronomy 18 and the Taxonomy of Taboo," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (Leiden, 2002), 242–59.

8. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 14, 18.

9. mSan 7.11. In the Mishnah this law is cited by R. Akiba in the name of R. Yehoshua, and the Tosephta (tSan 11.5) cites it in the name of R. Eliezer. As will become clear later on, it is not inconsequential that only the *Bavli* addresses this contradiction concerning the proper lines of rabbinic transmission (bSan 68a). This text includes the enigmatic example of "two who gather cucumbers, one gathers and is exempt and another gathers and is liable. He who does an act is liable and he who produces an illusion is exempt." Veltri sees a connection here with the law of the XII Tablets that prohibits the transfer of produce from field to field (G. Veltri, *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Judentum*, [Tübingen, 1997], 28). See also Virgil, Eclogue 8, 99. Bohak points out a similar boast made by Simon Magus, who can "make new trees suddenly spring up and produce sprouts at once . . . and once when my mother Rachel ordered me to go to the field to reap, and I saw a sickle lying, I ordered it to go and reap; and it reaped ten times more than the others. Lately, I produced many new sprouts from the earth, and made them bear leaves and produce fruit in a moment" (Ps.-Clemens, *Recognitiones* 2.9; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 360). See also Hans G. Kippenberg, "Magic in Roman Civil Discourse," in *Envisioning Magic*, ed. P. Schafer and H. G. Kippenberg (Leiden, 1977), 137–63; Philip S. Alexander, 'The Talmudic Concept of Conjuring (*'Aḥizat 'Einayim*) and the Problem of the Definition of Magic (*Kishuf*), in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan*, ed. R. Elior and P. Schafer (Tübingen, 2005), 7–26.

the illusionist is exempt. While this is one of the rare rabbinic "emic" definitions of magic,[10] it is not altogether surprising that this category of illusion or *magicas vanitates* was widespread in Late Antiquity, especially as a rhetorical means of domesticating magical power and denigrating its practitioners. We find similar sentiments when Origen speaks of "those who practice juggling tricks in order to deceive their simple hearers," and Pliny tries to convince his readers that "magic is detestable, ineffectual, and vain; if there is even a shimmer of truth in it, that shimmer owes more to chemistry than to magic."[11]

There is a significant and unexpected rearrangement of the discourse of magic in the transition from tannaitic literature to the Palestinian Talmud (ca. 360–400 C.E.). The ontological and juridical distinction (real/illusory–culpable/exempt) is transformed into an axiological statement. Thus, the dichotomy between the sorcerer and the illusionist becomes here a distinction between the sages who are able to perform real magic, and their opponents who can only perform illusionary tricks or inadequate magic. Surprisingly, the very act that in the Mishnah would entail capital punishment becomes here the means by which the sage demonstrates his power and acquires prestige. The discussion in the Palestinian Talmud (ySan 7:12 [25d]) is organized in a manner that highlights this axiological shift; first presenting three tales that portray the magical prowess of R. Yehoshua ben Hananya, afterward there appear two anecdotes in which gentile magicians are exposed as charlatans. I cannot enter here into a full scale analysis of these texts, but I would like to utilize them to illustrate what I take to be their salient points.

IIA. BATHING BUDDIES: CONTEST IN THE BATH HOUSE OF TIBERIUS (YSAN 7:13 [25d])

A story: R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua and R. Akiva went to bathe in the public bathhouse in Tiberius. They saw a certain heretic (*min*). He said what he said, and they were caught under the ceiling vault. R. Eliezer said to R. Yehoshua, Yehoshua ben Hanania, see what you can do. When the *min* tried to leave, R. Yehoshua said what he said, and the gate caught him and whoever entered or exited caused the door to whack him. He said to them, Annul what you have done. They said,

10. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 358.

11. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.55; 1.68; Pliny, *Natural History* 30.6.17. See also Philo, *Special Laws* 3.100–103. On comparative attitudes to magic between Pliny and the rabbis, see G. Veltri, "The Rabbis and Pliny the Elder: Jewish and Greco-Roman Attitudes toward Magic and Empirical Knowledge," *Poetics Today* 19 (1998): 63–89.

You annul (what you have done), and then we shall also. Both sides annulled what they had done.

When they came out, R. Yehoshua said to that *min*, Is this all you know how to do? He said, Let us go down to the sea. When they went down to the sea, the min said what he said, and the sea was split asunder. He said to them, Did not Moses your master do just that to the sea? They said to him, But do you not admit that Moses our master (also) walked in it? He said to them, Yes; they said to him, So walk in it. He walked in it, and R. Yehoshua commanded the Prince of the Sea, and he swallowed him up.

This narrative clearly divides into two sections according to location: the bathhouse of Tiberius and on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It is significant that what both connects and distinguishes these two scenes is water. Pools of water in general, and the bathhouse in particular, were often connected to magic and perceived as dangerous habitats of malevolent spirits. Apparently for this reason the Romans had a special salutation for those entering the bathhouse (*salvus laves*) and the rabbis likewise instituted a similar blessing (tBer 6:17). "It is likely," as Katherine Dunbabin suggested, "that the many tales of malevolent spirits in bathhouses reflect a wide spread belief among pagans, Christians, and Jews."[12] These two bodies of water may have their own cultural identity. While it is true that the rabbis did not object to the bathhouse, as Yaron Eliav has convincingly shown, "they did relate to it as a Roman institution."[13] It thus has different connotations from the Sea of Galilee, which if not "Jewish" (as the dwelling place of the Well of Miriam), was at least culturally neutral.[14] As a cultural site the bathhouse functioned as a mi-

12. Katherine M. Dunbabin, "Bairum Grata Voluptas: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 58 (1989): 18. See yTer 46:3; GenR 63:8; bShab 147b; Tertullian, *On Baptism* 5; Epiphanius, *Panarion* II.7,5. See also the summary of Clark: "Study of the texts concerning bathing, including inscriptions found in bath mosaics themselves, reveal that both Greeks and Romans clung to beliefs that made it necessary to take special precautions on baths" (John R. Clark, *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art* [Berkeley, Calif., 1998], 129).

13. Yaron Eliav, "The Roman Bath as a Jewish Institution: Another Look at the Encounter between Judaism and the Greco-Roman Culture," *JSJ* 31 (2000): 428; Fikret Yegul, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1992).

14. See LevR 22.4; bShab 35a. The bathhouse in Tiberius was a large and impressive structure, located close to the administrative center of the city, about one hundred meters from the shoreline. See Y. Hirshfield and R. Reich, "The Town Plan of Tiberius in the Roman-Byzantine Period," in *Tiberius From its*

crocosm of society in Late Antiquity where willingly or not people of different identities met and mingled. As such, we could definitely see it as an example of what Mary Louise Pratt has called a "contact zone," those "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination."[15]

In the first scene of this narrative the rabbis are attacked by a sorcerer, characterized as a *min*, as they sit in the bath-house. Caught "with their pants down," their assailant succeeds in pinning them under the ceiling vault. This is not only a compromising position, but even more embarrassing for the fact that the vault was the site of the bathhouse of idols.[16] Fighting fire with fire, R. Yehoshua counterattacks with his own magic and succeeds in jamming their assailant in the entrance gate. Thus this first act ends in a draw with each side incapacitated.[17]

The second scene takes place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and here the rabbis can demonstrate the full extent of their powers. The *min* duplicates Moses's splitting of the Reed Sea and goads the rabbis saying, "Did not Moses your master do just that to the sea?!" In response, the rabbis spur him on, "But do you not admit that Moses our master (also) walked in the sea?" And when the magician/heretic attempts this new feat, R. Yehoshua commands the Prince of the Sea to swallow him up, thus reenacting the fate of the biblical Egyptians who pursued the Israelites (Ex 14.28).[18] The tale ends with a rabbinic victory, reinstating the foundational dichotomies of rabbinic identity.

Founding until the Moslem Conquest, ed. Y. Hirshfield (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1988), 111–19.

15. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992), 4. Menachem Hirshman, "Tales of the Bath-House in Tiberius" in Hirshfield, *Tiberius from Its Founding*, 119.

16. See mAZ 1:7; Stuart S. Miller, "The Minim of Sepphoris Reconsidered," *HTR* 86 (1993): 382, n. 20; Gideon Bohak, "Magical Means for Handling *Minim* in Rabbinic Literature," in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. P. J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry (Tübingen, 2003), 270, n. 12.

17. Throughout the talmudic discussion here, R. Yehoshua ben Hananya is presented as the premier magician, while in the *Bavli* this position is occupied by R. Eliezer. I do not know why R. Yehoshua takes the lead when both masters are present, with Eliezer saying, "Show him what you can do." In any case, it is interesting that a similar situation and locution occurs in the Apocryphal Acts of Peter and Paul (VII): "Paul said to Peter: Do at once what you doest"[ANF VIII: 484].

18. Alexander ("Talmudic Concept of Conjuring," 22) is of the opinion that the second half of this narrative is a later addition; however, there is no literary or philological basis for this assumption. The Prince of the Sea, as well as the

In mimicking Moses's splitting of the Reed Sea, there is more at stake than one-upmanship or a demonstration of rabbinic street smarts. This scene resembles the biblical *historiolae* often found in many Jewish and Christian magical texts. As various scholars have explained, these are forms of "authoritative discourses of precedent that involve a 'mythic' dimension of action; a performative transmission of power from a mythic realm articulated in narrative to the human present."[19] Their ritual narration enables the practitioner to tap the hidden powers of these mythologems. The biblical account of the splitting of the Sea is such an *historiola*, and one that comes very close to the "magical." Bohak, who discusses this genre (but does not mention them in his short explanation of our narrative), points out that they are some of the few items that appear in both the Jewish magical texts themselves and in rabbinic accounts of magic.[20] I would venture that the talmudic narrator presents our *min* as enacting such a sacred precedent and attempting, by analogy, to harness the hidden powers of this mythological narrative for his own aggrandizement. Ironically, and perhaps satirically, the rabbis exact his punishment by goading him onto a more perfect performance.

In this narrative, and in all of the contest tales in this section of the Palestinian Talmud, there are a number of common thematic, spatial, and personal characteristics that distinguish it from the parallel discussion in the Babylonian Talmud. First, magic is presented here as an urban phenomenon and all of the contests take place in cities of mixed population, like Tiberius and Sepphoris.[21] The rival sorcerer is usually desig-

technical term *gazar al*, appears in many amulets; see J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1988), 63, 105, 159, 191; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1993), 93, 149.

19. Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 424; David Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, eds. M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (Leiden, 1995), 464, 474; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 340.

20. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 413. He posits (143, 406) the perceptive and critical distinction between what he calls "insider" views of magic, attested to in the magical texts and artifacts themselves, and "outsider" views recorded in rabbinic literature which are not in themselves magical texts.

21. See Reuven Kimelman, "Identifying Jews and Christians in Roman Syria-Palestine," in *Galilee through the Centuries*, ed. E. M. Meyers (Winona Lake, Ind., 1999), 324; R. C. Gregg and D. Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and Other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* (Atlanta, Ga., 1996), 318; H. Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco-Roman Environment," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* II, ed. P. Schäfer and C. Hezser (Tübingen, 2000), 51–80.

nated as a heretic (*min*), and finally, it is not surprising that the rabbis are always victorious, as their opponents are exposed as either inferior or fraudulent magicians. Like the double logic of cultural mimicry described by Homi Bhabha, the other magician is created in the image and likeness of the rabbinic sage (or the inverse; the image of the sage is created according to that of the magician), whose failure works to reinforce the cultural image of the sages.[22] This mimicry of identity is explicitly emphasized when the heretic magician presents himself as Moses and then is drowned as the Egyptians.

The problem of the identity of the *minim* in rabbinic literature in general and in the Galilee in particular is a thorny issue that I cannot enter into here.[23] Bohak is certainly correct that the two social groups singled out for accusations of witchcraft in rabbinic literature, and the antagonists of these contest narratives, are either female witches or male *minim*,[24] and the two opening narratives of the talmudic *sugya* here bear out this observation. However, it is no less pertinent that although the latter are often identified as "bible-reading heretics," the conflicting interpretation of Scripture is never a feature of the narratives here. As far as this passage is concerned, I agree with Miller that it is very difficult to ascribe to them a particular religious identity as the magical praxis is common to both sides.[25] It would perhaps exceed the textual evidence to link them to any specific group, like the Christians, as some scholars have done.[26]

22. Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in idem, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 85–92.

23. See Martin Goodman, "The Function of Minim in Early Rabbinic Literature," *Geschichte – Tradition – Religion*, ed. H. Canick et al. (Tübingen, 1996), 501–10; Richard Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *HTR* 87 (1994): 155–69; Reuven Kimelman, "Identifying Jews and Christians in Roman Syria-Palestine, in Meyers, ed., *Galilee through the Centuries*, 301–33; Miller, "The *Minim* of Sepphoris Reconsidered," 377–402; Bohak, "Magical Means," 267–79; Erich M. Meyers, "Roman Sepphoris in Light of New Archeological Evidence and Recent Research," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (New York, 1992), 321–38; A. Buchler, "The *Minim* of Sepphoris and Tiberius in the Second and Third Centuries," in idem, *Studies in Jewish History* (London, 1956), 245–74.

24. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 392.

25. Miller, "The *Minim* of Sepphoris Reconsidered," 383.

26. Some scholars have discerned in this attempt to split the Sea of Tiberius an anti-Christian polemic directed at Jesus's walking upon the waters of the Kineret (Mark 6.48–51); see Hirshman, "Tales," 122; Bohak, "Magical Means," 271. This textual echo is possible, although it seems to me that to identify the *minim* here with a specific group is unnecessary. R. Yehoshua is known as a successful opponent of the heretics, and upon his death the rabbis lamented, "What will become of us at the hands of the heretics?" (bHag 5b). See also the remarks of Tertullian

More than this epithet represents here any specific group, the rabbis are creating the figure of the heretic/magician as part of their rhetoric of marginalization whose cultural function is to create and police the borders of their own identity.[27] However, the magician is not presented here through an antipodal rhetoric of opposition, like the old crone who threatens the innocent child. Rather, it is the image of Moses and his powers that is both shared and contested by both parties. The "heresy" of the magician (who is never explicitly called a magician) is represented as an attempt to mimic Moses and thereby undermine rabbinic identity.

It is important to stress a number of elements that come here to the fore: in place of the biblical dichotomy between the nations who employ magic and Israel who is forewarned against it, in the *Yerushalmi* both sides use it. In fact, magical praxis disappears as a distinguishing ethnic marker and is replaced not by the actual use of magic but rather by its effectual use. If the Mishnah created an opposition between genuine and counterfeit magic, one forbidden and the other permissible; here the prohibited magic (effecting an actual change) is not only shared by both parties but the rabbis are portrayed as its triumphant practitioners. As I stated above, the most significant innovation in the move from the tannaitic to the talmudic discourse of magic is that the sages themselves become the superior magicians. Thus the juridical distinction in the Mishnah is replaced by a discourse of the effective use of magical power—and the question is merely who has the larger magic wand.

The biblical magician has been transformed from an ethnic Other located across the border into a dangerous neighbor who threatens rabbinic prestige. The rabbis and their opponents inhabit the same cultural space, and it is this proximity that shapes the nature of the conflict. This proximity is not only in space but also in identity; both employing the same means, with basically the same powers, and the narrator describes them in the same fashion. This characteristic coincides with Brown's hypothesis that accusations of sorcery increase when "two systems of power are

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concerning the connection between heretics and witches in *Against Heretics*, XLIII.

27. Jonathan Seidel, "Charming Criminals: Classification of Magic in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 149; Kimmelman, "Identifying Jews," 303–4; Jack N. Lightstone, "Magicians, Holy Men and Rabbis: Patterns of the Sacred in Late Antique Judaism," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism V*, ed. W. S. Green (Atlanta, Ga., 1985), 134; Stephen D. Ricks, "The Magician as Outsider in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 132.

sensed to clash within the one society."[28] Magic functions here as the touchstone of power and status for the representatives of two agonistic communities, just as the spectators of Simon Magus's acts of sorcery in Samaria exclaimed, "This man is what is called the Great Power (*dunamis*) of God" (Acts 8.19). The bottom line is that the rabbis are victorious because they are the better magicians. It is likely that the proximity between the Holy Man within and the magician from without led the rabbinic narrators to adopt a double tactic; on the one hand they appropriated for themselves the power of the magician, and on the other they proceeded to prove their superior prowess by the same means as the sectarian sorcerers displayed their own.

There is, however, a price exacted by this cultural strategy: the justification and demonstration of rabbinic prestige by means of magic undermines the distinctiveness of their identity. If the power and privilege of Moses (and the rabbis as his representatives) is dependant upon magic—as the Jews and pagans portrayed the miracles of Jesus, and as the gentiles said about Moses and Jesus together—then the distinction between Moses "our master" and the heretic magician is very slight indeed.[29] It would seem that the representation of magic in the *Yerushalmi* is fractured by a tension between a discourse of power and a discourse of identity; the more that the sage proves his magical prowess, so the difference between him and the heretic sorcerer diminishes. In the final analysis it may be that the heretic magician cannot completely imitate the wondrous deeds of Moses, but R. Yehoshua comes dangerously close to imitating the sectarian sorcerer.

GOING NATIVE IN ROME (YSAN 7:13 [25d])

The second narrative in the Palestinian discussion abounds with important details concerning magical techniques that I cannot dwell upon here.[30] This tale exhibits the same traits that I mentioned concerning the

28. Peter Brown, "Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages," in *Witchcraft, Confessions and Accusations*, ed. M. Douglas (London, 1970), 21.

29. The accusation against Moses is found, for example, in Clementine, Recognitiones 3.LVII. Rabbinic texts refer to Jesus as a magician in bSan 43a, bShab 104b. For accusation of pagans in the same light, see Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 1.43–44; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.32.3; Justin, *First Apology* 30; Lactantius, *Divine Institutions* 4.15.1; 5.3; Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.6; 1.28; 1.38; 1.68; 2.14. See also John Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville, Tn., 1972), 134–61.

30. For a discussion of various details, see the following note and Veltri, *Magie und Halakha*, 33–34; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 396–97.

place, nature, and outcome of all the magic contests. More importantly for my purposes, it exemplifies in a more forthright and complex fashion the ideological fissure between the rabbinic discourses of power and identity.

This tale recounts one of the trips of the rabbis to Rome, where they are hosted in the house of a local Jewish family. The behavior of their host arouses their suspicion when they see that the meal offered to them is first brought into a small side room before being served. Apprehensive that they are being served with idolatrous offerings ("sacrifices for the dead"), they ask their host about his suspicious behavior. He reveals to them that his father took an oath not to leave his room until he sees the sages of Israel. After they reveal their identity, the father begs them to pray for his son who has been cursed with impotence. In place of prayer, R. Yehoshua enacts a full-scale magical ceremony where he is seen as "growing" (in a manner suspiciously similar to birthing) the local sorceress who has bewitched the son.[31] He grabs her by her hair, threatens to publicize her deeds, and succeeds in locating the pernicious magical object which was thrown into the sea. Then, and only then, do the sages pray and as a result of their efforts one of the founding figures of Babylonian rabbinic Jewry, R. Yehuda b. Bathra, is born.[32]

Tales of magical prowess in nullifying curses and saving the bewitched are rather routine motifs in hagiography. These tales, as Brown has remarked, play out as a theatrical script that dramatically display the power of the Holy Man and the superiority of his God to the demonic world.[33] The type of magic portrayed here is most likely a binding curse (*defixio*), and, as Pliny the Elder stated, "there is no one who does not fear this

31. The "growing" of the witch seems to reflect the well-known connection between magic and chthonian powers; see ySan 6:9 (23c).

32. (1) On erotic magic, see Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); David Frankfurter, "The Perils of Love: Magic and Countermagic in Coptic Egypt," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 480–500. (2) On witch's hair, see Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity," *JAAR* 69 (2001): 357; J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 117. (3) I interpret the threat of publication as related to the legal status of magic; see Kippenberg, "Magic in Roman Civil Discourse," 156; Fritz Graf, "How to Cope with a Difficult Life: A View of Ancient Magic," in *Envisioning Magic*, ed. P. Schäfer and H. Kippenberg (Leiden, 1997), 105. (4) On throwing into the sea, see the tale of Simon Magus in Pseudo-Clemintine 3.63; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 18.

33. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 88.

type of magic."[34] Exorcism was prevalent in cases of erotic magic. For example, Saint Hilarion, the fourth-century Palestinian anchorite, tells of a young man who fell desperately in love with a Christian virgin, and when she did not return his affections he traveled to Memphis to learn the magical arts. Upon returning he concealed under the threshold of the girl's home "certain revolting words of magic and hideous figures engraved on thin sheets of Cyprian copper." As a result "the virgin went mad with desire" until Hilarion succeeded in exorcising the demon from the young lady and restoring her sanity.[35]

It is not surprising that most scholars who have discussed this narrative have concentrated on elucidating the specific techniques employed by R. Yehoshua. However by doing so they have not viewed these practices in the context of the tale as a whole. This particular text is an interesting generic mix; it is a magical contest that is also a travel narrative and a birth tale. As an etiological tale recounting the birth of the founding father of Babylonian Jewry, it also has a polemical sting. Rabbinic continuity and the production of new Diaspora sages would seem to depend upon the magical powers of the Palestinian rabbis. The connection between a magic contest and travel narrative is not as unusual as it first sounds. A travel narrative by its very nature thematizes boundary crossings, a departure from the known world and an encounter with the unknown. In other words, identity—one's own and another's—is always a subtext of travel narratives.

It is this generic mixture in the narrative as a whole that stages the central cultural anxiety represented here. As a magical contest, it exemplifies the power of the sages who venture forth from the colonized periphery of the empire to its very center, Rome, and vanquish there a local witch who threatens rabbinic continuity. Thus, like the bathhouse narrative we saw above, it dramatizes the supremacy of rabbinic power

34. *Natural History* 28.4.19; Daniel Ogden, "Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (Philadelphia, 1999), 1–90.

35. Life of St. Hilarion 21, in *Early Christian Biographies*, ed. R. J. Deferrari (Washington, D.C., 1952), 259. Likewise, the Byzantine historian Zosimus relates that the soon to be mother-in-law of the emperor Honorius opposed the latter's marriage to her young daughter, so "she had recourse to a woman who knew how to manage such affairs, and by her means contrived that Maria should live with the emperor and share his bed, but that he should not have the power to deprive her of virginity" *(New History* 5.28). Theopilus of Alexandria (fourth century) was also attacked by a witch and was told in a dream that he must find a chest that was thrown in the sea (Magoulias, "The Lives of Byzantine Saints," 236).

and prestige. But as a travel narrative it emphasizes questions of identity. From this perspective we could say that the sages journey not from the periphery of the empire to its center but rather from the heart of normative Jewish identity in Palestine to its margins. The tension between these two motifs of power and identity are most apparent in the opening scene of the narrative:

> R. Eliezer, R. Yehoshua, and Rabban Gamliel traveled to Rome. They came to a place and found some children making piles of dirt, saying, This is how the people of the Land of Israel do and say, This is for the Heave Offering, and this is for the Tithe. They (the sages) said, It appears that there are Jews here.

When the sages disembark the first thing they encounter are children playing at being rabbis or Palestinian Jews. Interestingly enough, Theodoret tells of another game, this one of monks and demons, when young girls in Heliopolis (Baalbek) dressed up as raving demoniacs, while another servant "putting on a goat's hair cloak, exorcised them like a monk." (*Historia Religiosa* 9.9). As descriptions of children's games are rather rare in rabbinic literature,[36] the obvious question is why our narrator chose to open this tale of a violent contest in such a manner.

The sages travel with an understandable sense of anxiety to the heart of the evil empire. Feelings of apprehension and foreignness are relieved when they encounter children playing "Jewish" games. What had seemed at first to be strange and foreign is transformed into something familiar and domestic, so much so that we could say that the first thing the rabbis encounter on foreign soil is actually a copy of themselves; another scene of cultural mimicry (like Moses at the Red Sea). It is hard to think of a better way to dramatize the instability of identity, of identity as performance, than as child's play. However, the talmudic narrator utilizes this encounter in order to stage the instability of rabbinic identity.

This, to my mind, is the thematic core of the magical contest narratives in the Palestinian Talmud, the problematic fluidity of identity. To be sure the sages are revealed as master practitioners of magic, but the price they pay for their victory is to destabilize any essential difference between themselves and their opponents. Thus, in this tale, the sages travel to the heart of the other culture only to encounter there a refracted image of

36. Joshua Schwartz, "Aspects of Leisure-Time Activities in Roman Period Palestine: The Evidence of the Talmud Yerushalmi," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. P. Schäfer (Tübingen, 1998), 324.

themselves. Likewise, in each scene they expect to confront a strange Other and find themselves before the uncannily familiar. This motif is played out not only with the encounter with the children but also with the old man who, at first, seems to embody the foreign otherness of idolatrous practices but is revealed to be waiting for the prayers of the very sages who suspect him. And the opposite is also the case: the old man puts his trust in the prayers of the sages, but they perform for him a demonic exorcism. Sorcery itself seems the embodiment of the strange and foreign, and yet it brings about the birth of a rabbinic sage.

In each section of this narrative the discourse of power undermines that of identity, as the border between here and there, us and them, becomes dangerously blurred. It does not seem coincidental that this encounter itself takes place on the border, not only the border between land and sea but more importantly between rabbinic, pagan, and diasporic Jewish identities. It embodies in a particularly forceful manner the hybrid nature of any boundary that both connects and separates identities. Since any border by its very nature straddles two semiotic spheres at once, it is where identities are both defended and transgressed.[37]

As I mentioned, there is certainly something uncanny in this scene. Both the children and the old man are revealed as different yet eerily familiar, and the same is true for the heretic who duplicates the splitting of the sea as Moses in the previous tale. I suggest that we view this scene as an embodiment of what James Clifford has called the "Squanto effect." Squanto was the Native American who greeted the pilgrims in 1620 in Plymouth and, speaking English, was able to help them survive the harsh winter. "Think of coming into a new place like that and having the uncanny experience of running into a Patuxet just back from Europe. A disconcertingly hybrid 'native' met at the ends of the earth—strangely familiar, and different precisely in that unprocessed familiarity."[38]

Meeting the children playing at being rabbis at the gates of Rome is much like meeting "a disconcertingly hybrid 'native' at the ends of the earth." This opening scene exemplifies how the attempts to stabilize an essential identity are problematicized not only because of a threatening Other but because the identity of the sages themselves is revealed as hybrid. In a wonderfully dialogical manner, neither side here can express his identity without using that of the other. The heretic displays his power

37. Yuri Lotman, "The Notion of Boundary," *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000), 131–42.

38. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1997), 19.

by playing Moses, and the rabbis themselves must engage in a magical exorcism in order to bring about the birth of a sage; magic gives birth to a sage—and a sage gives birth to a magician. Each side wears the other's mask, employing cultural mimicry in order to establish his own identity. If, as Freud suggested, the uncanny reveals itself in the return of the repressed—when we meet unexpectedly that which was denied—then perhaps we could say that the sages are struggling here with those repressed aspects of their own identity; with the otherness within them that haunts the cultural periphery of the narrator and his characters.

One final observation is in order. Bohak has recently observed that the western Palestinian sources of "insider" magic display almost no distinctly rabbinic elements.[39] The flip side of this coin could be that Palestinian rabbinic texts do not display specifically "rabbinic magic." Not only is this observation supported by these two "outsider" narratives, where both the rabbis and their opponents are virtually indistinguishable in their magical practice, but I would venture that it is precisely this lack of difference that is the textual unconscious here. The situation is different in the Babylonian Talmud, to which we now turn.

THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

There is much more to be discussed in relation to the material in the *Yerushalmi* but I wish now to look at the parallel text located in the Babylonian Talmud (bSan 67b–68a), where we can see a different configuration of the discourse of magic. Again I want to stress that in the following pages I am not proposing a comprehensive explanation of contest narratives in the *Bavli*, nor even an inclusive reading of the *sugya*. Though I run the risk of reductionism, I will try to point out what seem to me to be some of the dominant themes in the materials under discussion.

At first glance, talmudic *sugya* appears to be less organized than its Palestinian counterpart. It jumps from topic to topic in a medley of genres. In general, it is composed of five sections and in each it differs from the *Yerushalmi*. Both the Palestinian and the Babylonian discussions open with the attack of a sorcerer upon the sages; the *Yerushalmi* begins with the bathhouse tale we saw above, and the *Bavli* begins with an attack by a witch upon R. Hanina, who totally disregards the threat because of his trust in divine protection. In the former, the sages prove their superiority by magical acts, but in the latter the sage proves his preeminence by not engaging in magic. Here is the first major difference between the two talmudic approaches; while the sages in the *Yerushalmi* perform magi-

39. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 341, 414.

cal acts and do so in a manner that establishes their superiority, only twice in the entire Babylonian discussion do the sages perform successful magical acts. In distinction from what is normally perceived as the proclivity of the Babylonian Talmud for magic, here at least the sages perform almost no feats of magic.[40]

In the next section there appear a series of statements whose common denominator is a concerted effort on the part of the rabbis to define and distinguish between different types of magical acts and their accouterments. This section has no counterpart in the Palestinian discussion. Taking these two sections together we can underscore the central difference between the two works. While most of the *Yerushalmi* is composed of accounts of the magical victories of the sages and the duplicity of the gentile magicians, in the *Bavli* the rabbis do not perform magic; rather, what they do is to talk about it.

It would seem that the means of representing rabbinical power and the nature of that power itself have been transformed. If, as I suggested above, the Palestinian contest narratives represent rabbinic identity by means of magical prowess, here in the *Bavli* the discourse of magic is expressed as a type of knowledge.[41] So we see that most of the discussion here is a sustained effort to categorize and classify various magical acts in an attempt to create the authority of the sages not as gifted practitioners but as extraordinary savants of magical practice. I call this phenomenon, after Andrew Jacobs, "academic imperialism."[42] He discusses the manner in which late antique Christianity appropriated the Jews then residing in Palestine, by transforming them into a type of Christian knowledge. If I replace "Christians" with the "rabbis," his description of this process becomes remarkably appropriate:

> These processes of conceptual organization positioned the [rabbis] as knowers and controllers by construing inferior objects [magic] as to-be-known and to-be-controlled . . . Domination is a relationship, and

40. See Ludwig Blau, *Das Altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Budapest, 1898); Louis Ginsberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore* (New York, 1970), 22. Bohak, following Lieberman (Saul Liberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, [New York, 1965], 110), also remarks that "the age-old claim that the Babylonian rabbis were more prone to magical beliefs and activities than their Palestinian contemporaries seems to be quite unwarranted" (Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 354).

41. It goes without saying that I do not wish to reify this distinction into a binary dichotomy, rather I am addressing what I take to be salient differences in the textual/cultural dominant.

42. Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, Calif., 2004), 59.

> the [rabbis] in the fourth century began creating a world of religious authority through new relational webs of knowledge and power. Thus, a common feature of such discourses was the description of the deviant others, those figures who could be "known" and thus controlled by [rabbinic] discourses.[43]

This process of constructing magic as a discourse of knowledge, of creating knowledge about an inferior Other, places the Babylonian sages in a position of authority, structuring magic as an object to be known. As described by Edward Said, "To have such knowledge of a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it' . . . since it exists as we know it."[44]

The third section of the *Bavli* contains, in a manner similar to the *Yerushalmi*, a series of anecdotes about gentile attempts at magic that are revealed to be merely illusions. These tales are similar to those of the *circulators*, those traveling magicians who gave public performances of their tricks. As Apuleius relates in his Metamorphoses: "I saw with my very own eyes a street performer (*circulatorem*) swallow an extremely sharp cavalry sword with a lethal edge,"[45] and Tertullian condemns those magicians who perform what seems to be miracles with their tricks (*miracula circulatoriis*).[46] This section appears to be the closest to the *Yerushalmi*, which also relates a number of anecdotes concerning the chicanery of the heretic magicians in Sepphoris. While the *Yerushalmi* contains similar tales of revelation and exposure, the *Bavli* transfers the confrontation to the mythological past (of Moses and Pharaoh's magicians) and transforms narratives of personal confrontation into "textual" contests of interpretation between the rabbis themselves. Moreover, upon this common foundation appear three tales unique to the *Bavli*. In two of them the sages themselves are actually duped and defeated in encounters with magicians—an unthinkable outcome according to the cultural logic of the *Yerushalmi*—and I will return to this material shortly.

Here we arrive at another cardinal difference between the two talmudic discussions: the *Bavli* does not construct and represent magic through a discourse of power and identity but rather as a type of knowledge that the sage must acquire.[47] Kimberly Stratton, following Neusner, has sug-

43. Jacobs, *Remains*, 24.

44. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1995), 32.

45. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 1.4.

46. Apol. XXIII.1.

47. Thus, it is fitting that R. Yochanan's saying, that members of the Sanhedrin must know not only seventy languages but must also be "masters of sorcery" (bSan 17a), does not appear in any Palestinian source. Later interpreters strug-

gested that the magical abilities of the Babylonian sages emanate from their knowledge of the Torah.[48] Better yet, we could say that the rabbis' intimate relationship with and knowledge of the Torah as a sacred object—and not an acquired body of technical knowledge—enabled their magical powers. This is undoubtedly correct, but I want to add that the focus of the talmudic representation here is not that knowledge of the Torah bestows supernatural abilities but rather that magic itself is appropriated as a type of Torah.

This new direction explains the dominant place of the Torah in the entire discussion. I mentioned above that the rabbis here rarely perform feats of magic. In fact, in distinction from the *Yerushalmi*, there first appear here two types of rabbinic magic: successful and unsuccessful. This is already a salient point of difference from the *Yerushalmi*, where unsuccessful magic is always that of the heretics. Since magical prowess in the *Yerushalmi* is one of the marks of rabbinic status, the sages cannot represent themselves as being defeated. In the *Bavli*, however, all successful acts of magic are connected with the study of Torah, and all unsuccessful attempts are not. A good example of this difference is the gastronomic magic present in both Talmuds:

> ySan 25d: R. Yehoshua ben Hananya said, I can take gourds and melons and transform them into stags and deer, and these then produce more stags and deer.
> bSan 67b: Rav Hananya and Rav Hoshaiya would study the Book of Creation[49] every Sabbath eve and create a third grown calf and eat it.

In the *Yerushalmi*, R. Yehoshua boasts that he can transform melons into animals. The *Bavli* relates how the sages created a calf every Sabbath eve by studying the Book (or Laws) of Creation. If it is sufficient for the *Yerushalmi* to praise the sages' magical powers, the *Bavli* transform this culinary feat into a type of study.

In addition, if magic is a type of Torah then it must be studied and

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gled with this saying and suggested that the judge should be able to defend himself against a magic attack. I believe that Rav Hai Gaon offered a simpler explanation that the knowledge is necessary to distinguish between real and illusionary magic (Tosafot to bMen 65a).

48. Stratton, "Imagining Power," 365–67. See also J. Neusner, "Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism: The System and the Difference," in *Religion, Science, Magic*, ed. J. Neusner et. al. (Oxford, 1989), 69.

49. So in MSS Jerusalem-Herzog 1 and Florence II-I-9, other manuscripts read "Laws of Creation" (Munich 95, Karlsruhe-Reuchlin 2).

taught. Thus the entire discussion in the *Bavli* concludes with an editorial (stammaitic) attempt to circumvent the biblical and tannaitic prohibition on magic by declaring that while it is prohibited to perform magical acts, "you may study it in order to understand it." Likewise, the unique version of the narrative of R. Eliezer's death that appears here emphasizes how magic is part of the Torah.[50] In distinction from the version recorded in Palestinian texts (yShab 5b) where magic does not even appear, here R. Eliezer is praised for his magical knowledge, as one who knows three hundred laws of magic. What is important is not so much the hyperbolic quantity but the actual transformation of magic into law, into a type of legal tradition that must be studied and transmitted. It would seem that the Babylonian sages are less concerned with other magicians who can perform the same magical feats than with protecting and distinguishing their knowledge of magic from non-sage magicians.

Jacob Neusner is certainly correct when he stresses that the sage himself becomes the actual embodiment of the Torah, "that becomes a source of supernatural power."[51] No text exemplifies this insight better that the narrative here of R. Eliezer's death, where he is presented as the physical embodiment of the scrolls of Law ("these two arms of mine, that have been like two Scrolls of the Law"). This, however, is only half of the story. This narrative is a further example of academic imperialism as magic becomes a type of Torah that is taught and studied. It is not by chance that the narrator here praises R. Eliezer for his knowledge of three hundred laws of magic and three hundred laws of leprosy, a topic specifically tied to the priesthood. The discourse of Torah in the *Bavli* is appropriating all possible sources of competing knowledge and authority. Instead of the sage appropriating the actions of the magician in order to demonstrate his own powers and subdue his opponents, the *Bavli* transforms magic into a type of legitimate sage-knowledge.[52]

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50. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharasees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism," *HUCA* 55 (1984): 49; Daniel Boyarin, "A Tale of Two Synods: Nicaea, Yavneh, and Rabbinic Ecclesiology," *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 52–55; D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004), 178–82.

51. Jacob Neusner, *Talmudic Judaism in Sassanian Babylonia* (Leiden, 1976), 54.

52. Bohak is of the opinion that "the assumption that magic is a body of knowledge which requires detailed study, and the claim that one indeed may (or even must) study it, are central components of the rabbinic view of this subject from very early times, and are attested in Palestine and Babylonia" (*Ancient Jewish Magic*, 360). To prove this position—which undermines my point here—he quotes four rabbinic sources: the conclusion of the *sugya*, R. Yohanan's statement in bSan 17a that knowledge of magic is a prerequisite for sitting in the Sanhedrin,

If we examine now the contest-narratives in the *Bavli* against this background, it becomes apparent that all of the traits mentioned in the *Yerushalmi* have been transformed. On the level of personal and spatial characteristics, all of the heretics and all of the cities have disappeared. Instead of the Galilean map of Sepphoris and Tiberius, here the actions take place in an imaginary landscape where the sages meet and clash with various marginal figures in liminal locations like the inn or the market. The magician is not presented here as particularly dangerous, and these contests do not involve, as in the *Yerushalmi*, life-threatening situations. In fact, there pervades an almost comic atmosphere; streams of silk issue from one rabbi's nostrils and R. Zeiri is bested by magicians in the market of Alexandria who sell him an ass which is transformed into a plank of wood. In addition, as I mentioned above, one of the most surprising differences is that in several of these contests the sage himself is defeated.

If magic here in the *Bavli* is not connected to heretics and is not represented as a threat upon rabbinic power and prestige, the question that presents itself is what precisely is the nature and threat of magic that we find here? Clearly, not all types of magic can be incorporated as Torah; so what does that type of magic that non-rabbis perform represent? I suggest that the *Bavli* continues to represent magic as the power of a threatening Other, but not an ethnic or religious Other as in the *Yerushalmi*. From the moment that the Torah becomes the dominant episteme that constructs the world, then magic itself is transformed into a type of anti-culture. Yuri Lotman has aptly described this process whereby chaos is transformed into culture and vice versa:

> Culture and non-culture appear as spheres which are mutually conditioned and which need each other. The mechanism of culture is a system which transforms the outer sphere into the inner one: disorgani-

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SifreDeut 170, and MidTan to Deut 18.9 (p. 109 Hoffman). First, concerning the conclusion of the Babylonian *sugya*, Bohak is certainly aware of the possibility that "we might be tempted to suggest that the final statement . . . is just an ad hoc invention or a Babylonian add-on to earlier Palestinian traditions" (360) but dismisses it in light of the other sources he quotes. I believe that this is precisely an "add-on to earlier Palestinian traditions" as both the stammaitic language, diction, and the Palestinian parallel versions to R. Eliezer's death seem to indicate. Second, the proof from MidTan seems merely to be a reworking by *Midrash ha-gadol* of the *Bavli*. Third, as I alluded above (note 47), the unique tradition of R. Yochanan does not appear in any Palestinian sources and may very well be of Babylonian provenance. What remains is only the tradition in the Sifre. Even granting this tradition, we are a far cry from the dominance of this motif in the entire Babylonian discussion.

> zation into organization, ignoramuses into initiates, sinners into holy men, entropy into information. By virtue of the fact that culture lives not only by the opposition of the outer and inner spheres but also by moving from one sphere to the other, it does not only struggle against the outer "chaos" but has need of it as well; it does not only destroy it but continually creates it . . . In this connection it may be said that each historically given type of culture has its own type of nonculture peculiar to it alone.[53]

This transformation of chaos into order and entropy into knowledge is the basic mechanism of academic imperialism mentioned previously. Since "each type of culture has its corresponding type of chaos," I propose that in the *Bavli* magic functions as a type of "anti-culture" for the rabbis, which they both create and combat.

The most fruitful manner of characterizing this anti-culture is, I believe, with the Bakhtinian category of the carnivalesque, a "symbolic inversion that inverts, contradicts, or abrogates normative cultural codes."[54] Magic in the *Bavli*, and especially women's magic, is presented as a carnivalistic threat to the culture of the house of study. And it is not surprising to find here a gendered nature of magic: if the Torah world of the rabbis is androcentric, then any representation of its negative will accumulate feminine gendered properties.[55] The carnivalesque challenges hegemonic discourses and suspends normative hierarchies, usually expressing itself in three forms—transgression of bodily and spatial barriers, inversion of hierarchy, and degradation of the sacred.[56] These three elements work to destabilize or defamiliarize the normative codes of hegemonic culture by presenting alternative ways of constructing cultural life.

THE DAUGHTERS OF RAV NACHMAN, OR BAKHTIN STIRS THE CAULDRON

I previously mentioned that the sorcerer threatens rabbinic power and prestige. In light of the *Bavli*'s appropriation of magic as knowledge, this

53. Yuri Lotman et.al. "Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures," in *The Tell-Tale Sign: A Survey of Semiotics*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Lisse, 1975), 58

54. Babcock, "Introduction," 14.

55. On the connection between magic, women, and symbolic reversal in a later period, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1999), 129–33.

56. Peter Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the Cup of Liberty': Robin Hood, the Carnivalesque, and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England," in *The Violence of Representation*, ed. N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse (London, 1989), 46.

threat assumes a distinctly carnivalesque character, as can be seen in the following narrative of Rav Nachman's daughters (bGit 45a).

> A. The daughters of Rav Nachman stirred a boiling cauldron with their bare hands. Rav Ilish was puzzled; It is written [he said], "One man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among all those have I not found" (Eccl 7.28), and yet here are the daughters of Rav Nachman!
> B. It happened that they were carried away captive, and he was also taken captive with them. One day a man was sitting next to him who understood the language of birds. A raven came and called, and Rav Ilish said to him, What does it say? It says, he replied, Ilish, flee, Ilish, flee. He said, The raven is a liar, and I do not trust it. Then a dove came and called. He again asked, What does it say? It says, the man replied, Ilish flee, Ilish flee. Said [Ilish]: The community of Israel is likened to a dove; this means that a miracle will be performed for me.
> C. He then [said to himself], I will go and see the daughters of Rav Nachman; if they have retained their virtue, I will bring them back. He said: Women talk over all their affairs in the privy, so he went and overheard them saying, These [our husbands] are men and these [Nehardeans] are men. Let us tell our captors to remove us to a distance from here, so that our husbands may not come and hear [where we are] and ransom us.
> D. Rav Ilish then rose and fled, along with the other man. A miracle was performed for him, and he got across the river, but the other man was caught and put to death.
> E. When the daughters of Rav Nachman came back, they stirred the cauldron by witchcraft.[57]

We could say that this is a tale about women as a hermeneutical enigma. The daughters, like the witches in *Macbeth*, are able to stir a boiling pot with their bare hands. This supernatural ability seems to contradict that which was said by Solomon, the wisest of men, who searched for but did not find a righteous woman.[58]

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57. bGit 45a, according to the Vatican 130 MS. The printed addition, against all the manuscript evidence, places the last line in the mouth of Ilish. This fact was ignored by a number of scholars, see for example Simcha Fishbane, "'Most Women Engage in Sorcery': An Analysis of Sorceresses in the Babylonian Talmud," *Jewish History 7* (1993): 30; Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 166.

58. Seidel ("Charming Criminals," 151, n.17) for some reason explains that this narrative contains "the only use of legitimate women's magic in rabbinic literature."

This apparent contradiction between reality and Scripture is the catalyst for this plot; to what should we ascribe these unearthly powers—to exemplary righteousness or to the powers of darkness? This enigma is all the more unsettling because they seem indistinguishable, both enabling the same powers and thus creating the hermeneutic dilemma. In fact, this is one of the much debated issues in Late Antiquity; what is the source of the magician's power? Various authors of the period from Pliny the Elder to the Church Fathers all attempted to solve this issue. Augustine, for example, said, "The things done by magicians and by saints are often alike; but in fact they are done for different ends and by different rights . . . Hence it is one thing when magicians perform wonders, another when good Christians perform them: magicians do it through private contracts [with the evil powers], good Christians through public righteousness."[59]

The threat embodied in the acts of the daughters is the blurring of normative cultural categories, as can be seen through the structure of the narrative. The plot is composed of five sections arranged chiastically. The opening and closing sections (A–E) take place in Nehardea and represent the problem and its solution ("they stirred the cauldron with their bare hands"—"they stirred the cauldron by witchcraft"). In sections B and D both Ilish and the Bird Man appear in captivity in connection with the pronouncement of the escape and its enactment. Section C concerns the powder room gossip of the women and is the structural axis of the plot. Each narrative couplet has the same characters and transpires in the same space. Together they construct a system of dichotomies: man and women, righteousness and witch, dove and raven, white and black, here and there, Jew and gentile.

Sections A and E take place in Nehardea. This is not only the spatial anchor and home of the narrative but also the seat of rabbinic authority. It is important to remember that Rav Nachman is a central religious and political figure in this Babylonian community; therefore it is not surprising that it is here that the problem of righteousness versus magic arises and here it is resolved. It turns out that the anomalous behavior of the women does not contradict Scripture but rather proves the illegitimate source of their powers. This is the ideological frame of the narrative that establishes, or attempts to establish, the superiority of rabbinic knowledge.

What is the function of sections B and D in the overall plot? First,

59. De diu. quaest. LXXXIII 79.4. See also Augustine, *City of God* 10.8; Clementine, *Recognitions* 3.LVII; Robert A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool, 1996), 125–46.

birds in general, and the raven in particular, are intimately connected to ornithomancy and magic. The Tosefta (tShab 6:6) prohibits the interpretation of the call of the raven in a manner reminiscent of our tale, and Leviticus Rabbah (32.2) comments on the verse: "For a bird of the air shall carry the voice (Eccl 10.20)—this refers to the raven and the art of bird-divination." Likewise, Plutarch in his *Life of Cicero* (47.8) relates that a flock of ravens landed on his ship as it approached the port and was interpreted as an omen of ill fortune.[60] In a striking parallel to our tale, Epiphanius tells of a flock of crows that hovered over the temple of Serapis in the presence of Athanasius, crying continually "caw, caw." When some of the onlookers asked the bishop to tell them what the crows were saying, he answered: "These crows are saying, 'caw caw,' and in Latin this word means 'tomorrow' (*cras*), and tomorrow you will see the glory of God. Just afterwards, the death of the Emperor Julian was announced."[61]

I suggest that this scene functions as a mise-én-abyme in relation to the narrative frame. The dilemma concerning the nature of the daughters is mirrored in the cawing of the birds. Both represent a problem of interpretation for Ilish, and his lack of ability to distinguish between the raven and the dove parallels his inability to differentiate between the righteousness or the sorcery of the daughters. Moreover, both birds make the exactly same sounds, saying the same words—"Ilish flee"—just as the ability to stir a boiling cauldron is common to both groups. The question is, are the women ravens or doves?

What enables Ilish to decide that the raven is a liar and that the dove announces his deliverance? Although difficult to render in English, his language is replete with expressions taken from the rabbinic discourse of the House of Study. It is only his expertise in the use of the normative codes of rabbinic discourse that enables him to interpret correctly. It is this knowledge—which also has a gendered identity[62]—that enables him

60. Likewise, Apollonius of Tyrana, the famous wonder worker of the first century, had to defend his knowledge of the language of birds and explain that he came by this knowledge through legitimate means (Philostratus, *Life of Appoloanus* 4.3). Eusebius explains that Apollonius acquired this ability during his travels in the East (*Contra Hieroclem* X).

61. Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1984), 56–57.

62. For another text where the gendered dichotomy of Torah and magic appears, see LevR 9.9 and the illuminating analysis of Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003), 73–76.

to penetrate mere external appearances and distinguish between the raven and the dove, black and white, and righteousness and magic. Therefore, just as Ilish solved the problem of the birds on the basis of "normative" knowledge, so too he should have solved the apparent contradiction between the actions of the daughters and Scripture while still in Nehardea. The question is not which bird to listen to but rather how to use rabbinic knowledge to penetrate the veil of ephemeral appearances. In fact, the entire story of Ilish's quest is a series of false steps, since already in Nehardea he should have trusted the verse and not his eyes. It was precisely in order to learn this lesson that Providence arranged for him to be taken captive along with the daughters of Rav Nachman.

The third section (C) of the narrative takes place in the privy and stands at its structural and thematic center. Ilish decides to check the faithfulness of the women, in light of the prevalent rabbinic topos that captivity is a place of sexual license.[63] This connection between sorcery and licentiousness is a prevalent trope and part and parcel of the rhetoric of marginalizing magic; as Quintilian said, "The entire life of a prostitute is *veneficium*."[64] While it may be that Ilish is once again misguided in ignoring the explicit oracular instructions to flee, its seems certain that the rabbinic voyeur ignores the advice of the Babylonian sage Abaye: "When you go through the lanes of Mahoza to get to the fields, do not look to this side or to that, for perhaps women are sitting there, and it is not proper to gaze at them" (bBer 62b).

A particularly important aspect of this narrative is its deployment of space. While the narrative frame takes place in Nehardea, most of the story transpires in the liminal domain of captivity. On a generic level, Ilish is a heroic character who travels from the center of rabbinic space to its margins in order to solve the enigma of the women and return home with the truth. What is the privy in the cultural topography of the sages? First, it is the abode of harmful spirits, and also a type of reverse image of the house of study, a place where it is prohibited to engage in Torah.[65] If the space of captivity is taken as liminal in relation to the rabbinic habitus and seat of power in Nehardea, then the privy is a kind of ultimate limen. Along these lines, it is a wonderful example of Foucault's

63. See mKet 1.4, 3.2; bKet 23a, 36b.

64. Quint. *Decl. maior* 14.5. See also Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 178–91, 247–49. J. Hoch-Smith, "Radical Yoruba Female Sexuality: The Witch and the Prostitute," in *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, ed. J. Hoch-Smith and A. Spring (New York, 1978), 245–67.

65. bBer 62a; bGit 70a; bShab 150a; Daniel Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine* (Oxford, 1998), 137–39.

heterotopia, those places "that are something like counter-sites . . . in which all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[66]

In order to further understand the function of the privy here as a heterotopia, I want to use the distinction put forward by James Scott between public and hidden transcripts. The former describe "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate them," while the latter discourse takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by power holders and "represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."[67] In the privy we can eavesdrop on the women's hidden transcript that is free from the limitations of male censorship and supervision. In terms of Spivak's famous phrase, this is a classic representation (through the ventriloquism of the rabbinic narrator) of the voice of the subaltern.[68]

If, however, the daughters of Rav Nachman are liberated from the male gaze, they are not protected from the male ear, and what we hear through the snooping Ilish is rather remarkable: "these are men and the Nehardeans are men." In other words, from the point of view of the women, there is no substantial difference between their Jewish husbands in Nehardea and their gentile captors; and in this rabbinic Patty Hearst syndrome, they actually prefer their present partners. This indeed is a secret that rabbinic culture can whisper to itself only in the "women's room."

Now the privy is certainly a site of the carnivalesque, and not only because it is the place of the scatological that Bakhtin described so well, rather because of the attributes that Ilish himself describes: "Women talk over all their affairs in the privy." Here hierarchies are suspended and liberated from hegemonic male supervision. Therefore it is here that we can hear of the covert desires of the daughters without censorship or social masks, the hidden transcript that undermines rabbinic foundations. It is typical of carnival, as Bakhtin remarked, that it expresses and inverts "in the language of the material bodily lower stratum all the central ideas, images, and symbols of official culture."[69]

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66. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Places," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, vol. 2, (London, 1998), 178.

67. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), 2–4.

68. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Chicago, 1988), 271–313.

69. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 394; Barbara A. Babcock, "The Novel and the Carnival World," *Modern Language Notes* 89 (1974): 925.

I believe that we are now in a position to better appreciate the nature of the threat posed by the daughters of Rav Nachman to the sages. Ilish enacts a heroic plot, and perhaps a parody of such a plot, as he ventures forth from the center to the dangerous cultural margins (even to the latrine!) in order to reveal the truth and restore the normative hierarchies. Similar to the journey of the rabbis to Rome, this too is a travel narrative that moves from the center of rabbinic authority in Nehardea to the margins of the privy and back again. But in light of the thematics of the *Bavli*, Ilish does not venture forth to prove his power and prowess but rather in order to acquire knowledge. In this context, it is interesting to cite the distinction posited by Hanna Naveh between male and female travel narratives: "the former is concerned with spreading domestic sameness in zones of difference ('to make the world England'), while the female travel narrative focuses on the internalization of difference."[70] Ilish desires to disseminate the sameness of the house of study. His ideological project, as the agent of rabbinic authority, is to categorize; to put things in their proper place and restore the normative order based upon the separation of magic and righteousness, here and there, Jew and Gentile. This is the reason why he is so disturbed by the anomalous behavior of the daughters, and for this same reason it is essential that the rabbinic narrator return them to their proper place and status at the tale's denouement.

If hegemonic culture is based upon a stable hierarchy where upper and lower do not mix and mingle, then one of the social functions of carnival is to embody the cultural negative as described by Lotman. The nature of the carnivalesque is its hybridity, and it expresses itself in transgression, border crossing, and a topsy-turvy world.[71] Thus, unlike Ilish, who crosses borders in order to strengthen them, the women enact a carnivalesque and anti-heroic plot. They too transgress borders and move from the center to the margins, but they wish to stay there, thus undermining difference by "internalizing" it as a preferred dystopia. The daughters embody here the threat of the carnivalesque to normative identity, the transgression of those very categories by which rabbinic culture constitutes its reality. Ilish the hero crosses borders in order to return from his

70. Hannah Naveh, *Men and Women Travelers: Travel Narratives in Modern Hebrew Literature* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2002), 289.

71. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 166; Peter Stallybrass and Alon White, *Politics and Poetics*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986), 58. See also Stuart Hall, "Metaphors of Transformation," in *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing*, ed. A. White (Oxford, 1993), 8. For a similar representation of an antirabbinic dystopia, see now Beth Berkowitz, "The Limits of 'Their Laws': Ancient Rabbinic Controversies about Jewishness (and non-Jewishness)," *JQR* 99.1 (2009): 127.

journey with a message that will strengthen the boundaries of identity. But borders are not only where identities are separated, they are also where they meet and mingle, are performed and contested; and the daughters who cross these same boundaries undermine the border line itself as a sign of stable identity.

Magic is represented here as that which not only evades those who police the borders of identity but also what the social body must condemn in order to exist, the disorder that threatens the social body and which must be kept at bay if it is to survive and flourish. It both defines and undermines the society that creates it. Just as the carnivalesque, as defined by Lindley, "is antitaxinomic, it subverts the vision of a classifiable cosmos based on the desire for firm conceptual boundaries,"[72] so too we could say that this carnivalesque representation of the daughters of Rav Nachman signifies the shadow-self of rabbinic culture. It is an externalized projection of the difference within that both threatens the normative order and yet is also a necessary component of its self-definition. And this, I suggest, is the function of the daughters of Nachman in this tale and part of the cultural work of magic here in the *Bavli*.

If we now return to the discussion in bSan, I believe that it is possible to see this motif of a cultural negative in the following unusual comment by Abaye:

> The laws of sorcerers are like the law of the Sabbath: certain actions are punished by stoning, some are exempt from punishment, yet forbidden, whilst others are entirely permitted.[73]

While the Mishnah we saw above posits a dichotomy between prohibited real magic and permitted illusion, Abaye's classification is part and parcel of the attempt of the *Bavli* to dominate and control magic by means of academic imperialism, to write a cultural grammar of magic and by doing so to domesticate and transform it into internal knowledge, from entropy to information. Magic here becomes a type of knowledge that is parallel to Torah but also contrary to it. Just as the carnival is always analogous to the normative order but also at variance with it, so too magic is presented here as a negative homologue to the divine order. Magic is the carnivalesque inverted world, a dystopic parallel to the utopia of the Sabbath. This is a very similar approach to that with which the *Bavli* discus-

72. Arthur Lindley, *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnivalesque Subversion* (Newark, N.J., 1996), 23

73. bSan 67b.

sion opens, that magic contradicts the heavenly household because it constructs a mirror-like reversal of the rabbinic world.

R. YANNAI GOES TO MARKET

In constructing magic as knowledge the *Bavli* evades the dilemma we saw in the *Yerushalmi* that the powers of the sage undermine any claim to a unique identity. However, the construction of domination through knowledge opens up narrative possibilities that do not exist in the cultural logic of the Palestinian texts. If the *Yerushalmi* is precluded from presenting a magic contest where the sage is defeated—the *Bavli* can dramatize an encounter where the sage does not understand. This is a typical rabbinic situation.[74] Here the problem is not the Jew who appears as another or vice versa but rather the sage who attempts to control the other by means of his knowledge, as we saw in the tale of Ilish, or who is revealed as one who does not understand, as in Zeiri's burlesque encounter with the merchants of Alexandria (bSan 67b).

As I stated above, the *Bavli* introduces a twofold innovation when it not only connects magic to sage knowledge but also dramatizes the possibility of rabbinic failure. One of the elements that signifies the uniqueness of the *Bavli*'s approach is that for magic to be successful it must be connected to the study of Torah, and all the instances of rabbinic defeat are not so connected. The last text I wish to examine exemplifies this failure.

> R. Yannai came to an inn. He said to them, Give me a drink of water, and they offered him *shatitah* [a kind of porridge]. {Seeing the lips of the woman[75] [who served him] moving}, he spilled a little thereof, and it turned into scorpions. Then he said, As I have drunk of yours, now do you come and drink of mine. So he gave her to drink, and she was turned into an ass, and he then rode upon her to the market. But her friend came and released the spell, and he was seen riding upon a woman in the market place[76].

Who is victorious here? It would seem, in distinction from all of the tales in the *Yerushalmi*, that here the rabbinic sage is defeated in a most compromising and facetious manner. Not for naught did the classical commentator Rashi eliminate here Yannai's rabbinic title, saying that he could not be the reknown R. Yannai because "he acted inappropriately since he

74. See Jeffrey Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore, Md., 2003), 16–38.

75. These words are missing in the Yemenite MS and T-S F2 (1) 169.

76. bSan 67b.

performed magic." Once again, as we have seen in all of the tales in the *Bavli*'s discussion here, the confrontation takes place in a liminal space, an inn, and again the opponent is a woman. In the rabbinic social imaginary the inn or tavern was considered a dangerous location, far from the reach of law and order. The innkeeper herself was not exactly considered a blushing maiden; as Sperber has remarked, "The main places of prostitution were taverns."[77] R. Yannai seems to be aware of the dangers awaiting him, and when the woman offers him some food that he did not request, his suspicions are aroused and subsequently confirmed.[78]

Now the games begin. It is not entirely clear what the witch hoped to achieve with her potion, yet this seems to be an example of erotic magic. It corresponds with Winkler's description of erotic magic as "a kind of sneak attack waged in the normal warfare of Mediterranean social life."[79] This magic was frequently violent, used by men and women alike, and often resembled spells of domination whose "purpose is to establish control of the victim."[80] From the continuation of the story I assume that the innkeeper attempted to transform Yannai himself into an ass. Therefore, as we see, Yannai sought his revenge in a commensurate fashion and transformed her into a she-ass and rode her to the market. Not only is transformation the dominant trope of this narrative (from water to *ʿhatitah*—*ʿhatitah* to scorpion—woman to ass and back) but it is well known that the ability to turn a person into an animal is found in every magician's bag of tricks and widespread in erotic magic. A similar scene occurs when the libidinous witch Pamphile (all-loving) transforms Lucius into an ass in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (3.24).[81]

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77. Sperber, *The City*, 15–17; Harry J. Magoulias, "Bathhouse, Inn, Tavern, Prostitution and the Stage as Seen in the Lives of the Saints of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *EEBS* 38 (1971): 238–46.

78. I understand the scorpions to be images of the potency of the magical charm. The significance of spilling the *ʿhatitah* is not entirely clear to me. Perhaps it is related to the law that "one who spills water in public and says, 'Hada,' this is the ways of the Amorite" [i.e., prohibited magic] (tShab 6.11). Pliny the Elder also mentions a similar custom: "If, when eating, we happen to make mention of a fire that has happened, we avert the inauspicious omen by pouring water beneath the table" (*Natural History* 28.5.25), and see Veltri, "The Rabbis and Pliny the Elder," 73. Petronius also mentions spilling wine under the table (*sub mensa*) in order to ward off an evil omen (*Satyricon* 10.73).

79. John J. Winkler, "The Constraints of Eros," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (New York, 1991), 233.

80. Yuval Harrari, "Ancient Jewish Erotic Magic," *Kabbala* 5 (1990): 255.

81. See also Pseudo-Clement where Simon Magus boasts of his ability to "change himself into a sheep or a goat" (*Recognitions of Clement* II.9).

In a wonderful article on erotic magic in Coptic Egypt, David Frankfurter cites the tale of St. Macarius the Egyptian from the fourth century, who treated a woman who was bewitched and transformed by her pursuer into a horse. The saint releases the spell with holy water and prayer.[82] It seems to me that we are concerned here with a similar situation. Additional support may be found in Augustine's *City of God* where he writes:[83]

> Indeed we ourselves, when in Italy, heard such things about a certain region there where landladies of inns, imbued with these wicked arts, were said to be in the habit of giving to such travelers as they chose, or could manage, something in a piece of cheese by which they were changed on the spot into beasts of burden, and carried whatever was necessary, and were restored to their own form when the work was done.

Frankfurter documents the significance of horses and asses in erotic magic and concludes that these two beasts were "the very image of phallic lust" and the purpose of such spells was to arouse "extreme passions for unrestrained copulation and erotic frenzy." He quotes, for example, a Coptic charm where there appears the wish that the desired victim "should hang on the suitor as a female upon a male donkey."[84] He concludes that the ass "is represented both as phallicly disposed and as phallic magnetic to women—the animal match to women's own excessive carnality."[85]

Think for a moment what would have happened if our witch had suc-

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82. David Frankfurter, "The Perils of Love: Magic and Countermagic in Coptic Egypt," 480–500. Likewise Basil of Caesarea denigrates those women who "frequently endeavor to draw men to love them by incantations and magic knots, and give them drugs which dull their intelligence" (Basil of Ceasarea, *Letter*s 188.8).

83. 18.18. See also the tale brought in *The Malleus Maleficarum* (II.2.4, H. Kramer and J. Sprenger, trans. M. Summers, [New York, 1971], 173–75). Baroja records an interesting tale about Pope Leo IX, who granted an audience "to a young minstrel who asked for lodging in the house of two old witches who lived on the outskirts of Rome. While the unfortunate man was asleep they changed him into an ass . . . and made lots of money exhibiting him in public and making him do tricks" (Julio C. Baroja, *The World of Witches* [Chicago, 1961], 45).

84. Heidelberg kopt. 1684, lines 115–23, published in *Ancient Christian Magic*: *Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, ed. M. Meyer (San Francisco, 1994), 155.

85. Frankfurter, "The Perils of Love," 491–91. See also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 7.21, 10.21.

ceeded in achieving her desired end to transform Yannai into an ass. Then we would see the classic reversal of "woman on top," similar to the famous tale of Phyllis and Aristotle (figure 1).[86] This image of a woman-gentile-witch riding upon a man-Jew-sage is the fulfillment of the ultimate rabbinic nightmare. Once again we see how the sages imagined magic as a dystopia. Such was the image embodied in the words of the daughters of Rav Nachman who said "these and these are men," and so also here. On the one hand, the textual community imagines its own inversion—that all men are the same, or a witch riding upon a sage—and on the other hand, it acts to neutralize this dangerous fantasy.

Figure 1: *Phyllis and Aristotle*, Master of the Housebook, ca. 1485, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

86. Master of the Housebook (ca. 1485). See also David Kunzle, "World Upside Down: The Iconography of a European Broadsheet Type," in Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World*, 39–94; Natalie Z. Davis, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," ibid., 146–90.

To return to our tale, Yannai's powers stand fast and he settles the score by transforming the witch into an ass and riding her to the market. This gesture is a kind of "cultural performance,"[87] a staging of the normative hierarchies: the sage and the man is to a witch and woman as a man is to his beast of burden. With this act, with all of its erotic connotations, Yannai performs the "naturalness" of the ideological constructions of power and gender. Like Ilish in the previous narrative, Yannai attempts to put the witch in her proper place—under his saddle.

As a typical talmudic tale in could certainly end here with Yannai's comic *triumphus* into the market. And I think that we could surmise that if it would appear in the *Yerushalmi* such would be its conclusion. But now comes another twist in the plot, and with all of the irony of a double reversal, the witch's accomplice appears and releases Yannai's spell—and all present see him riding upon a woman in the market. What exactly happens here? Like the tale of Nachman's daughters, here too the spatial dimension is important. The image of a woman in the market in rabbinic literature arouses connotations of *on* the market—that is to say, a woman as commodity (just like a women in captivity), whose identity, body, sexuality, and worth are all, in some sense, up for grabs. For this reason the rabbis transform the divine mandate to conquer the earth (Gn 1.28) into another type of discourse altogether by saying that "a man must conquer his wife so that she does not go out to the market place, for every woman who goes out into the market place will, like Dinah (Gn 34.1), eventually come to grief."[88] As Cynthia Baker has shown, "The woman in the market conveys the sense that if only the female body (and all that it is made to signify) is sufficiently controlled and bounded, perhaps that accomplishment might serve as a protection against the penetration and dissemination of others' culture into the carefully delineated Jewish society."[89] This is the meaning preferred by Yannai and the logic of his revenge.

The rabbinic anxiety expressed here recognizes that the market is the classic site of carnival and therefore they caution that "a woman should not go out to the market . . . for in the end she will come to harlotry."[90]

87. "Occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others" (John J. MacAloon, *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals towards a Theory of Cultural Performance* [Philadelphia, 1984], 1).

88. GenR 8.28.

89. Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford, Calif., 2002), 110.

90. Tanhuma Buber, *Vayishlach* 12, p. 171.

It is a place of cultural hybridity where the personal and the public, inside and out, meet and mix, and therefore a fitting site for the defrocking of Yannai. In formalist terms we could say that the second witch reveals the rabbinic ideological device (or forces Yannai out of the closet). She transforms the hegemonic hierarchy of man upon beast in the market or man upon woman at home into a transgressive hierarchy when she changes its site of expression from the private to public and from the home to the market.[91] Yannai's private victory is turned into a degrading debacle when it appears that the "natural" hierarchy can only be sustained by means of magic.

We must remember that the cultural hierarchies of "above and below" are ideologically constructed and can therefore be deconstructed. When the second witch releases Yannai's spell she exposes him to the vulgar laughter of the marketplace. In this game the witch is actually empowered by her failure, and the normative dichotomy is destabilized when the witch tops Yannai even as she remains beneath him. As a result the normative hierarchy itself—man on woman—becomes a type disorder, as Stallybrass has said: "The relation of law to play could be constituted differently by subordinate classes. In carnivalesque play, the law became the subject of interrogation. Indeed, official law could be seen from this perspective as a form of disorder."[92] Thus, the riding on the woman in the market is a wonderful embodiment of what Bakhtin calls "the dual image of carnival, combining praise and abuse . . . Such an image crowns and uncrowns at the same moment."[93]

CONCLUSION

The two parallel talmudic discussions contain consistently different representations of magic. From the discussion in the Mishnah we would not expect the radical new turn that we find in the Palestinian Talmud as a discourse of power replaces the juridic-ontological categories. The tannaitic distinction between culpable and exempt is not only displaced but actually reversed, as the sage as magician is praised against his mounte-

91. "Each place within the social ensemble is a particular site of production of discourse, a specific semantic field, but each domain in turn can easily be reconstructed within the terms of other domains and according to the hierarchies and ranks governing the social formation as a whole . . . 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" (Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 149).

92. Stallybrass, "Drunk with the Cup of Liberty," 72.

93. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 166.

bank opponents. This reconstitution of the discourse of magic transforms the contest narratives along the lines discussed by Peter Brown, who emphasized the competition between two systems of power, that "above everything, the holy man is a man of power."[94] In such an atmosphere of competition and enmity the rabbis appropriated for themselves the powers of the magician for the double purpose of proving their superiority and denigrating their adversaries. However, from the moment that the distinction between the sage and his adversary becomes a matter of power, of the effective use of magic, then the sage becomes merely the more successful version of his adversary. In this double game of cultural mimicry, appropriation of the powers of the sorcerer creates a certain anxiety concerning the fluidity of the sage's own identity; the more he attempts to prove his superiority to his adversary, so he becomes more and more like him. The texts we saw both display this anxiety and attempt to contain it.

The situation in the *Bavli* is different. In the cultural cartography of the *Bavli* the other magician moves from the urban center to the margins. This topographic movement is accompanied by a personal displacement from the image of a sorcerer as heretic to various liminal characters. With the ascendancy of Torah study as the dominant episteme in Babylonian rabbinic culture, the axis of confrontation is not between the rabbi who can and the sorcerer who dissembles, as in the *Yerushalmi*, but rather between those inside the rabbinic study house who understand, and those who are outside.

Therefore, the disappearance of the *minim* does not need to surprise us. It is likely that the Babylonian rabbis did not feel that they were engaged in a conflict against an emerging hegemony that wished to replace them. The Christians themselves were just another subaltern community, and perhaps even more suspect than the Jews in the eyes of their Sasanian rulers because of their connections to Rome. This does not mean that there were not conflicts of this sort in Babylonia. We know of flourishing Gnostic, Mandean, and Christian communities, and from the homilies of Aphrahat and Ephrem it is easy to hear voices of conflict and polemic. Even if we hear from the fourth century of an increased influence of the West upon the East and an empowerment of a local Christian presence,[95] the scope and nature of these conflicts were different "in Neh-

94. Brown, "Holy Man," 121.

95. Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (London, 1999), 70–71; Adi Schremer, "Stammaitic Historiography," in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, ed. J. Rubenstein

ardea where there are no heretics" (bPes 56a) than in the "Empire that turned to heresy" (bSot 49b).

And yet, these changes cannot in themselves explain the major transformation we witnessed in the discourse of magic: why does it become an expression of rabbinic knowledge more than rabbinic power, and why is non-rabbinic magic represented here as a carnivalesque blurring of the normative categories of group identity? The over determination of cultural artifacts—and the *Bavli* should certainly be seen as such—makes it unlikely that there is any one explanation for these differences. Rather there are a number of forces at work here and we should look for the convergence of multiple vectors.

Many scholars have pointed out the scholastic tendencies of the Babylonian Talmud and its predilection for valorizing study as the ultimate act of *imitatio dei*. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that this proclivity is intimately connected to the emergence and institutionalization of the rabbinic academies themselves in mid-fifth- and sixth-century Babylonia.[96] This development in and of itself contributes considerably to explaining the new forms of rabbinic prowess and control. Texts formed and transmitted in an institutionalized scholastic setting would tend to reify their particular types of knowledge as power and power as knowledge.

This conjecture can, I believe, be considerably strengthen by the impressive work done by Adam Becker on the emergence of what he calls the "pedagogical paradigm" in Eastern-Syriac Christianity, most notably in the school of Nisibis that developed in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. By the term "pedagogical paradigm" or model he means the understanding of Christianity "as a form of learning that ultimately derives from and concerns God himself."[97] This "East-Syrian practice of devotional study" and its concomitant "elevation of the man of learning to an authoritative position within the community" has clear structural parallels to the rabbinical institutions in Sasanian Persia of the same time

(Tübingen, 2005), 224; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 1993), 510.

96. David Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden, 1975); Yeshayahu Gafni, "Yeshiva and Metivta" (Hebrew), *Zion* 43 (1978): 12–37; Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society*; Jeffrey Rubenstein, "The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence," *JSIJ* 1 (2002): 55–68; idem, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 16–38.

97. Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, 2006), 38–39.

and place.[98] Both the rabbinic and the East-Syrian schools emerged in the same scholastic culture of late antique Mesopotamia and provided a scholarly habitus that advocated ritualized study and fostered similar values and lifestyles as the students and masters dedicated themselves to the systematization, interpretation, and analysis of received traditions.[99]

Beyond the emergence of devotional study and interpretation as new forms of cultural capital, how does this structural resemblance relate to magic? Interestingly enough, Becker himself relates this pedagogic model to magical knowledge, especially in relation to the Babylonian incantation bowls published and studied by Shaked and Naveh. Various scholars have pointed out that magic is a language and practice that travels.[100] This "transportability" can explain the preponderance of "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" motifs and formulae in these amulets and bowls and demonstrates thoroughly how much this form of ritual knowledge and expertise crossed ethnic and religious boundaries. As Shaked has shown, the bowls reflect "a broad common denominator in the field of popular religious beliefs, around which members of different communities could be united, and which made it possible for them to turn to magic specialists outside their own community."[101]

Building upon this foundation, Becker has drawn insightful connections between the pedagogical paradigm and esoteric traditions in both Jewish and Christian cultures:

> This real economy of ritual objects would have been correlative with an ideology of the power of the learned male. *Learning was authoritative, and the language of learning was employed metaphorically in a number of places where we would not expect it, functioning to expand its discursive range into areas not usually labeled as belonging to the realm of learning* . . . Furthermore, this elevation of the man of esoteric learning to a place of symbolic and religious power within Sasanian culture may also be understood as correlative to the existence of such scribal authority within the bureaucracy of the Sasanian Empire . . . This ideology of

98. Adam H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," 5. The author has kindly permitted me to read and cite this important article, to be published in the *AJS Review*.

99. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism'," 23; idem, *Fear of God*, 204–9; Rubenstein, *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 35, 37.

100. Gideon Bohak, "Prolegomenon to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition," *Jewish Studies: Forum of the World Union of Jewish Studies* 44 (2007): 18.

101. Saul Shaked, "Popular Religion in Sassanian Babylonian," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997): 106.

learning was concomitant with the institutionalization of the transmission of knowledge among these different religious communities.[102]

Now all of this should sound very familiar vis-à-vis the Babylonian texts we saw above, especially the employment of the "language of learning" for magical practice and its transformation into a form of study and knowledge. To this we may add the importance of esotericism in Sasanian Zoroastrian tradition itself. Shaked has remarked that the status and power of the Magi were based upon the acquisition and transmission of esoteric knowledge, "knowledge that is the power of Azura Masda (Lord of Wisdom).[103] And Stratton explicitly connected these phenomena by saying that "in Babylonia the tremendous authority and influence of the magi flowed . . . from special knowledge. It is this notion of power, based on secret teachings and possession of a sacred text, that most influenced the self-representation of Babylonian sages."[104]

In short, Jews, Christians, and Persians in Sasanian Babylonia elevated the man of esoteric learning to a place of symbolic and religious power. And so we have returned to the theme of knowledge in the Babylonian talmudic discussion, to the knowledge of Torah that expressed the cultural capital of the sages in their own eyes and distinguished them from other ritual experts. These converging lines of interaction and dialogue could contribute to our understanding of the unique characteristics of the Babylonian magic contests we saw. This common discourse of magic that empowered the ritual specialist also worked to reconfigure the lines of identity along an axis of knowledge. Furthermore, the very same conceptual network that enabled the circulation of magical knowledge between religious and ethnic communities opened the door to competition. If, as the incantation bowls themselves testify, their clients were not adverse to soliciting "magic specialists outside their own community"[105]—this was presumably two-way traffic. Non-rabbinic and even rabbinic Jews could just as well turn to other expert neighbors for advice and assistance in their time of need.

Bohak has added a further important point in his careful distinction between Palestinian and Babylonian magic traditions mentioned above. On the basis of the Babylonian incantation bowls and other artifacts, he concludes that the eastern Babylonian branch of late antique magic dis-

102. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism'," 30.

103. Saul Shaked, "Esoteric Trends in Zoroastrianism," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 3 (1969): 175–205.

104. Stratton, "Imagining Power," 384–85.

105. Shaked, "Popular Religion in Sassanian Babylonian," 106.

plays "rabbinic elements," whereas "the western Jewish magical texts currently at our disposal do not really display any close contacts with rabbinic Judaism."[106] In other words, we can witness in the Babylonian tradition a gradual rabbinization of magical knowledge and practice. I would suggest that the appropriation of the discourse of magic as a type of sage knowledge through the pedagogical paradigm and the "language of learning" which occurs specifically in the *Bavli* is a further effect of this rabbinization, undertaken perhaps as a reaction to competing ritual experts, both within and without the rabbinic or Jewish milieu.

"Self-fashioning," as Greenblatt has remarked, "is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile."[107] Thus, a new question presents itself: what now distinguishes the Jewish or rabbinic savant of ritual power? A new image of self-fashioning invites a new image of the Other, and different types of difference are needed in this polyethnic culture of shared magic. It is here that the dystopian carnivalesque comes into play. By transforming this common language of magic into an especially Jewish dialect of knowledge, the rabbis not only justified their own prominence but also warned those who turned to ritual outsourcing. However, rabbinic identity and status in themselves are not sufficient to ensure magical prowess. Proper use of ritual magic must be acquired along recognized institutional chains of transmission, as are all other forms of rabbinic knowledge. For this reason the talmudic discussion not only transforms magic into knowledge but equally stresses the necessity of its proper authoritative transmission from within a recognized chain of tradition. Thus, on the one hand, only the *Bavli* records R. Eliezer's deathbed lament that he has not been able to transmit his arcane lore to his students, and only it is disturbed by the contradictions between the Mishnah and the Tosefta concerning the identity of R. Eliezer's masters (bSan 68a).[108] And on the other hand, as the comic failures of R. Zeiri and R. Yannai illustrate, it is not enough merely to have certain knowledge but a ritual expert must be schooled in its proper use; in other words, "Do not do try at home!"[109]

106. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 341.

107. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9.

108. See note 9 above.

109. I do not think it is coincidental that among the parallels Becker has pointed out between the rabbinic and East-Syrian church schools in late antique Persia is the shared importance of chains of tradition that "create a fictional continuity between authoritative figures" (Becker, *Fear of God*, 107–10; Amram Troper, "Tractate *Avot* and Early Christian Succession Lists," in *The Ways That Never Parted*, ed. A. Becker and A. Yoshiko Reed [Minneapolis, Minn., 2007], 159–88).

Therefore, it is not surprising that both non-rabbinic magic and rabbinic magic that is not connected to the Torah are both represented here through the three major elements of dystopic carnival: the transgression of boundaries, the reversal of hierarchies, and the profanation of the sacred. Magic remains the power of the Other, but this is not the ethnic Other of the Bible or a heretic as in the *Yerushalmi*, rather the Other as reflected in the rabbinic mirror, the repressed shadow-self of rabbinic culture. These changes do not diminish the dangers of sorcery. When the Galilean map is displaced by an imaginary anti-culture it may be that magic becomes all the more threatening because it is now encountered every time the rabbi ventures forth from the rabbinic house of study.