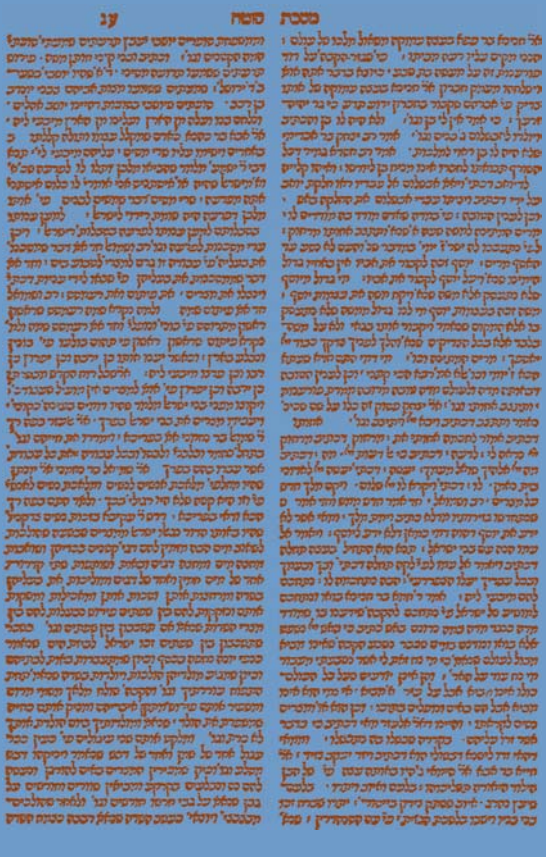
From Sermon to Commentary

Expounding the Bible in Talmudic Babylonia



Eliezer Segal

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Expounding the Bible in Talmudic Babylonia

Eliezer Segal

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Introduction
Aggadic Midrash in Babylonia

In both the ancient rabbinic texts and the accepted usages of academic study, the term *midrash* encompasses a diverse range of meanings. Almost all these meanings share a historical component, limiting its use to a specific era of "late classical Judaism," roughly coextensive with the era that produced the Mishnah and Talmuds.[1] As far as its substance is concerned, the decisive factor is its connection to scripture. Unlike other domains of the rabbinic oeuvre, *midrash* is restricted to items that relate explicitly to the text of the Hebrew Bible.[2]

In spite of the apparent consistency and precision of this definition, it becomes quickly apparent that its scope is still too general to serve all the needs of scholarly exactness.

For one thing, its connection with the Bible can take numerous guises. Standard classifications of *midrash* divide it into exegetical (*parshani*) and homiletical (*darshani*) types.[3] The former type, which is most recognizable when applied to the study of *halakhah* (legal discourse), involves detailed analysis of the meanings and implications of words and phrases; the latter type is characterized by the incorporation of biblical verses into rhetorically crafted sermons. The term *midrash* may be employed also with reference to the incidental citation of Scripture in the context of an otherwise non-exegetical discussion, or the redactional arrangement of material (including units that deal with non-biblical laws or narratives) according to the sequence of a biblical book.

It might be argued that subsuming these varied phenomena under a single terminological category demonstrates that the Jewish sages who produced midrash regarded them all as a single phenomenon. Nevertheless, a nuanced appreciation of the finer distinctions among various uses of midrash is crucial for explaining some incongruities in the development of rabbinic literature, particularly if we take into account the lengthy historical period during which the literature was produced and the fact that ancient rabbinic Judaism flourished in at least two major centres with vastly different cultural profiles.

Modern students of rabbinic literature were quick to take note of the profound differences that distinguish the sages of Babylonia from those of the Land of Israel in their treatment of aggadic *midrash*—*aggadah* being the component of

rabbinic literature that relates to the Bible from a non-legal standpoint. The differences have been described in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Not only is the Babylonian contribution to the genre conspicuous by its scarcity but what the Babylonian rabbis did produce appears excessively literalistic and unaesthetic, the product of a mentality that is incapable of appreciating rhetoric or poetic hyperbole.[4]

To be sure, there has not been universal agreement on the matter of the Babylonian Talmud's inferiority in the domain of *aggadah*. In their analyses of specific pericopes by means of refined methods of contemporary literary criticism, scholars such as Jonah Fraenkel,[5] Ofrah Meir,[6] and others have drawn our attention to subtle elements of literary sophistication that distinguish aggadic passages in the Babylonian Talmud. While some nuances that emerge from these studies might strike us as anachronistic when applied to a cultural setting that had very different standards of literary or rhetorical craftsmanship, the talmudic passages that fare best under such analysis tend to be narratives, whether legendary anecdotes involving the talmudic sages or extensive retellings of biblical episodes.[7] On the other hand, the conspicuous differences between Palestinian and Babylonian *aggadah* are most pronounced in units that are primarily midrashic—that is, the ones that focus on the interpretation and homiletical exposition of biblical texts. I suggest that at least some of the scholarly disagreements over the evaluation of Babylonian *aggadah* can be attributed to the types of literary corpus that formed the bases for their assessments.

Previous attempts to grapple with this phenomenon did not offer satisfying explanations and tended to treat the matter as an intangible cultural or psychological variation. In his perceptive investigation of the problem, Joseph Heinemann suggested that the difference might be rooted in the differing political and cultural climates of the two communities.[8] Thus, Jews in the Land of Israel were being subjected to a continual barrage of assaults on their religious values, whether through the aggressive inroads made by Hellenistic ideas or through systematic oppression by the pagan or Christian Roman empires. In this setting, weekly synagogue sermons played a vital part in raising the spirits of the common people and equipping them with the ideological weapons necessary to withstand challenges to their beleaguered faith. By contrast, the relative insularity and religious autonomy that were enjoyed by the Babylonian Jewish community, making for less competition from rival religions or philosophies, did not provide an ideal environment for the flourishing of midrashic preaching.[9]

Without denying the validity of these psychological and social factors, I find that the cultural contrast that they assume is questionable; Babylonian Jews were hardly immune to the claims of Zoroastrians, Christians, and other competing religious outlooks. I therefore believe that there is a need to explore addi-

tional ways of accounting for the differences by means of explanations that focus on the institutional settings in which the midrashic traditions were created.

The primary distinction can be epitomized in a simplistic formulation: *Aggadic midrash was created in the synagogue, whereas Talmud was created in the academy*. The synagogue's ambience is characterized by the interplay between the rabbi and the living community, which finds literary expression in the sermon. The talmudic academy's ambience, on the other hand, is characterized by theoretical study and scholarly interpretation. This fundamental difference in approach generated very distinct attitudes towards the biblical text. For synagogue preachers, biblical verses were used in various ways (and in combination with several other devices) in order to further the literary and ideological objectives of their sermons. For talmudic scholars, however, the elucidation of texts or traditions was the ultimate goal of intellectual activity.

Clearly, the Bible was studied as a text in the rabbinical academies,[10] even as sermons were delivered in the synagogues in both Babylonia and the Land of Israel (although they were probably less common in Babylonia, and their character differed in significant respects).[11] Nevertheless, the fact that passages of aggadic *midrash* that originated in the synagogue were later incorporated into the academic curriculum of Babylonian *yeshivahs* gave rise to decisive differences in the ways that the rabbis treated this material, including the disproportionate attention that the Babylonian rabbis devoted to its exegetical dimensions.

Biblical exegesis is of course a perfectly legitimate enterprise and one that was pursued, according to its own distinctive hermeneutical methods, in the venerable genre of halakhic *midrash*. However, the transition from synagogue to academy often resulted in a skewing of the original Palestinian sources into what can only be characterized as bad exegesis—"bad" not so much because it does not uncover the objective or authorial meaning of the biblical text (a concept that has dubious application to the ancient rabbinic mindset), but because it does not even accomplish the usual goals that were expected from rabbinic interpretation, especially that of providing ethical or religious edification. In the original Palestinian homily, a flagrantly non-literal reading of a biblical verse usually found its justification (to take some common examples) in the way that it gripped the congregation's attention, enhanced their faith in God's infinite power, or elicited a fundamental rabbinic value-concept from the words of the written Torah. The scriptural interpretations that appear in the Babylonian Talmud frequently serve none of these purposes, and we are left with the impression that their authors and editors had no intention in mind other than to assemble the most outrageous and irrelevant comments that they could attach to the given verse.

The pattern that I have just described emerged initially from my investigations into *b. Megillah* 10b–17a, an extensive exposition of the biblical book of Esther to

which I devoted a three-volume commentary.[12] When I compared Babylonian sources with analogous material in the Palestinian or midrashic collections, it became evident that the Palestinian versions were embedded into coherent literary homilies that conformed to the established rhetorical structures of rabbinic expositions. These texts yielded novel scriptural interpretations, when cross-fertilized through juxtaposition with other biblical passages, in accordance with the established modes of midrashic exposition. In their Babylonian incarnations, however, the editors often isolated specific exegetical or pseudo-exegetical comments and analyzed them narrowly in connection with the verses that they were interpreting—without reference to the homiletical frameworks in which they had originally figured or to the other biblical verses that had influenced the rabbis' readings of these verses.

I arrived at those conclusions from the study of a single block of text, albeit an extensive one. The "Esther Midrash" is after all, a unique document in several respects, and might not represent the larger body of Babylonian aggadic *midrash*. It is advisable, therefore, to perform a similar analysis of a different corpus of Babylonian *aggadah*.

For this purpose, I have selected a particular form of midrashic tradition that is distributed throughout the Babylonian Talmud. The tradition in question conforms to a formal pattern: "Rav and Samuel—One says x; and one says y."[13] Rav and Samuel were the most prominent figures in the first generation of Babylonian *amoraim*[14] and played a crucial part in establishing rabbinic scholarship in what would become the only major centre outside the Land of Israel. It is tempting to assume that Rav, who studied in the Holy Land before returning to his birthplace in Babylonia, is more likely to show influences and transmit traditions from the Land of Israel, whereas Samuel represents native Babylonian traditions.[15] Given the indeterminacy of attributions, this thesis is all but impossible to test. My studies of the respective passages will introduce questions about the historicity of attributions (based on comparisons with parallel versions and reconstructions of the traditions' evolution).

Although I do not want to prejudge the results of this investigation, an initial survey suggests that several of these passages demonstrate a distinctive approach to scriptural interpretation that might be classified as typically Babylonian. Furthermore, the majority of these passages, though scattered across the books of the Bible and the fractates of Talmud, lend themselves to comparisons with passages in classical Palestinian collections (or in traditions that can be presumed to have originated there). Most of the comparisons yielded instructive conclusions about the special character of Babylonian midrash and the qualities that distinguish it from its Palestinian counterpart.[16]

The methods and objectives of this study are unabashedly historical. In spelling out this otherwise obvious fact, my intention is to dissociate my research from some of the more exotic agendas for which *midrash* studies have been conscripted in recent decades by various postmodern schools of literary studies. I am not concerned here with the contributions that *midrash* might make to current or future approaches to literary analysis, nor have I found much in the postmodern toolbox that deepens our appreciation of the ancient Jewish sages' literary achievement beyond what emerges from the study of original texts on their own terms in their cultural and religious contexts. Whatever the personal motives that might have drawn me to the study of talmudic and midrashic documents, they should not affect the accuracy of the evidence or the plausibility of my reasoning. This book is not likely to promote a revival of creative interpretation of religious scriptures, not will it inspire a secular alternative to the traditional modes of Torah study.[17]

My work is grounded in the conviction that the authors of the Talmud and Midrash were operating within a well-defined framework of religious and aesthetic conventions that could be readily appreciated by fellow members of their community who shared these values. To state that *midrash* is not concerned with revealing the literal or contextual meanings of the Bible does not imply that its creators were allowing themselves full freedom to impose their subjective opinions on the sacred texts. For all its flexibility, *midrash* is governed by rules.

Especially in its homiletical versions, *midrash* involves an agile coordination of several features that are closely integrated with its functions in synagogue worship. These include: the genre's literary conventions; the accepted methods of interpreting and manipulating biblical citations; and the moral, religious, or ideological assumptions of the discourse. In most cases, the key elements of these features are reasonably well understood by modern scholars.

Thus, scholars have catalogued and described the most prominent homiletical structures. Chief among these patterns is the classical *petiḥta* proem, which begins by quoting a verse from a scriptural location other than the current synagogue lection and develops a discourse that culminates in the citation of the current lection's opening words.[18] Other structures, such as opening the sermon by posing a halakhic question to the sage, or concluding it on a note of eschatological hope and consolation, are also familiar to students of rabbinic literature.[19] Other literary tropes and devices that were available to the preachers include parables, hagiographic legends, and the like. A pivotal feature in the aesthetics of a well-crafted sermon is the ability to create transitions between biblical quotations and other components, often by means of word-associations and typological interpretations.

With respect to the exegetical dimension of *midrash*, it is possible to identify the techniques that are appropriate or acceptable to the numerous purposes of *midrash*; and sensitivity to questions of appropriateness are indeed central to the investigation. In the domain of *halakhah*, the derivation of laws from the Bible is governed by precise, though varied, hermeneutical rules that must be argued and at times defended according to demanding criteria of rational coherence. This is not the case with aggadic exegesis. Although lists of formal exegetical rules were assembled along the lines of those used in halakhic discourse, they were not employed in a systematic way. In the end, these "official" rules were probably less central to aggadic *midrash* than the more flexible modes of "creative philology" and "creative historiography" that were enumerated by Isaac Heinemann.[20] Even in compendia or passages of the parshani type, where the interpretations are not embedded in literary homilies, the content of those interpretations usually has a homiletical thrust, serving more to inspire religious values than to clarify the lexicography, grammar, or realia of the text. This suggests that those interpretations originated in homiletical settings. The gaping difference between classic Palestinian *midrash* and conventional exegesis becomes apparent when we observe that the former rarely involves straightforward reflection on particular biblical passages; instead, the *darshan*'s insights are typically inspired by encounters, often contrived, between two or more verses, so that the homiletical point is produced by resolving a contradiction or by interpreting one verse on the basis of the other. This approach is intrinsic to the *petiḥta* structure described above, and it permeates the entire literature of *midrash*.[21]

Several exegetical norms of rabbinic *midrash* are intricately meshed with religious values, making it difficult to distinguish between hermeneutical and theological elements. This often involves the rabbis projecting contemporary standards of belief and institutions on biblical narratives: reading sacred history in terms of recurrent typologies, imposing consistent divine justice in the meting out of reward and punishment or heavenly interventions through miracles and angelic activity, and emphasizing clearly defined dualistic contrasts: between Jewish monotheism and pagan depravity, faultless saints and wicked villains, this world and the "world to come," beloved Israel and the despised nations of the world.[22]

In the following pages I shall examine thirty-two passages of an aggadic midrashic character. Each is introduced by the formula "Rav and Samuel—One says x; and one says y." With respect to each passage, I will pose similar questions:

- How (if at all) does each of the interpretations function as exegesis—that is, as a solution to legitimate difficulties in understanding the verse?

- How might the interpretation have been incorporated into a homiletic discourse that was preached in the synagogue?
- Do similar interpretations appear in Palestinian midrashic compendia?
- If so, then how do those Palestinian traditions rate as exegeses or homilies?
- Are there grounds for supposing that one version evolved out of the other, or that both might be variants of a common prototype?
- Are there ideological, hermeneutical, literary, or other factors that would account for differences?

I hope that a rigorous and critical analysis in connection with these methodological questions will shed further light on the distinctive traits of the aggadic *midrash* in the Babylonian Talmud.

Notes

1 The complications that arise when attempting to propose a more precise dating of the era are not directly pertinent to this discussion. It should be noted, for example, that some compendia that are widely accepted as part of the midrashic corpus stem from well into the Middle Ages (e.g., *Numbers Rabbah*).

2 Here, too, there are some rare exceptions to this definition, such as when *midrash* is applied to the interpretation of legal documents.

3 Strack and Stemberger, 261–62.

4 Eliezer Segal, "*Petiḥta*," 165–204.

5 Fraenkel, 317–19, 448–56, etc.

6 Meir, *Poetics*. Her study is devoted primarily to what she designates "the homiletical narrative." That term is used as well by Fraenkel, 287–302.

7 See also Rubenstein.

8 Joseph Heinemann, *Aggadah*, 163–79.

9 Shinan discusses Joseph Heinemann's explanations, with new examples (16–22). He suggests four reasons for the centrality of *aggadah* to the Land of Israel: (1) the requirements of inter-religious polemics; (2) the rootedness of literary expression in one's native soil; (3) the deplorable socio-economic condition of Palestinian Jewry, which encouraged *aggadah* as a form of escapism; (4) the fundamental psychological character of Babylonian teachers, whose intellectual acuity made them insensitive to the aesthetics of *aggadah*.

10 See Fraenkel, 27–38. As he hints there, this fact has been obscured by the ultimate emergence of the Mishnah as the sole repository of rabbinic teaching, a later phenomenon which was superimposed by traditional historiography onto earlier eras. See Eliezer Segal, *Case Citation*, 6–8.

11 The Babylonian sermon, delivered before lay congregations on Sabbaths and festivals, was known as the *pirqa*. A comprehensive survey of the evidence for this institution can be found in Gafni, 204–12. Evidence assembled there suggests that Babylonian sermons were focused largely on halakhic instruction, albeit at an elementary level. Gafni leans towards the view that their literary structure resembled that of the *she'iltot* as recorded in early ge'onic times.

12 Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther*.

13 See Kanowitz, 1 (Rav): 23–52; 2 (Samuel): 19–32; Neusner, 2:188–240, especially his characterization of the material on 208–209. Stemberger (199, 201) notes the unusual fre-

quency of these disputes in midrashic passages of *b. Soṭah.* Albeck notes that there is no discernible methodological difference between Rav and Samuel as far as their talmudic scholarship is concerned (*Mavo la-talmudim*, 173).

14 The traditional chronology, as found in the *Iggeret rav sherira gaon*, dates Rav's death in the equivalent of 247 CE and Samuel's in 253/254. The reliability of Sherira's dates (including the one about Rav's return to Babylonia from the Land of Israel in 219) is examined thoroughly (and, for the most part, upheld) by Gafni, 239–65.

15 Notwithstanding a venerable and ingenious interpretative tradition. there is no reason to identify this Samuel with the "Samuel Yarḥina'ah" who cured Rabbi Judah the Prince (presumably in Tiberias) as related in *b. Baba Meṣi'a* 85b.

16 For purposes of this study, I have restricted myself somewhat narrowly to passages that conform to a definite formal pattern. I have excluded from it the many halakhic disputes that are formulated in the identical "Rav and Samuel, one says ... one says" pattern. The classification into aggadic midrashic passages and halakhic ones was usually straightforward. Less obvious, however, was the exclusion of patterns that seemed almost identical in their format, including midrashic disputes ascribed to other sages. On this basis, for example, I have omitted the many passages for which the attributions are stated explicitly, "Rav says ... Samuel says," as well as traditions introduced by the formulas: "Rav and Samuel; and some say Rabbi Johanan and Rabbi Eleazar—one says ... one says" (on *b. Berakhot* 17a and 17b and *b. Baba Batra* 3a) or "Rav and Samuel; and some say Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi" (on *b. Soṭah* 42b). Some other pericopes that appear initially to fit my classification were excluded nonetheless after I determined that the correct reading (unlike that in the standard editions) does not fit the pattern. This is true, for example, of *b. Soṭah* 11b in connection with Exodus 1:21: "he made them houses," where the correct reading is evidently "Rav and *Levi*" (see Liss's edition, 1:163 and n. 177). Spanish traditions of *b. Megillah* 12a introduce the pericope on *ḥur* (Esther 1:6) as a "one said ... one said" dispute, but the reading might not be authentic. Similarly, although the passage in *Ruth Zuṭa* 4:6 ostensibly fits our pattern (Buber, *Ruth Zuṭa*, n. 4), comparison with parallel versions in *y. Ḳiddushin* 1:5 (60c), *Ruth Rabbah* 7:11, and *Midrash on Samuel* 18 (Buber, ed., Samuel); cf. *b. Bava Meṣi'a* 47a) demonstrates that the second name should be read as "Levi." A Rav-Samuel dispute that is cited in Grünhut's edition of the medieval *Midrash al yit-hallal* (Grünhut, ed., 1:22a and n. 4) is ultimately based on the talmudic story from *b. Sanhedrin*, where the opinions are introduced anonymously as *ikka de'amerei*. See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke ṣoferim*, n. ת. Jellinek's text of *Midrash al yit-hallal* (6:107) conforms to the Talmud's reading. See also: Eisenstein, 1:15–19.

17 A perceptive discussion of the problematic aspects of the "midrash-theory connection" and its peculiar motives can be found in Stern, 1–13.

18 Joseph Heinemann, "Proem," 100–22.

19 Stein, 353–71; Bregman, 74–84.

20 Isaac Heinemann.

21 See Boyarin, *Intertextuality*.

22 The beliefs and values of "rabbinic Judaism" find expression in a remarkably consistent constellation of conceptual terms that are encountered routinely in midrashic works and have furnished the basis for the standard surveys; e.g., Schechter, *Aspects*; Kadushin; Urbach, *Sages*.

1 : *A Chamber on the Wall*

b. Berakhot 10b:

"*Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall*" (2 Kings 4:10).[1]

Rav and Samuel—

One says: There was an open[2] attic,[3] and they built a roof for it.[4]

And one says: There was a large exedra,[5] and they divided it[6] into two parts.

It is well for the one who says "an[7] exedra"—this is what it says: "*wall*."

However, according to the one who says "an attic"—what is "*wall*" [קיר]?

—That they put a roof on it [קירוה].[8]

It is well for the one who says "an attic"—this is what is written "עליית קיר"

However, for the one who says "an exedra"—what is "עליית קיר"?

The finest [מעולה] of chambers.[9]

To the best of my knowledge, there is no precise parallel to Rav's and Samuel's interpretations in any other rabbinic compendium. In some of those texts, however, the biblical narrative about Elishah and the Shunamite woman is expounded in diverse ways.[10]

In *b. Berakhot*, the dispute is appended to an extensive midrashic retelling of 2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 28.[11] A similar discussion is found in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 5:6, and the comparison between the two traditions is instructive.

Both units are incorporated into expositions of verses from Ecclesiastes. The one in *b. Berakhot* opens: "Says Rav Hamnuna:[12] What is it that is written (Ecclesiastes 8:1) '*Who is as the wise man, and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?*' [פשר דבר]—Who is like the Holy One, who knows how to achieve a compromise between two righteous men, between Hezekiah and Isaiah!"[13]

The *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* pericope, on the other hand, opens with Ecclesiastes 5:7: "*For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear*

thou God." This loosely structured homily discusses various remedies that can prevent the fulfillment of unpleasant decrees that would otherwise be portended by disturbing and undesirable dreams.

In connection with their respective themes, both the Talmud and the Midrash cite the story of King Hezekiah, to whom Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 38:1) "*Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.*" As related in the biblical story, the king was not persuaded by the prophet's vision to despair of his life.[14] He began to pray, instead, asking God to rescind the decree: "*Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord.*"

The expression "*towards the wall*" is expounded as if Hezekiah was invoking or appealing to a specific wall that is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible: "To which *wall* was he casting his eyes?"[15]

One of the answers that is proposed for that question is:

b. Berakhot 10b:	*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 5:6:
Rabbi Levi[16] says:	Rabbi Samuel bar Naḥman[19] says:
Concerning the matter of the[17] wall. He said before him: Master of the Universe! If for the Shunamite woman, who only made one small wall, you restored her son to life— [for] my grandfather who plated the sanctuary entirely with silver and gold,[18] how much more so!	It was to the wall of the Shunamite woman that he was casting his eyes, as it is written "*Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall.*" He said to him: Master of the Universe: This Shunamite woman made one wall for Elishah and you restored her son to life. My ancestors[20] who have performed these great acts of praise, how much more so![21]

Both versions thus make a powerful point about the efficacy of prayer and its ability to void a divine decree, even one that was explicitly ordained in a vision of one of Israel's greatest prophets. The story of Elishah's resuscitation of the Shunamite woman's child provided a source of inspiration; even death is not necessarily final and can be undone with the help of sincere supplication. *b. Berakhot*, also cites Ecclesiastes 5:7, in connection with the futility of dreams. For good measure, it cites several additional rabbinic pronouncements about never relinquishing one's reliance on the power of prayer.

The *b. Berakhot* version introduces thematic elements that are not found explicitly in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, notably an exchange between Isaiah and Hezekiah

in which the latter expresses his reluctance to father children after it has been revealed to him that some of his descendents will be unrighteous.[22]

The introductory verses from Ecclesiastes in both versions suggest that the expositions originated as *petiḥtot*,[23] although in neither instance are we able to determine with any degree of certainty which lection it was attached to.[24] The question of the reliability or unreliability of dreams, suggested by verse 5:7 and the *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* passage, would lend itself to discourses on biblical sections in which dreams play a prominent role. Some possible candidates include the following:

Genesis 21:1: "*And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said.*"

Genesis 28:12: "*And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth.*"[25]

Genesis 40:1,[26] where Joseph (later in the lection) interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's imprisoned servants.

Genesis 41:1: "*And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed.*"[27]

Or perhaps Genesis 37:1, where Joseph's dreams of greatness constitute one of the reading's central topics.[28]

It is somewhat more difficult to identify a Torah lection that would provide an appropriate target verse for the homily in *b. Berakhot*, where the main theme is the reconciliation between Isaiah and Hezekiah.[29] The opening chapter of Isaiah, read as the special *haftarah* of "rebuke" on the first of the three Sabbaths preceding the Ninth of Av, is a possibility. Its opening words, "*The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz*," lend themselves naturally to thoughts about the inevitability of prophetic oracles and the ability of prayer or repentance to counteract them.

If Rav's and Samuel's dispute over the architecture of Elishah's room was originally linked to a homiletical exposition,[30] then the above-mentioned discourses about Hezekiah's prayer are the only existing texts that suggest themselves.

Since the "wall" interpretation is presupposed by the homiletical expositions of Hezekiah's prayer, it is also conceivable that the "roof" interpretation could have been proposed originally as an alternative or refutation of that assumption.[31]

It is equally possible, however, that Rav and Samuel were relating to an entirely different, and lost, homiletical context—or that their remarks are of a purely exegetical character and have no ulterior purpose. If that latter option is the correct one, then the exegesis seems to be going out of its way to overlook the obvious meaning and to create unnecessary difficulties.[32]

The exasperating character of this passage was expressed clearly by Rabbi Jacob Ibn Ḥabib in the commentary he composed (*ḥakkotev*) for his *'Ein ya'aqov* compendium of Talmudic *aggadah*:

> It would be well worth knowing what the basis is for the dispute between Rav and Samuel on this matter. For of what consequence is it whether it was an attic, and they built a roof for it, or an exedra? It is unacceptable to suppose that they are merely quibbling about the meanings of the words.

Underlying his puzzlement is the premise that talmudic teachers did not normally indulge in purely academic exercises in textual interpretation. Every interpretation should have a point: a moral lesson, a theological insight, or a halakhic nuance. But no such point is evident in this passage.[33]

It would be tempting to interpret the dispute between Rav and Samuel as having some symbolic connection with the biblical story of Hezekiah's prayer and Isaiah's prophecy. For example, their respective understandings of the physical structure of Elishah's chamber reflect differing paradigms of prayer, or holiness.[34] One possibility that comes to mind is that Rav and Samuel might have been metaphorically emphasizing different dimensions of worship, whether as a communal experience (represented by the vertical partition or its absence) or as an encounter with the divine (represented by the roof or its absence).[35]

Unfortunately, the Talmud itself is less than forthcoming in helping us to derive these lessons.

Notes

1 Some texts (including MS Munich 95) insert a question: "What is 'a little chamber on the wall'?"

2 Current printings read פרועה (unclosed), which is supported by MS Munich and others. However the *editio princeps* and *Yalquṭ shim'oni* have פרוצה, which has a similar meaning. MS Florence has no adjective at all.

3 On attics or upper chambers in talmudic sources, see Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 1:2:319–23 (which mentions the passage under discussion here) and Krauss *Talmudische*, 1:29, 33.

4 MS Florence reads only "an attic."

5 Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 1:2:421–24; Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:52–53; Wissowa, 12:1581–583. Krauss points out that the Roman exedra had a decidedly different designation from the Greek. Whereas the Greek term referred to a colonnade at the entrance of a house, the Roman referred to a hall or large room inside it. Such halls, containing apses and benches, were more likely to be built in gymnasia or public buildings than in simple private dwellings. See also Jastrow, 64.

6 The expression "divided it" is missing in MS Florence.

7 Instead of "an," MS Oxford 366 has "a large."

8 Cf. Maharsha. The verb קיר which designates roofing in rabbinic Hebrew, is related to the noun *qorah*, "beam." Regarding the process of roofing in talmudic times, and the Hebrew terms associated with it, see Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 297–309; Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:25, 29.

9 Margoliot cites several similar interpretations of *'aliyyah* in the sense of *me'ulleh* (41). To his examples can be added *b. Ketubbot* 50b, also in connection with a dictum of Samuel (Hershler 1:373). However, cf. *b. Zevaḥim* 13b.

10 Materials related to the housing of guests and travelers in talmudic times is discussed by Safrai (199–201). Although Safrai mentions the topic of private hospitality, he is interested primarily in describing public and communal institutions.

11 The story in all its biblical and rabbinic versions was subjected to a thorough and incisive analysis by Meir in "Story" 109–30 [= *Poetics* 81–124] I will make frequent references to her comments. Various thematic parallels from classical literatures are pointed out in 463–66.

12 This is evidently the correct reading. MSS Parma 3010 and London 406 have "Huna."

13 Meir, "Story," 112–13 and *Poetics*, 87–88. She poses the question of how much of the elaborately retold homiletical narrative (in which no other rabbis' names appear) we can justly ascribe to Rav Hamnuna. She does not reach a clear-cut conclusion, aside from noting that "even though it is impossible to prove that Rav Hamnuna composed the entire story, and there is no necessity to make such a claim, it is nonetheless clear that his exposition is connected to the subsequent story. What is more: Even though his words are couched in the present tense and are not part of the plot, they constitute a vital illumination of the narrative." She remarks as well that the key terms of Rav Hamnuna's initial statement do not recur in the narrative. Cf. Urbach, *Sages*, 921–22, n. 48; he seems to ascribe the whole story to Rav Hamnuna.

14 See Urbach, *Sages*, 523 and 921–22. Note in particular his remark about the addition to the story that appears in *'Ein ya'aqov and Haggadot ha-talmud* and in Portuguese printings of the Talmud (as reported by Rabbi Isaac Lampronti).

15 See Hirshman, 1:88–91. Hirshman presents the text of our passage according to the Genizah fragment TS-F 17.48 (although the segment that he analyzes there does not encompass the material about Elishah and the Shunamite).

16 For information on this third-generation Palestinian aggadist, see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 266; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensichen Amoräer*, 2:296–436 (the current passage is discussed on 376).

17 Some Spanish texts add "little." See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, ad loc. n. צ.

18 Other texts read "tables of gold" or just "gold." Rabbinowicz (*Dikduke*, n. ת) observes that the biblical descriptions of Solomon's temple do not mention silver.

19 He lived in third-generation Palestine and is known primarily as an aggadist; Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim* 266–67; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensichen Amoräer*, 1:477–551.

20 See Meir, "Story," 117, n. 23; *Poetics*, 170, n. 29.

21 Meir, "Story," 121; Meir, *Poetics*, 104: "As against the difference between Rahab's deed (her saving the spies) and the Shunamite's deed (building a chamber for Elishah), there is a conspicuous affinity with regards to both the principle of 'measure for measure,' which was realized in the form of divine recompense in the past, and in Hezekiah's request to be saved for the sake of his ancestral merit."

22 In *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, Hezekiah prays: "My ancestors were great personages but could not pray at all times in the Temple ... whereas in my case, when I pray, there is no wall between me and the Temple." This was understood by the commentators (e.g., Maharzu) as an allusion to the fact that, as a bachelor, he was not defiled by impurity caused by marital relations.

The multiplicity of homiletical themes in the story (conciliation, procreation, averting divine decrees) suggests that it was assembled from discrete units. According to Meir, "Story," 117; *Poetics*, 93, the talmudic story teaches that Hezekiah was being punished for second-guessing the divine plan. This is not quite accurate, since the punishment was inflicted on account of his refraining from family life—a decision that he reached as a result of his foreknowledge of his evil descendents.

23 This possibility is not considered seriously by Meir in connection with the *b. Berakhot* version. She is convinced that the story originated in connection with the biblical accounts of Hezekiah's illness.

24 Hirshman (1:88–91) compares the *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* passage with the similar material found in *y. Sanhedrin* 10:2 (27d) and *Berakhot* 4:4 (8d). He argues that the *yerushalmi* versions are probably later than *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, since they allude to material from the *midrash* that is not actually included in the Talmud. Furthermore, on the basis of a detailed reading of the respective parallels, he is able to conclude plausibly that "it is clear beyond all doubt that *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* is not dependent on TB, while its relationship to TP is closer"; and that the later scribal strata of the Palestinian compendia appear to have been quoting back and forth at each other.

25 See Mann, 233–37 on the question of whether this verse (as distinct from verse 10) was the opening of the reading. Mann cites several homilies on analogous themes. See also *Genesis Rabbah* 68:12 (Theodor and Albeck, 784–89); Joel, 122–32.

26 Mann, 307–308; Joel, 130.

27 Mann, 308–13; Joel, 122–32., See also Rabinowitz, 1:230–34.

28 Mann, 289–93; Joel, 122–32; Rabinowitz, 220.

29 The midrashic association between *pesher* and *pesharah* ("compromise," "conciliation"), upon which the talmudic exposition is based, is not found, to the best of my awareness, anywhere else in rabbinic literature. See Hyman and Hyman, 205. The word does of course connect easily with the topic of dream interpretation. See also Meir, 112, *Poetics*, 87–88, who cites *b. Soṭah* 13b; the amora Samuel appears to employ the "compromise" meaning of the Ecclesiastes verse in the context of a divinely uttered eulogy over Moses.

30 It is noteworthy that Meir does not include the Rav and Samuel dispute within the scope of the Hezekiah homily.

31 I will discuss analogous conjectures elsewhere in this study in order to account for the origins of Rav's and Samuel's more puzzling interpretations.

32 Maharsha aptly notes how superfluous the argument is in its current form. Each of the disputants has latched on to only one element of the verse's literal sense and discarded a second aspect. There is no obvious exegetical reason why they could not simply have affirmed both of the verse's literal points and stated that a roof or partition was constructed in an upper chamber. Maharsha's solution, that attics are generally too small to be divided (evidently because of the need to leave space for a staircase or ladder), is not convincing.

I suggest the following hypothetical reconstruction of the passage's evolution: the original dispute did not concern itself with the word *'aliyyah* at all, and second, neither Rav nor Samuel thought to question that the term ought to be understood in its normal sense, as an upper storey. Their dispute, on the other hand, revolved around two legitimate translations of *qiruha*: "added a wall" (from *qir*) or "built a roof" (from *tiqrah*). It is also conceivable that the idea of dividing up a larger exedra was inspired by the word "small" in the verse or by the peculiar juxtaposition of "wall" and "upper chamber." It was the later redactors who gave a more extreme formulation to the dispute by suggesting that each sage had arrived at his interpretation by focusing on only one of the operative words at the cost of having to provide a forced explanation of the other. For all its exegetical difficulties, the resulting pericope follows a familiar, symmetrical, talmudic literary pattern.

33 Margoliot argues (40–41) that, as a general rule, Rav favours literal exegesis, whereas Samuel leans towards the homiletical. Accordingly, in the current *sugya*, the "roofed attic" interpretation is closer to the plain sense of the verse, since the alternative requires the imaginative word-play between *'aliyyah* and *me'ulleh*. Even if we accept Margoliot's premise (which I do not believe is adequately demonstrated), then we must still keep in

mind that the *me'ulleh midrash* is not proposed by the *amora* himself; rather, it is the conclusion of a discussion by the Talmud's anonymous redactors. For the same reason, we should not attach much weight to Margoliot's argument that interpretations similar to the one that he ascribes to Samuel are adduced elsewhere by Rabbi Eleazar, a disciple of Samuel.

34 Ibn Ḥabib suggests that underlying their exegetical disagreement is a philosophical dispute concerning moral priorities. Which value ranks higher: bestowing fitting honours on a holy man or living within one's means? I find no warrant for this explanation in the words of the Talmud.

35 If we choose to dissociate Rav's and Samuel's dispute from the Hezekiah episode, then we could, following similar lines, interpret it in connection with different evaluations of Elishah's holiness: Was it defined by his direct relationship with God or by the acts of righteousness and kindness that he performed for people in need?

Margoliot (40–41) points to the similarity between this passage and the dispute between Rav and Samuel in *b. 'Eruvin* with respect to the meaning of the word *machpelah*. See the presentation of that passage below.

2 : *A Holy Man of God*

b. Berakhot 10b:

> "*And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God*" (2 Kings 4:9).[1]
>
> Says Rabbi Yosé bar R' Ḥanina:[2] From here we learn that a woman is more perceptive of guests than a man.[3]
>
> Whence did she know?[4]
>
> Rav and Samuel—
>
> One says: Because she did not see a fly passing on his table.
>
> And one says: She laid out for him[5] a linen sheet[6] on his bed, and she did not observe semen.[7]

The Talmud brings this passage in connection with the preceding exposition of the story of Elishah and the Shunamite woman, which was in turn cited incidentally in the *sugya* about King Hezekiah and Isaiah.

Several Palestinian sources cite a similar *midrash*:[8] The following version is from Leviticus Rabbah 24:6:[9]

> And why was the section dealing with forbidden sexual relations[10] juxtaposed to the "Holy" section?[11]
>
> Rather, it is in order to teach you that wherever you find a barrier against promiscuity, there do you find holiness.
>
> And it is in accordance with this statement of R' Judah bar Pazi;[12] for R' Judah bar Pazi says: Whoever makes himself a barrier against[13] promiscuity is called "holy."
>
> Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin[14] in the name of Levi derives this from the case of the Shunamite woman.
>
> This is what is written "*And she said unto her husband*,[15] *Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God*."
>
> And the Rabbis say: Because she never saw a drop of semen on his sheet.[16]

This *midrash* is a discourse on Leviticus 19:1–2: "*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy*." In addition to motivating its audience

to modesty and restraint in their sexual conduct, it suggests a theoretical model for the vague concept of "holiness," and a path through which that ideal can be approached. Its homiletical context is not entirely clear.

The paragraph in *Leviticus Rabbah* does not technically constitute a *petiḥta* in that it does not commence with an "external verse." Conceivably, since it culminates with a quotation of Leviticus 19:1–2, it might have been the conclusion of a *petiḥta* whose beginning was omitted in the redaction process; or it might even be the continuation of paragraph 26:4 above, which is a *petiḥta* based on Psalm 20:3 ("*Send thee help from the sanctuary*"). However, the reading from Leviticus is explicitly identified and interpreted at the beginning of the passage. This runs counter to the expected literary direction of a well-crafted *petiḥta*, in which the lection should not get mentioned until the very end.

Of the two interpretations that are mentioned by Rav and Samuel, only one appears in the Palestinian sources: the one about seminal emissions.[17] However, it is the second one, about the flies, that is most difficult to understand.[18] It appears to suggest a certain understanding of holiness, although its precise significance remains obscure.[19]

In its current form, the *b. Berakhot* passage is not about the relation between cleanliness and Godliness but rather is about the discernment of hostesses as characterized by Rabbi Yosé bar Ḥanina. Read in that light, the disagreement between Rav and Samuel might relate to whether this perceptiveness is based on the Shunamite woman's penetrating power of observation (which extends to noticing the absence of flies) or on intensive research (examining the stains on the bed sheets).[20]

Notes

1 The extents of the biblical lemmas vary from one textual witness to another. The current passage should probably be attached to the words "man of God" (an expression that is repeated here in MS Oxford 366, Munich and Florence); whereas the following section, about Gehazi, is attached to "this is an holy man."

2 He was a second-generation Palestinian *amora*; see Zuri, *Rabbi Yosé*; Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 185–86; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensichen Amoräer*, 1:419–46 (which cites this passage on 437).

3 Cf. *b. Bava Meṣi'a* 87a: "Says Rabbi Isaac: A woman is more miserly with guests than a man." The observation is derived from Sarah's behaviour in Genesis 18:6 and 8.

4 This question is missing from MS Parma 3010.

5 Several witnesses (including MS Munich) read "under him."

6 Some texts read "sheets." The *'Eṣ yosef* commentary explains it this way: "If he did have an emission, then it would have been clearly visible on a linen sheet, but that would not be the case on a woolen sheet."

7 MSS London 406 and Parma 3010 read: "And one says: Because he did not experience a seminal emission ever. And from where did she know this?—It teaches in a *baraita* [תאנ"י תאנא]: She laid out a linen sheet."

8 *Y. Yevamot* 2:4 (3d); *y. Sanhedrin* 10:2 (29b).
9 Margulies, *Midrash wayyikra rabbah*, 559–60.
10 Leviticus 18.
11 Leviticus 19.
12 That is, R' Judah the son of R' Simeon ben Pazi; R' Judah was a prominent fourth-generation Palestinian aggadist; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 329–30; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensichen Amoräer*, 3:160–220.
13 In *y. Yevamot*: "Whoever separates himself from."
14 Fourth-century Palestinian *amora* who appears primarily as a transmitter of sayings by Levi; Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 331; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensichen Amoräer*, 3:730–31.
15 In *yerushalmi* version of 10:2 (29b): "For thus the Shunamite woman says to her husband."
16 "On his sheet"—missing in *y. Yevamot*; in *y. Sanhedrin*: "on his garment." See the textual variants in Margulies's edition of *Leviticus Rabbah*.
17 Margoliot claims (41) that Rav was the author of this opinion, based on his statement in *b. Yoma* 18b: "A guest … should not sleep in his host's robe," which Rashi explains as "so that semen should not be found on it." (R' Ḥananel offers a similar explanation). The discussion in *Yoma* illustrates how the rabbinic community, whose students often lived as boarders, were conscious of the potential embarrassment that could be occasioned by leaving stains in their bedclothes. See also *b. Shabbat* 127b.
18 In *Iyyun ya'aqov* to the *'Ein ya'aqov*, Rabbi Jacob Reischer observes that there is an element of arbitrariness in singling out these two criteria, since "there are certainly many different varieties of holiness." See below. The *'Es yosef* commentary suggests that this remark ought to be read in light of the contrast between Elishah and Gehazi, which was discussed in the preceding lines. Accordingly, Gehazi's impure character was revealed through the *presence* of flies and semen stains.
19 Cf. Hallevy, 448 and n. 1. While the English usage of expressions like "There ain't no flies on me" (as in Eugene Field's poem "Jes' 'fore Christmas" [Field and Parrish, 116–17]) is usually intended to designate a person who is in a state of constant activity. (See also Lennon, 1964). Rabbinic texts focus more on the flies' association with filth (see Rashi to *b. Yoma* 21a). Hence the absence of flies would be occasioned by an aura of purity that inheres in a person or place. Similarly, among "the ten wonders that were performed for our ancestors in the Temple," *m. Avot* 5:5 enumerates the facts that "the sacred flesh never putrefied; and a fly was never observed in the slaughterhouse" (but cf. the *Tif'eret Yisra'el* commentary, which explains that this was to prevent discomfort to the priests). See also: *Genesis Rabbah* 69:3 (Theodor and Albeck, 792): "like a prince who was sleeping in his cradle, and flies were resting on him"); *Midrash on Psalms* 3:3 (Braude), which mentions cheese that was so smooth (apparently) that flies could not stand on it. Lieberman adduces parallel sources (*Hellenism*, 174–77) from pagan authors who attach great importance to their belief in the miraculous disappearance of flies from sacrificial sanctuaries (he also provides a naturalistic explanation for the absence of flies from the Jerusalem Temple). For a comparison with Stoic attitudes towards nature's unpleasant aspects, see Becker, 387–96. Note that the list of the ten wonders in the Temple juxtaposes the absence of flies and the fact that the High Priest never experienced a seminal emission on the Day of Atonement. This association might have influenced the author of the present passage, as was suggested by several of the traditional commentators (e.g., Maharsha, and Jacob Reischer's *'Iyyun ya'aqov*, etc.). The association is reinforced by the fact that the Talmud goes on to cite Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob's dictum that "anyone who hosts a scholar in their home…. Scripture counts it for him as if he had offered up the daily offering."

On *b. Berakhot* 61a, Rav (expounding Ecclesiastes 10:1: "*Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor*") depicts the Evil Inclination as a fly stationed at the openings to the chambers of a person's heart. Several commentators (e.g., Maharsha and Reischer) understand that this imagery is based on the fly's loathsome associations. However, cf. *'Eṣ yosef*. See also *b. Megillah* 13b, *b. Giṭṭ* in 6b, 90b, etc.

20 Alternatively, the Talmud might be suggesting that what appears initially to be a higher level of perceptiveness is not really inherent in the woman's character but is merely a consequence of the fact that the she is normally the one who does the guests' laundry. This approach is proposed by the *'Eṣ yosef* commentary: "And this is so because it is the woman who is normally at home more than the man; as we say elsewhere in connection with the giving of charity." Note the similar testimony brought in *Leviticus Rabbah* and parallels by the maidservant of Rabbi Samuel bar Isaac. (This is apparently the correct reading; see Margulies's note) regarding the holiness of that sage).

Reischer understands that Rav's and Samuel's intention was to find qualities that point to *continual holiness*, rather than momentary acts of piety; this is in keeping with the words of Scripture, "*this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually*" (2 Kings 4:9).

3 : *Two Faces*

b. Berakhot 61a [and *b. ʿEruvin* 18a]:

R' Jeremiah ben Eleazar[1] says: the Holy One created two faces [דופוצפין δι πρόσωπος] in the first man; as it says "*Thou hast beset me* [צרתני] *behind and before*" (Psalm 139:5).

"*And the rib* [הצלע]*, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman*" (Genesis 2:22).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: a face [*parṣuf*].

And the other says: a tail.

It is well for the one who says "a face"—this is what is written: "*Thou hast fashioned me* [צרתני][2] *behind and before.*"

However, for the one who says "a tail," what is "*Thou hast beset me* [צרתני] behind and before"?

This dispute between Rav and Samuel is attached directly to the verse in Genesis, and appears to be concerned with the correct understanding of *ṣela'*, which denotes the item or limb from Adam's anatomy out of which God created the first woman.

In Palestinian midrashic literature, we encounter several variations on these interpretations. All of them are constructed as *petiḥtot* whose "external" verse is Psalm 139:5. The following version is from Genesis Rabbah 8:1:[3]

"*And God said, Let us make man in our image*" (Genesis 1:26).

Rabbi Johanan opened: "*Thou hast fashioned me* [צרתני] *behind and before*"...

Said R' Jeremiah ben Leazar:[4] At the time when the Holy One created the first man, he created him as an *androgynos*, as it states: "Male and female created he them" (Genesis 5:2).

Said R' Samuel bar Naḥman:[5] At the time when the Holy One created the first man, he created him *dio parṣufa* [δυο πρόσωπος], and he split him in two and made him backs on one side and backs on one side.

They challenge him: Is it not written (Genesis 2:21) "*and he took one of his ribs* [מצלעותיו]"?!

He says to them: From his side,[6] even as you say (Exodus 26:20) "*And for the second side* [ולצלע] *of the tabernacle.*"

> And Samuel says: He took one rib from between two ribs. It does not say "in its place," but rather "*and closed up the flesh in their place*" (Genesis 2:21)[7]...
>
> Says R' Samuel bar Tanḥum:[8] Also his praise occurs only at the end. Thus it states (Psalm 148:1–11) "*Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heaven ... he hath made a decree which shall not pass.... Praise the Lord from the earth ... Kings of the earth.*"
>
> Says R' Simlai:[9] Even as his[10] praising occurs only after that of the cattle, the beasts, and the flying fowl, so too his creation occurs only after the beasts, and the flying fowl. Initially it says "*And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.*" (Genesis 1:20). And after all of them: "*Let us make man in our image.*"

Leviticus Rabbah 14:1 (p. 295–99) and its derivative sources[11] contain expositions that are largely identical, until Rabbi Simlai's concluding comments:

> Says R' Simlai: Even as his fashioning occurs only after that of the cattle, the beasts, and the fowl, so too his "law" occurs only after the cattle, the beasts, and the fowl. This is what it says "*This is the law of the beasts, [and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth]*" (Leviticus 11:42). And after all of them: "*If a woman have conceived seed.*"

It is hard to decide which of these versions is the primary one, and it is conceivable that the original editor (or perhaps Rabbi Simlai himself) adapted the comment for use in both contexts. At any rate, some circumstantial considerations favour concluding that the *Leviticus Rabbah* version is earlier.[12]

Although the Palestinian texts incorporate the interpretations into *petiḥtot*, there are no prima facie grounds for assuming that they were generated by the *petiḥta* process—that is, by expounding the creation story from the perspective of Psalm 139:5. As many scholars have observed, the idea that the first man and woman were joined together in a single androgynous creature is legitimately suggested by the biblical text itself.[13] Moreover, it is found in Aristophanes' famous discourse in Plato's *Symposium*.[14]

At any rate, these discussions about the nature of woman's creation are not integral to the *petiḥta*, which would have been perfectly coherent without those associations. At an earlier stage of development, perhaps, the *du-parṣufin* passage comprised a separate *petiḥta* attached to Psalm 139:5, although we no longer know which pentateuchal lection it introduced.

Even though it is not emphasized in the rabbinic texts, the interpretation is likely to stem from manifest exegetical problems posed by the biblical narrative. As is well known, the problems are inherent in the wording of Genesis 1:27: "*in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*," as well as in the comparison between that verse and 2:18–24. Assuming the separation

of an originally androgynous creature effectively accommodates the literal wording of this passage without resorting to "documentary" theories.[15]

The opinion that equates the *ṣela'* with the *parṣuf* is easily accounted for by comparison with several statements in the Talmuds and Midrash that use the expression *du-parṣufin*, a formulation that occurs in virtually identical form in Plato. Accordingly, the explanation proposed by Rav or Samuel would imply that the original Adam had two faces or heads[16] and that one of these was removed to form Eve.

The "tail" explanation, however, seems to be unique, and its precise significance is difficult to fathom.[17] All other considerations being equal, the dispute could imply differing assessments regarding the personalities and spiritual capabilities of women.[18]

The same accusation that we can level against the Babylonian version of the passage—that it is of an academic and exegetical character and leads to no explicit moral or religious lesson[19]—is applicable to the Palestinian versions as well.[20] In both Palestinian variants, however, the passage's incorporation into the larger proem becomes part of an intriguing homily about humanity's place within the larger structure of creation.[21]

The *duparṣufin* tradition is also subject to eschatological exposition, as we observe in a remarkable midrashic passage. Rabbi Simlai is challenged by *minim* regarding the interpretation of Genesis 1:26. To this he responds as follows:[22]

> In the past, Adam was created[23] from the earth and Eve was created from Adam. From now on, "*in our image, after our likeness*"—not a man without a woman and not a woman without a man and not the two of them without the divine presence.

This idea bears an interesting resemblance to the theology expounded in the gnostic Gospel of Thomas. Jesus promises his disciples that they will come to see their images as they existed prior to the creation of the material world:

> Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then you will enter [the Kingdom]."[24]

Scholars have understood that this view is based on the premise that sexual differentiation is part of the "fallen" state of humanity in which its original divine image has been diminished.[25] Those who merit the enlightenment of the gnosis will be able to undo the division and return to the purer spiritual state.[26] It would be most intriguing to speculate about the degree to which the rabbinic

and the gnostic Christian documents were drawing on one another or on common traditions or reacting to each other when proposing their respective interpretations of Genesis 1:26.

Notes

1 Albeck identifies him tentatively (*Mavo la-talmudim* 342) as a fourth-century Palestinian *amora*, a teacher of *aggadah*.

2 The rabbinic interpretations all read this verb as if it were derived from the root יצר, "fashion," thereby supplying the necessary verbal and semantic link to the creation story and particularly to the verb וייצר. Most conventional translations connect it to צור in the sense of "besiege" or "beset." Others have suggested the root נצר, "watch" or "protect." See Briggs and Briggs, 2:493, 496; Brown, 848; Dahood, 3:287–88; Hakham, 2:532.

3 Ed. Theodor and Albeck, 54–55.

4 Thus in all the witnesses here, including MS Vatican 60 (Sherry). *Leviticus Rabbah* has R' Samuel bar Naḥman as the author of this statement, and the current text might well have been emended to bring it into line with the Babylonian Talmud. See Bacher, *Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, 3:583–87. (Our passage is discussed on 585 and in n. 6.)

5 In *Leviticus Rabbah*: Rabbi Simeon ben Laqish.

6 Indeed, this noun normally has the sense of "side" in both biblical and rabbinic Hebrew. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 854.

7 Cf. Targums, Theodor and Albeck. In *Carnal Israel*, Boyarin interprets Samuel as an assertion of woman's subservience in the creation process (42–44).

8 Bacher, *Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, 3:748.

9 He was a second-generation, Babylonian-born *amora* who settled in Lydda; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 190; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, 552–66; current passages are cited on 557–58 and 562). As will be seen below, he was involved in disputations with heretical groups.

10 That is, Adam's, humanity's.

11 *Tanḥuma*, Tazria 1; Buber, *Tanḥuma*, 3:33. *b.* '*Eruvin* 18a preserves a similar interpretation in the name of R' Ami: "'*behind*'—with respect to the creation; '*before*'—with respect to punishment." The original intent of the last segment is not clear. The Talmud rejects the possibility that it is referring to Adam's punishment, since that comes after those of the serpent and of Eve. This objection would be equally valid if *pur'anut* were understood in the sense of "evil" rather than "punishment." The Talmud's conclusion, that Rabbi Ami is alluding to the order of victims of Noah's flood in Genesis 7:23 ("*man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven*"), is not quite satisfying either, since it seems an arbitrary choice of verse. It is possible that Rabbi Ami's original statement was made with respect also to Leviticus 11:42.

12 (1) Although *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1 is structured as a proem to Genesis 1:26, this verse did not open a lection in any known rite; see Mann, 23–43; Joel, 130. (2) The connection with the theme of childbirth in Leviticus is less obvious; hence, it would have worked more successfully as a homiletic tour de force by joining biblical texts with no obvious thematic affinities. On the other hand, the transfer to Genesis requires much less ingenuity, given that the creation of the first man and woman is the manifest topic of most of the dicta in the passage. (3) All of the later *midrashim* (i.e., the *Tanḥumas* and the *Midrash on Psalms*) attach the homily to Leviticus.

13 See Skinner, 33; Cassuto, 57–58, 90–96, 104.

The *Tanḥumas* derive the concept of a doubly created human from the two *yods* in וייצר (Genesis 2:7), as distinguished from the single-*yod* form of the verb that is used

for the creation of other animals in Genesis 2:19. In the Talmud, this distinction forms the basis of other teachings. Cf. Maharsha to *b. Berakhot* 61b.

14 It is difficult to escape the impression that the *du-parṣufin* is derived directly or indirectly from Aristophanes' myth in Plato's *Symposium* (Lamb, 189–93 [pp. 132–47]), a claim that was made in the nineteenth century by Sachs, Freudenthal, 1–103; 1–238, Lenormant, Reinach, 185–206, and others. Although both Freudenthal and Ginzberg (5:88–89, n. 42; citing Jeremias, 460) have noted diverse materials related to myths of hermaphrodites and androgyny in classical and other ancient cultures, I am aware of none that agrees in so many essentials with the rabbinic traditions. For example, standard myths about the mythical hermaphrodite focus on the process through which the masculine and feminine elements came to be combined. However, Aristophanes and the rabbis posit hermaphroditism as the primal condition of humanity. Whereas most other sources speak of a commixture of male and female qualities, Aristophanes and the rabbis speak of a welding of two distinct bodies and duplicated limbs. Aristophanes actually employs the precise Greek terminology of rabbinic traditions; not only ἄνδρόγυνον (189E) but also πρόσωπα δύ' (189E; cf. 190A), and has Zeus slice the creatures in two ([δια]τεμῶ δίχα), and then healed up (cf. Genesis 2:21). See Theodor's notes to *Genesis Rabbah*; Frazer, 1:3 ff.; and Rappoport, 1:152–53. Clearly, Aristophanes' myth is being paraphrased by Philo's *De opificio mundi*, 53, 118–21 (Colson and Whitaker): ἔρως δ' ἐπιγενόμενος καθάπερ ἑνος ζῴον διττὰ τμήματα διεστηκότα συναγαγὼν εἰς ταὐτον ἁρμόττεται, πόθον ἐνιδρυσάμενος ἑκατέρῳ τῆς πρὸς θάτερον κοινωνίας εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὁμοίου γένεσιν. Unlike Aristophanes (and, evidently, the rabbis), Philo regards this desire as essentially an impediment to spiritual perfection (as noted by Reinach, 189–90). Cf. Krappe, 312–22; on 316, we read the following: "If Hellenic mythology has not preserved such a myth, the reason must be sought in the aversion for the grotesque inspired by the Homeric tradition. Besides, Plato's story may well be of Anatolian provenance. What is certain is that the tradition of primitive androgynous human beings is far older than the Alexandrian period; it is probably older than the Babylonian captivity of the Jews." So too, in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (12–12; p. 585), Eusebius was convinced that Plato must have known the biblical creation story. See also Baer, 131, n.3. The entire question is cogently summarized and argued by Meeks, 185–86, and nn. 88–94.

Regarding androgynous myths in ancient religions, see also Baumann; Delcourt; Eliade.

15 Krappe, 312–13.

16 The depiction of two heads is consistent with the Platonic myth and the Palestinian midrashic sources. It is also possible, however, that the text has in mind a Janus-like figure: a single head with a face on either side.

17 Margoliot claims (45) that this interpretation should be equated with *Genesis Rabbah* 17:6 (157): "'*And he took one of his ribs*' (Genesis 2:21)—R' Samuel bar Naḥmani says: From his side.... And Samuel says: He took one rib from between his ribs. It is not written here "instead [lit.: beneath] it," but rather "*and closed up the flesh instead of them* [lit.: beneath them]." According to Margoliot, "The Torah is hereby alluding to the fact that the place from which it was taken was the bottom-most part of the body"; i.e., from a tail that Adam originally sported.

18 The '*Eṣ yosef* is compelled to explain that the reference is to an extra rib, since otherwise the talmudic explanation would blatantly contradict the biblical text. "The fact that it is referred to here as a tail is because any extraneous thing is called a tail." He refers to the Babylonian legend about Vashti's tail; see Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:262, n. 58. Braude translates the word as "appendage" (344). Perhaps it ought to be understood as a euphemism for the male genitals; if so, the *midrash* had in mind the tradition recounted

by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* (190B; pp. 138–41), to the effect that Zeus moved the genitals of the recently separated androgynos to the front (μετατίθησιν αὐτῶν τὰ αἰδοῖα εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν).

Reinach has demonstrated that precisely this theme has exerted a powerful influence on gnostic symbolism and on subsequent European folklore.

Note Krappe's account (314) of the tradition that Adam was originally graced with a monkey's tail, which was (at his imprecation) transformed into Eve. Krappe suggests that this tradition evolved through ancient gnostic texts. However, other than the talmudic passage being discussed here, I have been unable to find any basis for this tradition aside from the various modern folkloric testimonies cited in his article. Cf. Marelle, 233–34.

19 A most attractive hypothesis would be that of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Adret and Rabbi Jacob Ibn Ḥabib (cited in Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*) that "in all places, both in Scripture and in the words of the Sages, the term 'head' is used as an equivalent for the important end of anything, and the 'tail' designates its inferior end ... and by extension, the term is borrowed in order to designate any human limb which is superfluous, like a scab." This approach played a part in patristic exegesis; see Reinach and Krappe.

In most ancient dualistic and gnostic traditions, the separate creations of Adam and Eve are emphasized, with the latter representing demonic evil. See, e.g., Jonas's characterization of Manichaeism: "The creation of Eve had a special purpose. She is more thoroughly subject to the demons, thus becoming their instrument against Adam: 'to her they imparted of their concupiscence in order to seduce Adam" (228). A possible exception was the doctrine of the gnostic Justin, whose creation myth involved combinations of male and female elements in Adam and Eve. Thus, in the characterization by Williams: "Then into each of the first humans, Adam and Eve, the angels place some soul from Eden [the female principle] and some spirit from Elohim [the masculine principle]. Possessing these elements from both Elohim and Eden, the first human couple are nothing less than living symbols of the marital unity and love of Eden and Elohim"(19).

See also Alan Segal, 185.

20 See Urbach, "[Unlike the Platonic myth] In the Midrash no inference is drawn from the dictum. The notion of the hermaphrodite the Amora bases on the verse 'male and female created He them' (Genesis v, 2), and R' Samuel bar Naḥman resolves the contradiction between his statement and the verse... but no attempt is made there to invest the dictum with any implications whatsoever.... We do not know if the myth became known to the Amoraim in its Platonic or another form, but what remains in their expositions is an altogether soulless myth" (Urbach, *Sages* 228).

21 The point can be understood in opposing ways, as indicated in the previous passage in *Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah*: "If a person is worthy, they say to him: You came before the ministering angels; but if not, they say to him: the fly came before you, the mosquito came before you, this worm came before you." Cf. the teaching of the Gospel of Thomas that "those who miss the divine kingdom will fall behind the 'birds of the sky' and the 'fish of the sea' instead of ruling over them" (Pagels, 477–96).

The lesson was understood very differently by the *Tanḥumas*. According to their interpretation, we learn that the unborn child was tutored in the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and accepted upon itself all the precepts of the Torah before emerging from the womb. See Urbach, 235–50.

Margoliot cites (45) *b. Bava Batra* 74b: "Says Rav Judah in the name of Rav: Everything that the Holy One created in his world, he created male and female." He sees this as an indication that Rav was the author of the *du parṣufin* interpretation.

22 *Genesis Rabbah* 8:9 (Theodor and Albeck, 62–63); *y. Berakhot* 9 (12d) (cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 38b, *Genesis Rabbah* 22:2 (p. 206) and other parallels listed by Theodor and Albeck.

23 The homily is evidently based on the reading נעשה as a third-person *nif'al* form in the past tense; see Theodor and Albeck.

24 Koester and Lambdin, 117–30.

25 This Platonic way of reading the two creation accounts, one referring to the *idea* of humanity and the other to the actual human beings, was suggested by Philo and adopted by several later commentators. See literature cited in Ginzberg's *Legends*. The doctrine is also found in works such as the *Gospel of Philip* (Eisenberg, 131–51); "When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being. If he again becomes complete and attains his former self, death will be no more" (141). See also Boyarin, 44.

26 The scholars who champion this interpretation have emphasized passages such as logia 22 and 114, although their interpretation is not quite explicit in the text. See Schenke; Meeks; Eisenberg; Meyer, 554–70; Arai, 373–76; Pagels.

4 : *Daughters of Zion*

b. Shabbat 62b:

"*And the Lord will discover* [יערה] *their secret parts*" (Isaiah 3:17).

Rav and Samuel:

One says that they[1] were spilled like a ladle.[2]

And one says that their openings were made like a forest [יער].[3]

This discussion is included in an exposition of Isaiah 3:16–24. In that section, the prophet berates the arrogant and wanton daughters of Jerusalem, threatening that they will come to sad ends at the hands of foreign conquerors. Rabbinic comments both exaggerate the immorality of those women and magnify the degradations and punishments that would eventually be inflicted upon them.

Expositions of the same verses appear in classic Palestinian midrashic compendia.[4] In *Leviticus Rabbah* 16:1, they are incorporated into a *petiḥta* for Leviticus 14:2[5] ("*This shall be the law of the leper*"), based on the external verse in Proverbs 6:16–19 ("*These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him,*") and on the statement by Rabbi Johanan that "they were all stricken with leprosy." This promiscuous behaviour among the daughters of Zion is expounded in the same spirit as the *b. Shabbat* passage, as is the grisly suffering that befell them "when on account of the sins the enemies came."

"*Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab* [שפח] *the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion*" (Isaiah 3:17).

R' Leazar[6] and R' Yosé bar Ḥanina:[7]

R' Leazar says: He smote them with leprosy. This is as you say, "*And for a rising, and for a scab, and for a bright spot*" (Leviticus 14:56).

And R' Yosé bar Ḥanina says: He brought up to their heads many families [משפחות משפחות] of vermin.

And R' Ḥiyya bar Abba says: He turned them into indentured slaves שפחות.

R' Berakhiah and Ḥilfi bar Zevad in the name of R' Isi:[8] What is שפח ("*smite with a scab*")?

—(In order not)[9] to cause it to flow freely, in order to preserve the holy seed, in order that the holy seed not be mixed with the people of the land.

The Holy One said: I know that the nations of the world do not separate themselves from leprosy.

> What did he do?—"*the Lord will smite with a scab*"; the Holy One gave a signal to her fountain, and it discharged blood until it filled up[10] that carriage.[11] And that commander stabbed her with a javelin and she was thrown before the carriage, and the carriage passed over them and split them.
>
> For this reason Moses was admonishing Israel, and he said to them: "*This shall be the law of the leper*."

In *Lamentations Rabbah* 4:18,[12] the same elements are incorporated into an exposition of Lamentations 4:15: "*They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not*." The full interpretation of Isaiah 3:16–24 is introduced with the formula "R' Ḥanina[13] expounded the scriptural section in relation to the daughters of Zion."[14] The formal connection with Lamentations 4:15 is created at the conclusion of the story about girls who were cast out of their carriages: "And they would say *Depart ye; it is unclean*."[15]

In *Pesikta de-rav kahana* 17:6[16] and *Pesikta rabati*,[17] the interpretation of Isaiah 3 forms part of a homily on Isaiah 49:14, "*But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me*."

Notwithstanding the differing contexts and sequences in the parallel versions, all of them conform to the structural norms of a *petiḥta* homily. This, however, is not true of the passage in the Babylonian Talmud, which expounds the verses in Isaiah without fitting them into an identifiable literary or rhetorical framework. Nevertheless, the larger unit is introduced with these words: "Rava the son of Rav 'Ilai *darash*," which might be an allusion to the preaching of a sermon although it might also refer to an academic exposition of the biblical passage.[18]

We cannot posit a straightforward contrast between the Babylonian and Palestinian texts with respect to how they address matters of concern to their contemporary audiences or congregations. The simple fact is that Isaiah's original castigation of Judean society can find clear analogies in any normal community, and it is doubtful whether any moralizing preacher in any time or locality would have lacked occasions for criticizing young women (with or without justification) for being too coquettish or flirtatious.

Rav's and Samuel's explanations are attached directly to Isaiah 3:17. Neither of them is intended to support Rabbi Berakhiah's notion that God subjected the women to their respective afflictions "in order to preserve the holy seed." Without that rationale, these can be understood simply as extreme but fitting punishments for their licentious conduct[19] and as grisly object lessons to deter potential transgressors. The difference of opinion between Rav and Samuel was not stimulated by any discernible philosophical or conceptual distinction but by a purely exegetical factor: their differing ways of reading the word "יערה." As emerges on several occasions in this study, one of the two explana-

tions ascribed here to Rav or Samuel is found in the Palestinian rabbinic compendia, while the other is unique to the Babylonian Talmud.

Notes

1 MS Vatican reads "their openings."

2 On the *kiton* (κώθων), see Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 540; Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:81; Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 2:1:112 (with illustration). It was used principally for wine, but occasionally for water.

Margoliot finds significance in the similarity between this expression and the one that appears in the dispute between Rav and Samuel in *b. Soṭah* 42b (discussed below).

3 Rashi: "They became filled with hair and sexually repulsive." Rabbinic literature generally assumes that female pubic hair should be removed, because it was considered both unsightly and dangerous to the male during intercourse. See Preuss, 367–68.

4 Albeck, "Midrash," 25–44, 38–39. He argues, against Friedmann, that the *Pesikta rabati* copied its version of the *midrash* from *Lamentations Rabbah*; it is therefore based on Lamentations 4:15 and not on Isaiah 49:14 (see below).

5 Ed. Margulies, *Vayikra Rabbah* 340–48.

6 See Margulies's note to 344 l.5. The reference is evidently to R' Eleazar ben Pedat, the eminent disciple of R' Johanan who had initially studied with Rav and Samuel in Babylonia. See Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim* 224–27; Bacher, *Agada der palästiniensischen Amoräer*, 2:1–87 (a passage discussed on 43 and n. 4).

7 Cf. Bacher, *Agada der palästiniensischen Amoräer* 1:437, n.7.

8 These names appear with several variant readings and corruptions in the various midrashic collections (see below).

9 Deleted in accordance with Margulies's suggested emendation. On the difficulties of the text, see his discussion, (345); Braude and Kapstein, 312, n. 31.

10 Evidently, this interpretation is based on the reading of יערה in the sense of "pour."

11 καῤῥούχιον: Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 564–65.

12 Buber, *Echa rabbati*, 4:15, pp. 150–51.

13 That is, R' Ḥanina bar Ḥama, the first-generation Babylonian born *amora* who stood at the helm of the academy in Sephoris. See Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 155–57; Bacher, *Agada der palästiniensischen Amoräer*, 1:1–34.

14 This heading is found in every Palestinian version of the passage except for *Leviticus Rabbah*, although it does appear there in the fragment Oxford 2634/8.

15 The passage continues (in all versions) "R' Abin says, It is Greek: *seron seron*." Margulies's note surveys the various scholarly attempts to identify the obscure Greek word.

16 Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de rav kahana*, 288–91; trans. Braude and Kapstein, 311–12.

17 Section 31 (Friedmann, 145b; trans. Braude, *Peskita rabbati*, 2:611–3). Friedmann concludes (n. 65) that the *Pesikta rabbati* was neither copied from *Lamentations Rabbah* nor vice versa but that the *Leviticus Rabbah* version was copied from *Lamentations Rabbah*. Cf. Albeck, "Midrash," ibid.

18 See Strack and Stemberger, 240.

19 This approach is favoured by Maharsha, who brings support from Rashi's commentary to Isaiah.

5 : *The Cave of Machpelah*

b. ʿEruvin 53a:

"*The cave of Machpelah*" (Genesis 23:9).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Two structures, one inside the other.

And one says: Two structures,[1] a house and an upper chamber on top of it.[2]

It is well for the one who says Two structures, one on top of the other—this is what is written: *Machpelah* [= double].

However, for the one who says Two structures, one inside the other—what is "Machpelah"?

—It is double with couples.[3]

Other than the fact that the Hebrew root כפל normally has the meaning of "double,"[4] the Bible does not provide an explicit etymology for the name Machpelah, which is attached to the burial cave purchased by Abraham for Sarah. In fact, it is unclear whether Machpelah originally designated the cave itself[5] or the larger district in which it was located.[6]

Genesis Rabbah 58:8[7] includes some discussion about the meaning of the word *machpelah*:

"*And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah*"—

This teaches that they became doubled in the eyes of each person.

For everyone who is buried in it is assured that his reward is doubled and redoubled.

Says Rabbi Abahu: that the Holy One doubled over the full stature of the first man and buried him inside it.[8]

All these interpretations contain homiletical lessons.[9] The first sings the praises of Abraham and Sarah, whose honour multiplied the market value of their property. Similarly, the second explanation[10] extols the righteousness of the Hebrew Patriarchs and God's just apportioning of rewards in the next world. The third explanation, which places Adam (and Eve) in the Patriarchal mausoleum, thereby ties the history of Israel in with God's primal design in creating the human race.

Nothing of the sort can be said for the Babylonian dispute between Rav and Samuel.[11] If they were interested in anything other than the meaning of the name machpelah and the physical structure of the cave, then that purpose is not spelled out by the Talmud.

Notes

1 "Two structures"—these words are missing in several texts (Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. ה).

2 Several texts read "One on top of the other." See *Rabbinowicz, Dikduke soferim*, n. ד; cf. *b. Bava Batra* 58a. The order in which these two opinions are presented is reversed in several texts.

3 Maharsha rightly objects to the logic of this passage: "If the word Machpelah is not appropriate to describe two structures one inside the other, which compelled them to say that it was the couples who were doubled, then what is his basis for asserting that there were two structures one inside the other?" He concludes that Rav and Samuel could not have been arguing about the meaning of Machpelah; rather, each was in possession of a received tradition regarding the physical shape of the cave. While Maharsha's reconstruction makes better sense than the actual talmudic passage, it is not easily harmonized with the Talmud's wording.

4 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 495.

5 As suggested by verse 9.

6 As stated in verse 17: "*And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein*." See Skinner's commentary on Genesis, 338–39: "The cave below has never been examined in modern times, but is stated by its guardians to be double. There is no reason to doubt that the tradition as to the site has descended from biblical times; and it is quite possible that the name Makpelah is derived from the feature just referred to." Cf. Rashbam (Bromberg, 20); Speiser, 170; Wenham, 128; Sternberg, 28–57; *Zohar* 128a.

Rashi's commentary to the Pentateuch paraphrases the interpretations of Rav and Samuel, replacing the "one inside the other" with the Talmud's concluding solution that it was "double with couples." Naḥmanides challenged Rashi's exegesis on the grounds that the name belongs primarily to the district, and hence there is no further need to seek a specific connection between the name and the cave (Chavel, *Perush ha-torah*, 1:130; in English: Chavel, *Commentary on the Torah*, 286–87]; Kasher, 929. The view that the cave itself was double is reflected in the ancient translations, including the Septuagint (τὸ διπλοῦν) and Onqelos. See Naveh, 965–66.

7 Theodor and Albeck, 628.

8 On the legends regarding Adam's burial in the Machpelah cave, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:100–102, 288; 5:125–26, n. 137; 5:256, n. 263; Theodor and Albeck, 622. An alternative tradition documented by Ginzberg identified the Temple altar as Adam's burial place. See also Sperber, 55–59.

9 Actually, it is not obvious where these comments would have been attached. Although there is a Babylonian Torah lection that commences at Genesis 23:1, which begins the account of Sarah's death and the negotiations leading to the purchase of the cave of Machpelah, the Palestinian rite did not insert any divisions between Genesis 22:1 (the binding of Isaac) and 24:1 (choosing a bride for Isaac). See Mann, 181–84; Joel, 130; Rabinowitz, 162. Therefore, it seems most likely that comments about the Machpelah cave would have been included in homilies for the lection beginning at Gen. 49:27, a pas-

sage that is devoted primarily to Jacob's request to be buried in his ancestral tomb and the execution of that request. See Joel, 130; Mann, 357.

10 This should presumably be read as a separate comment. The textual evidence and commentators are not entirely consistent on this matter, and some read it as an explanation of the previous sentence. See Theodor and Albeck, 622.

11 Cf. Jacob Reischer's *'Iyyun y a'aqov*. Reischer tries to argue that underlying the philological dispute is a fundamental argument over the relative importance of Adam and Eve (who were the direct creations of God) and the Hebrew Patriarchs and Matriarchs. In fact, the interment of the first couple in the Machpelah cave is not mentioned at all in the talmudic passage.

6 : *Amraphel and Nimrod*

b. ʿEruvin 53b:

"*And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar*" (Genesis 14:1).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Nimrod is his name. And why is his name called Amraphel?—Because he issued a command [*amar*] and had Abraham cast down [*vehippil*] into the fiery furnace.

And one says: Amraphel is his name. And why is his name called Nimrod? Because he caused the entire world to rebel [*himrid*] against him during his reign.[1]

Genesis Rabbah 41:4:[2]

"*And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel.*"

He was called by three names: Cush, Nimrod and Amraphel.

Cush, because he was a real Cushite.[3]

Nimrod, because he caused the world to rebel [*himrid*].

Amraphel, [because] he spoke a dark word [*amar imrah afelah*];

and he rebelled and mocked [*amrei ve'aflei*] in the world, he rebelled and mocked regarding Abraham;

that he commanded that he go down to the fiery furnace.[4]

Both passages are built on well-known midrashic hermeneutical devices, particularly the propensity to identify minor biblical personages with one another or with more prominent ones[5] and the symbolic name etymology.[6] In this case, there is some textual basis for the identification of Amraphel with Nimrod, since the Bible attests that both monarchs reigned over Shinar.[7]

Both versions presuppose the legends of Abraham as the champion of monotheism, with Nimrod as his heathen foil. There is no essential difference in how the material is handled in these two sources, especially when we are unable to reconstruct the larger homiletical units out of which they might have originated.[8]

A possible homiletical setting for the "caused the world to rebel" interpretation is found in *b. Pesaḥim* 94a–b and *b. Ḥagigah* 13a:

> Says Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai: What retort did the heavenly voice give to that wicked man [= Nebuchadnezzar] at the time that he said "*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*" (Isaiah 14:14)?
>
> —The heavenly voice issued and said to him: Wicked man son of a wicked man! Descendent of the wicked Nimrod who caused the entire world to rebel against me during his reign. What is the lifespan of a person? "*threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years*" (Psalm 90:9). And the distance from the earth to the firmament is five hundred years.
>
> "*Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit*" (Isaiah 14:15).

This exposition might have functioned within a homily on the book of Lamentations (read liturgically on the Ninth of Av).[9] However, it is not difficult to imagine several other contexts that would be appropriate for it.

Notes

1 Several texts read "during his reign against him."

2 Ed. Theodor and Albeck, 408–409.

3 Gen. 10:8: "*And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.*" "Cushite" is thus used here in a simple, factual way that requires no aggadic exposition. In other instances, however, the word was expounded in more homiletical directions. See *Genesis Rabbah* 37:2 (p. 345), etc. Cf. the diverse interpretations that were proposed for Moses' "Cushite" wife in Numbers 12:1 (Kasher, 38:218–21).

4 I have translated this section on the understanding that the *midrash* is presenting three etymologies of the name Amraphel. The structure of this section is not entirely clear, and differing interpretations are reflected in the textual readings and the explanations of the commentators; see Theodor and Albeck. The traditions about the conflict between Nimrod and Abraham are collected in Ginzberg, 1:86–217; 5:207–24. On this topic, one must exercise particular caution in disentangling the rabbinic and earlier materials from the many medieval elaborations of the story.

5 Isaac Heinemann, 28–31.

6 Isaac Heinemann, 110–12.

7 As regards Amraphel, that fact is spelled out here in Genesis 14:1; whereas in Genesis 10:10, it states concerning Nimrod, "*And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.*"

8 Cf. Margoliot, 50–51: "This dispute is an unsolved mystery. Why did one of them expound the name Nimrod and the other the name Amraphel?" He lists the other Rav and Samuel disputes that revolve around similarly structured name-etymologies and arrives at the intriguing observation that in each case one of the names is recorded in the book of Chronicles. Margoliot therefore concludes that the principle underlying all those disagreements relates to the status of names in Chronicles, whether they are meant to be treated as actual names or only as midrashic expositions. Since Rav was the author of the statement (see below) that Chronicles can be cited only for expositions, Margoliot decides that in all cases Rav was the one who claimed that the non-Chronicles name is the real one. This clever construction is not very convincing, of course, especially since it makes Samuel's position very difficult to justify. At any rate, it does bring into relief the inherent difficulties that attach to all the passages in question.

9 It should be noted, however, that other aggadic treatments of Isaiah 14:14–15 lack the comparison with Nimrod. See, e.g., *Mekhilta Shirata* 6 (Horovitz and Rabin 136; ed. Lauterbach 46; *Mekhilta deRabbi Shim'on ben Yoḥai* 85; *t. Soṭah* 3:19 (Lieberman 166); *Tanḥuma Beshallaḥ* 12. See additional material cited by Lieberman in his long commentary (644).

7 : *A New King*

b. ʿEruvin 53a, *b. Soṭah* 11a:

"*Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph*" (Exodus 1:8).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: "*New*" literally.[1]

And one says: "*New*" in that his decrees were rendered new.

The one who says "*New*" literally—it is because it is written "*new*."

And the one who says "*New*" in that his decrees were rendered new—since it is not written "and he died, and he reigned."

And what is "*which knew not Joseph*"?[2]—That he resembled someone who did not know him.[3]

This exegetical debate between Rav and Samuel is found with virtually identical wording in *Exodus Rabbah* 1:8.[4]

As an explanation of the biblical narrative, the suggestion that this was anything other than a new Pharaoh in a fully literal sense is impossible to accept here.[5] The Talmud's attempt to provide a textual basis for the interpretation is unconvincing. More importantly, the effort does not bear any obvious homiletical fruit. The Talmud does not derive from it any religious or moral lessons, although it would not have been difficult to do so.

A more satisfying variation on the same theme is to be found in several midrashic collections from the *Tanḥuma* family, including the standard *Tanḥuma*, *Shemot*, 5.[6] This passage has come down in diverse forms, including a genizah fragment published by Louis Ginzberg in *Ginze Schechter*:[7]

Tanḥuma	*Tanḥuma*, ed. Buber	*Ginze Schechter*
"*Now there arose up a new king over Egypt.*" Said the Prophet: "*They have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for* >	"*Now there arose up a new king over Egypt.*" Said the Prophet: "*They have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for* >	Rabbi Simeon ben Laqish[8] introduced it [פתח בו]: "*They have* >

> Tanḥuma	> Tanḥuma, ed. Buber	> Ginze Schechter
they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions" (Hosea 5:7).	*they have begotten strange children.*"	*dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children.*"! What is meant by "*they have begotten strange children*"?![9]
To teach you that when Joseph died they violated the covenant of circumcision. They said: We shall be like the Egyptians.	That they would bear children but not circumcise them.	—Rather, [that they did not circumcise their children, and they grew them] *belurits*.[10] It is written: "*And the children of Israel were fruitful, [and increased abundantly [vayyishreṣu]*" (Exodus 1:7). Scripture] made them "creeping things" [*sheraṣim*] because they drew out their foreskins[11] and grew *belurit*[s for them].
When they did this,[12] the Holy One transformed the affection with which they used to love them, as it says: "*He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants*" (Psalm 105:25).[13]		"*They have dealt treacherously against the Lord … with their portions.*" What is "*shall a month [ḥodesh] devour them*"?[14] [—These are the decrees that] are constantly being inflicted anew [*mit-ḥaddeshim*] on Israel.
There arose the "new one" [*ḥadash*] and imposed [*ḥiddesh*] his new decrees against them. For this reason it is written "a new king."	"*Now shall a month devour them with their portions.*" It is written "*ḥadash.*" Therefore: "*Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.*"	Another interpretation: "*now shall a month devour them.*"—*This is the new one [ḥadash]*, as it is written "*Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.*"

Only in Rabbi Simeon ben Laqish's discourse in *Ginze Schechter* is the unit introduced explicitly as a *petiḥta*, although the structure of all versions evidently implies a *petiḥta*.[15] All versions agree that the "external" *petiḥta* verse is Hosea 5:7; however, the identification of the "local" verse (the beginning of the day's scrip-

tural reading) is indeterminate. In the form in which it is cited in *Ginze Schechter*, the proem appears at first to be built around Exodus 1:1, since the expression "opened for it" implies that it is attached to the same verse as the previous unit, which is based on Exodus 1:1.[16] It is at any rate possible that a new *pisqa* should be inserted just before Rabbi Simeon ben Laqish's proem[17] or even that the *petiḥta* to Exodus 1:8 was not preceded by a *pisqa*.[18] However, the actual rhetorical culmination does not cite that verse explicitly; rather, the unit seems to end only after the "Another Interpretation" has connected it to verse 8. If Exodus 1:8 is truly the target verse, then it would be difficult to accept the current *petiḥta* structure as original. The eighth verse into a biblical book is too far from the beginning of a lection to be the target of a *petiḥta* for verse 1 but too near to the beginning to constitute the opening of a new lection—even if we were to assume, hypothetically, that a division could have been introduced here in contradiction to any of the known divisions of the triennial or annual cycles.[19] An additional possibility, one that has no direct corroboration in the extant midrashic literature,[20] is that the original proem introduced Exodus 12:1–20. This lection, which is read on the Sabbath preceding the new moon of Nisan, begins "*This month shall be unto you the beginning of months* [*ḥodashim*]" and therefore provides a natural link to expositions on the *ḥodesh* in Hosea and the *melekh ḥadash* in Exodus 1:8.

If we prefer not to include the "Another Interpretation" unit as part of the original exposition, then the exposition has no real conclusion. Indeed, it is quite possible that the original homilist was not cognizant of the connection with Exodus 1:8 and the new king of Egypt. If this premise is correct, then we must conclude that the final section of Rabbi Simeon ben Laqish's original *petiḥta* has not survived.

If we choose to attach the homily to Exodus 1:1, then we might plausibly speculate that it developed the theme of "*these are the names*" from Exodus 1:1 in the manner of the *Tanḥuma*, by drawing a contrast between the later generations of Hebrews, who were over-ready to blend into the majority society, and Jacob's original children—especially during the lifetime of Joseph—who maintained their original Hebrew names, symbolic of their resistance to cultural and religious assimilation into the Egyptian mainstream.[21]

This homily, in all its varied forms, presents us with a very different perspective on the "new decrees" that formed the basis of the interpretation in the Babylonian Talmud and its derivatives. In at least two important ways, these traditions strike me as more coherent midrashic units:

- The exegesis is grounded in a textual feature, by the word *ḥodesh*, which is found in Hosea 5:7.
- It is incorporated into a thematic presentation that teaches a religious message that is of relevance to its audience.

While I do not claim that it is possible to trace an evolution between the *Tanḥuma-yelammedenu* texts and the Babylonian Talmud's dispute between Rav and Samuel, I believe that the comparison illustrates in a general way how the Babylonian tradition might have come into being. The author of the original Palestinian *petiḥta*, which was built around an interplay between the Exodus and Hosea passages, was led to ponder the phenomenon of a punishment by means of something "new" for the sin of having "begotten strange children" as mentioned by Hosea. Applying that theme to the events related at the beginning of Exodus, this inspired a comparison between the Israelites' peaceful years in Egypt before Joseph's death and the persecution that ensued afterwards. Was it not reasonable to deduce that the persecution had been incited by the Israelites' begetting "strange children"—that is, by their abandoning traditional Jewish customs in favor of pagan Egyptian ones? The criticism that was being leveled at the ancient Hebrews could surely be directed against the preacher's contemporaries, whether in his own community or in the Jewish world at large. This combination of exegetical, rhetorical, and social ingredients is, of course, an ideal recipe for an effective homily.

Only incidentally, in order to maintain conformity with the wording of the Hosea verse, did the homily emphasize that Pharaoh's role in inflicting suffering on the backsliding Israelites was somehow related to the phenomenon of "newness." This could be construed either in the sense of "decrees appearing anew" or "at the hands of the new Pharaoh." Of greatest importance for the preacher was the radical change that had taken place in relations between the Egyptians and the Israelites, not the historical succession of pharaohs. It is possible that this hermeneutical ambivalence (which is embodied in the alternative endings to the homily) evolved later into the semantic dispute ascribed to Rav and Samuel over the meaning of "*new king*."

Clearly, these assorted versions of the *midrash* demonstrate a much more satisfying homiletical purpose than the one in the Talmud, precisely because their main thrust is not to explain the allusion to the "*new king*" in Exodus 1:8. Instead, they make use of the *petiḥta* structure in order to preach on a theme that concerned the audience: namely, the perils of cultural assimilation. Within that framework, they interpret a variety of verses, apparently including Exodus 1:8. However, it is evident that these verses are being used homiletically, and not being interpreted. It is the homily itself that is primary, and all the other components are subordinated to it.

Whether or not we choose to posit a historical link between the two traditions, the comparison between them is instructive in what it reveals to us about the Babylonian Talmud's approach to *aggadah*.

By all indications, the editors of the Babylonian pericope took little interest in the literary aesthetics of artful preaching. Their interest in whatever aggadic

homily reached them from the Land of Israel was limited to the interpretations of biblical verses that it contained. In this case, persumably, the only item from the original Palestinian homily that captured their attention was the exegetical question of whether the king of Egypt was "new" by virtue of his decrees or his person. Removed from its original context, this dispute (or, at least, the view that he was not literally a new king) strikes the reader as odd, and lacking a meaningful purpose.

The following passage from *Pesikta rabati* (15:17) presents an alternative use of similar ingredients, one in which they are combined into a statement of eschatological hope rather than of chastisement:[22]

> *"And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying, This month* [*ḥodesh*] *shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you"* (Exodus 12:1–2).
>
> Rabbi Berakhiah[23] in the name of Rabbi Judan the son of Rabbi Simeon:[24] The Holy One said to Israel: My children, here you have a new kind [*ḥiddush*] of redemption in the time to come.
>
> In the past I did not redeem one nation from the midst of another, but now I shall redeem a nation from the midst of a nation.
>
> This is what is written "*Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of a nation*" (Deuteronomy 3:34).
>
> Rabbi Joshua bar Nehemiah[25] in the name of Rabbi Ḥanan ben Pazi:[26] "*a nation* [goy] *from the midst of another nation.*"
>
> "A people [*'am*] from the midst of a nation" is not what is written, but "*a nation* [goy] *from within a nation.*"[27]
>
> For these were uncircumcised and these were uncircumcised.
>
> These grew *belurits* and these grew *belurits*.
>
> If so, then the standard of justice would never have allowed Israel to be redeemed from Egypt.
>
> Samuel bar Naḥman says: Were it not that the Holy One had bound himself by an oath, Israel would never have been redeemed from Egypt.
>
> What is the reason?
>
> "*Wherefore* [*lakhen*] *say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments*" (Exodus 6:6).
>
> "*Lakhen*" means nothing other than an oath, as you say "*And therefore* [*lakhen*] *I have sworn unto the house of Eli*...." (1 Samuel 3:16)

The message of this homily seems very straightforward, although its formal structure and homiletical occasion are obscure and, apparently, incomplete.[28]

Whatever might have been its original form, the *Pesikta rabati* passage is an instructive counter-example to the other *Tanḥuma-yelammedenu* homilies with which it shares several elements, notably the references to *belurit* and uncir-

cumcision as indicators of assimilation into the heathen ethos and a hermeneutical play on the root ḥadash. With those elements, the *Pesikta rabati* constructs a homily that is the reverse of the *Tanḥuma-yelammedenu* ones. Instead of reproaching the people[29] for their readiness to adopt foreign customs, he consoles them with reassurances that redemption will eventually come, in spite of their own conspicuous lapses, because God's promises are unconditional and irrevocable.

This passage illustrates the flexibility with which an accomplished preacher could mold exegetical elements to his will and thereby place them at the service of a homiletical theme of his choosing. The contrast to the laconic presentation in the Babylonian Talmud is self-evident.

Notes

1 Margoliot observes that the expression *mamash* is characteristic of Rav, who also demonstrates a general preference for literal interpretation (51–52). See the extensive list of passages that he cites in support of his claim.

2 The "Salonika" printing in *b. ʿEruvin* (according to Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. כ) had "Says Rav Joseph: That he resembled." Rabbinowicz correctly observes that this error was probably occasioned by the mention of Joseph in this passage. In Liss's edition of *b. Soṭah* [1:143 n. 48], the reading is attributed to "the Spanish printing and one manuscript in *ʿEruvin*." I am unaware of any surviving pages from these passages in either tractate (see Dimitrovsky). However, the reading is attested in MS Parma 3010 to *b. ʿEruvin*. On the identity of Rabbinowicz's "Salonica printing" (which afterwards came into the possession of the Frankfurt a.M. municipal library and perished in World War II), see his preface to *Dikduke soferim* on *b. ʿEruvin*; Rabbinowicz, *Ma' amar*, 32–35 [= *Dikduke soferim* to *b. Berakhot*, 53]. Subsequent studies make it virtually certain that the tractate was actually printed in Fez. See: Neubauer, 700; Adler, "Talmud Printing," 81–84; Adler, "Talmud Incunables," 3; 378, n. 27; Friedberg, 143–44 (and cf. 132); Mehlman, 43–46; Dimitrovsky, 44–45; Heller, 269–76; Friedman, 18–19; 33–35; and cf. Tedghi, 78.

3 The reading here follows most witnesses in *b. Soṭah* and *b. ʿEruvin* as well as *Exodus Rabbah*, where this interpretation is introduced in response to a challenge to the view that "his decrees were rendered new." Later printings of *b. Soṭah*, on the other hand, treat the question generically. See the extensive discussion in Liss, *b. Soṭah*, 1:142–43, n. 48.

4 See also *Tanḥuma 'Shemot*, 3 [Kensky, 164]; Buber, par. 7 (p. 4); Townsend, 6.

5 At the most, we would have expected the Talmud to cite Psalms 105:24 (which is adduced for a similar purpose by the *Tanḥuma*; see below): "*He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants*." At any rate, the plural form "their" refers to the Egyptians as a whole and not specifically to the king.

As several traditional commentators have observed (see, e.g., *ʿEṣ yosef* to the *ʿEin yaʿaqov*), the disputing positions are not quite symmetrical. Even if we allow that the verse refers literally to a new pharaoh, we must still assume that he changed his attitude radically by disregarding the friendlier treatment of the Hebrews in previous years and the gratitude that Egypt owed to Joseph, their great benefactor.

6 Variants are listed by Kensky, 257–58; parallel versions are listed there on 532–33.

7 Ginzberg, *Ginze Schechter*, 62–63. The fragment in question, which Ginzberg entitled "A new recension of the *Tanḥuma* to *Shemot* and *Va'era*," is TS–129.

8 He belonged to the second generation of Palestinian *amora'im*; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*; Albeck, *Agada der palästinensichen Amoräer*, 1:340–418.

9 Cf. Macintosh, who translates "bastards."

10 Insofar as the rabbis were preaching against practices that were current in their own time and communities, the reference is probably to the growing of hair in imitation of non-Jewish norms and not to Jews who were actually offering their sheared locks to idols—although there were presumably subtle gradations of superstition, which made it difficult to distinguish absolutely between categories. *m. 'Avodah Zarah* 1:3 lists among the pagan festive days, which involve prohibitions against transacting business: "the day of the shaving of his beard and his *belurit*." Also, *t. Shabbat* 6:1 (Lieberman, 2:22) includes "one who makes [or: "grows"] a *belurit* among acts forbidden as "the ways of the Amorite." *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:18 adds "but one who makes a *belurit* grows it only for the sake of idolatry." See *t. 'Avodah Zarah* 3:6 (Zuckermandel, 463) and parallels: "A Jew who is cutting the hair of a gentile, when he reaches the *belurit* must withdraw his hands." As Lieberman deduces, "it is clear that the reference is to locks that are offered up to idols; i.e., to growing hair that is specifically devoted to idolatry" (Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-feshuṭah*, 3 [*Mo'ed*]: 80–81). Useful references to classical sources and to secondary literature are provided in Elmslie, 24; he writes that "This ceremony forms part of the coming-of-age festival as observed by the Greeks and Romans," originating with the former. He notes that the most common deities to whom the hair would be dedicated were Apollo, Herakles, or a river god; the ritual would be followed by a bout of drinking. Tertullian dealt with the question of whether Christians were allowed to attend these rituals. See also Nicholson, 49–50 (cited by Lieberman); he refers to "the custom followed by the young men of Greece … of wearing the hair long until they reached the age of ἔφηβοι when it was cut off and consecrated to some deity. Sometimes a single lock of hair was kept long during boyhood for this purpose." Nicolson presents a lengthy catalogue of Greek words that are used to represent this practice, none of which bears any substantial resemblance to the Hebrew *belurit*. Summary discussions, with additional references to primary and secondary sources, can be found in: Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-feshutah*; Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 2:157, *Talmudische* 1:193, 645–46; Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 2:2:285–87. In n. 1 on 285, he surveys scholarly discussions surrounding the etymology of this word, which has not yet, to the best of my knowledge, been resolved. Cf. Albeck, *Shishah sidre* 4:326, 487. Krauss notes that, in addition to the distinctly pagan rites associated with growing a *belurit*, several texts refer to it as a more general indication of gentile customs (although some of the sources tend to confuse the *belurit* with the *komé*). A useful collection of sources on this topic can be found in Ginzberg's n. 9 to the *Ginze Schechter* fragment. See also: Herr, 92–93. Extensive historical material relating to hair-cutting rituals among Arabs, Jews, and other Middle Eastern peoples is collected in Morgenstern, 36–47, 84–106.

11 On this practice of "epispasm," see *1 Maccabees* 1:15 (Tedesche,: "ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς ἀκροβυστίας" (made themselves uncircumcised). Historians disagree over how to define the relation between the Roman ban on circumcision and the Bar Kokhba uprising. Some regard the ban as originating in a punitive edict that was issued following the outbreak of the rebellion. However, most believe that the inclusion of Jews in a general imperial ban on castration and sterilization (*Lex Cornelia de Sicariis*) was among the events that sparked the rebellion, although it was afterwards enforced as a consciously anti-Jewish measure. The talmudic sources that describe the practice of restoring the foreskin in connection with the Hadrianic persecutions do not suggest that the Romans demanded it (although they clearly prohibited the circumcision of infants and proselytes), only that it became an act of convenience for some Jews, particularly in Egypt, who wanted full citizenship and acceptance into Hellenistic society (as well, perhaps, as some who sought exemption from *laographia* taxes); see Alon, 583–91; Smallwood, 334–47; Vermes, Millar, and Black, 1:537–40; Lieberman, "Persecution," 213–45. In spite of Paul's state-

ments to the contrary (1 Corinthians 7:18), some Jews evidently tried to undo their circumcision as a preparatory step for their conversion to Christianity. Rabbinic references and additional scholarly bibliography on the topic are assembled and discussed by Rubin, 105–17. Rubin notes that according to the manner of circumcision that is required by normative *halakhah*, such an operation would be medically impossible, since not enough flesh would remain from the foreskin. He therefore concludes that the requirement of *peri'ah* did not exist in early times and was imposed during the second century CE in response to the practice. See also Preuss, 246–47.

12 Some texts have "When the Holy One saw that it was so."

13 The whole of Psalm 105 is a recounting of the story of the Exodus. The section in context reads as follows: "*Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham* (23). *And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies* (24). *He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants* (25). *He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen* (26)."

14 The wording in Hosea is quite inscrutable and has inspired many ingenious interpretations and emendations. See, e.g., Ibn Janah (Bacher, *Sefer hashorashim* 144); Lipshitz, 58, 62 and Heb. 18 (Ibn Janah and Ibn Ezra understand that the reference is to an "evil month," Av, according to Ibn Ezra); Andersen and Freedman, 396–97. A selection of the variant readings and emendations proposed by assorted scholars is brought by Macintosh, 190, n. 17. These include the reconstructed Septuagint reading of חסיל (locust).

15 The formula "Said the Prophet" (אמר הנביא) appears initially to be a *terminus technicus* for introducing the external verse of a *petiḥta*, but other instances of the expression do not bear out this conclusion. In several examples, it appears just before the conclusion of a unit. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 30:15 and *Tanḥuma*, (Buber, *Mishpaṭim*, 9 (p. 86). The *petiḥta* is explicitly identified as such in *Exodus Rabbah* 1:8 (Shinan, ed., *Midrash*, 46), which appears to be a reworking of the *Tanḥuma* version to which a few narrative details have been added ("when Joseph died they violated the covenant of circumcision," "From here you may learn that Moses circumcised them upon their departure from Egypt").

16 Here is a translation of the initial lines of Ginzberg's fragment. Square brackets indicate his reconstructions:

> "[*Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob*."
>
> This is what Scripture has said: "*He shall cause them that come of Jacob*] *to take root:* [*Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit*" (Isaiah 27:6).
>
> Israel have a root, as it says: "*And there shall come forth a r*]*od out of the stem of* [*Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*" (Isaiah 11:1).
>
> The nations of the world have no root, as it says:] "*Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon* [*with fair branches*" (Ezekiel 31:3).
>
> Behold how much praise. However,] he has no root and blossom and bud.
>
> [And similarly, you do not find any name or remnant for] the nations of the world: "*When the wicked spring* [*as the grass*, etc." (Psalm 92:8).
>
> But when he mentions the] tribes, he spells out their names, [as it says: "*Now these are the names of the children of Israel*."]

The beginning of this unit is missing in Ginzberg's fragment. Basing himself on similar but not identical passages that appear in *Midrash ha-gadol* on Exodus (Margulies, *Midrash ha-gadol* 1:1 [p. 7] and Buber, [*Midrash agadah*] 118), Ginzberg has reconstructed that unit as an exposition based on the words "which came into Egypt" in Exodus 1:1, since Isaiah 27:6, upon which it is based and with which it concludes, contains the phrase

"*them that come of Jacob*." The details of the reconstruction are not certain, but enough remains from the manuscript to establish that the preceding unit was a proem that concluded with Exodus 1:1. Notwithstanding the usual scholarly skepticism about using *Midrash hagadol* to establish textual readings for passages from otherwise unknown sources, this passage has a ring of authenticity to it. A partial parallel to that exposition is found in *Song of Songs Rabbah* 7:7 (3) (Dunsky, 156). The anti-Christian homily there is not phrased as a proem, and it concludes by quoting Isaiah 41:16. It does not cite any verses from Exodus or from anywhere else in the Torah. Evidently, Isaiah 27:6–13 was the standard *haftarah* to Exodus 1:1 according to the triennial cycle; see Mann 2:358.

17 This reconstruction supposes that the preceding citation of Exodus 1:1 was limited to one or two words, which is not unreasonable. Both *Midrash agadah and Midrash ha-gadol* separate the exposition on Exodus 1:1 (based on Isaiah 27:6) from the one on 1:8 (based on Hosea).

18 Cf. Joseph Heinemann, "Proem," 103–104.

19 All these considerations and difficulties have been raised by Shinan in the notes to his edition of *Exodus Rabbah*, p. 46. The two *Tanḥuma* versions present the basic argument of the exposition as an undivided unit. We must keep in mind that, unlike the author of Ginzberg's fragment, the redactor of *Exodus Rabbah* has explicitly adapted the *midrash* into a proem to Exodus 1:8, a development that is consistent with the character of this medieval collection—one that is no longer rooted in the reality of the synagogue sermon and its connection to public reading of the Torah. On the provenance of *Exodus Rabbah*, see Shinan's introduction, especially pp. 14–22. On the question of whether the ancient Palestinian preachers were really committed to a fixed cycle of lections, see Naeh, 167–87 and the extensive survey of scholarly discussion that it is contains. Naeh's refutations of the various arguments that have been directed against the existence of a uniform lectionary cycle strike me as eminently persuasive.

20 Note, however, the passage from *Pesikta rabati* 15:17 cited below.

21 Cf. *Tanḥuma 'Shemot* 3; *Exodus Rabbah* 1: 4 (Shinan 40–41 and additional sources cited there):

> "*Coming*" (Exodus 1:1)—But is it only today that they come? Has it not been many days since they came! Rather, during all the days that Joseph was alive, they did not bear the burden of Egypt. When Joseph died, they placed upon them the burden. For this reason it wrote "*coming*," as if on that same day they came into Egypt.

22 Friedmann, 76a; Ulmer, 308–309; Braude, *Pesikta rabati*, 330. My translation is based on Genizah fragment JTS 8159, transcribed by Ulmer, although the text (including the proper names) remains remarkably uniform in the various editions. Note that the awkward expression "in the time to come" [לעתיד לבא] is attested in all witnesses in spite of the attempt by the *Mattenot kehunnah* (accepted by Braude) to delete it.

23 This fourth-generation Palestinian sage known primarily as an aggadic preacher; Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 321; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, 3:344–96.

24 Presumably Rabbi Berakhiah's colleague Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Simeon ben Pazi.

25 A fourth-generation Palestinian aggadist; see Margaliot, 2:188.

26 A third-generation Palestinian rabbi (also designated as Ḥanina or Ḥanin), known primarily as an aggadist; possibly the brother (or even the son) of Rabbi Simeon ben Pazi. See Margaliot, 1:140.

27 This homiletical exposition is based on the change in usage between biblical and mishnaic Hebrew. In the former, *goy* carries the collective meanings "people" or "nation" (referring equally to Israelites and foreign nations); in rabbinic usage, it denotes almost

invariably an individual representative of the (heathen) nations of the world. For the semantic history of *goy*, see Ben-Yehudah, 2:718. On the homiletical use of rabbinic word meanings, see Isaac Heinemann, 112–17; instances with *goy*, including our current passage, are discussed on 113–14.

28 It is incorporated as a discourse on Exodus 12:1, which is undoubtedly a lection that would have been expounded in the synagogue. It is the special reading for the Sabbath preceding the new moon of Nisan by virtue of which it is incorporated into *Pesikta rabati*. By contrast, Deuteronomy 3:34 does not open a new section according to the known rites. (The nearest sections begin with 3:23 and 4:25. See Joel, 131–32.) Similarly, Exodus 6:2 opens a section in both the triennial and annual cycles. To focus the proem as far into the section as verse 6 would not be in keeping with the conventions of this genre, although it is not entirely impossible to imagine that the homilist could have dealt with verses 2–8 as a single integrated unit. In its current form, though, it is built around three biblical texts, all of which are from the Torah. This violates the rules for a standard *petiḥta*. Although exceptions to the rule can be found in midrashic literature, *petiḥtot* should be built on the interplay between verses from different sections of the Bible. At any rate, the passage in its current form is not explicitly structured as a *petiḥta*.

By the same token, it does not demonstrate any other common homiletical structures, such as the posing of a halakhic question ("yelammedenu rabbenu") or a "messianic peroration."

29 Whether one sees the reproach as directed primarily at the ancient Hebrews or at their contemporary descendents.

8 : *The Fish*

b. Yoma 75a:

"*We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely*" (Numbers 11:5).

Rav and Samuel[1]—

One says: Fish.[2]

And one says: Illicit sexual relations.[3]

The one[4] who says Fish—because it says: we did eat.

And[5] the one who says Illicit sexual relations—because it is written: "freely."

And for the one[6] who says Illicit sexual relations—what is[7] *we did eat*?

—It is a euphemism,[8] as it is written: "*she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness*" (Proverbs 30:20).

And[9] for the one who says Fish—what is *freely*?[10]

—That they used to find them[11] and bring them from unowned property;

as the master stated: When Israel used to draw water, the Holy One would cause small fish to appear in their pitchers.[12]

It is well for the one who says Fish—but they were not promiscuous with respect to illicit sexual relations; this is what is written "*A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed*" (Song of Songs 4:12).[13]

But according to the one who says Illicit sexual relations—what is *a fountain sealed*?[14]

—With regard to those relations that are permitted[15] they were not promiscuous.[16]

It is well for the one who says Illicit sexual relations—this is what is written "*Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families*" (Numbers 21:10)—regarding matters of their families.[17]

However, for the one who says Fish—what is "*weep throughout their families*"?

—It was both things.

The interpretation of fish as an allusion to incest or other sexual relations forbidden by the Torah underlies the following discourse in *Tanḥuma*, *Beha'alotekha*, 16:[18]

And if you should say: What they were demanding was fresh meat—was it not the case that the manna would become whatever they desired inside their mouths, as it says: "*And he gave them their request*" (Psalm 106:16)?

If you should say: They had no cattle or kine, does it not already say "*And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle*" (Exodus 12:38)?

And if we should say: They consumed them in the wilderness—Is it not written regarding their entry into the land "*Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle*" (Numbers 32:1)?

Because of this Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai[19] said: It was not for meat that they lusted, seeing that it states "*He rained flesh* [*she'er*] *also upon them as dust*" (Psalm 78:27).

And *she'er* means nothing other than illicit sexual relations, as it says "*None of you … to any that is near of kin* [*she'er*] *to him*."

And thus does it state: "*Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families*."

And when they asked in this way, therefore "*and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased*" (Numbers 11:10).

The basic content of both traditions is similar, in spite of the significant dissimilarities in their forms. Although the *Tanḥuma* version does not bear the marks of a rhetorically crafted homily, it is made up of a straightforward stringing together of biblical paraphrase, midrashic embellishments, and proof texts. This is very different from the Babylonian Talmud, where interpretations are challenged on exegetical grounds, and each must be defended and justified. Since there are no parallels in the classical Palestinian aggadic compendia, we have no easy way of knowing whether or not the *Tanḥuma* versions have been influenced by the Babylonian Talmud.

In neither tradition is a homiletical purpose spelled out. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to discern in the rabbis' depictions of the ancient Israelites an implied criticism of contemporary Jews who might regard their own religious observance as a burden rather than a privilege, looking with a measure of envy at the easygoing lives of their gentile neighbors whose conduct was not constricted by so many moral or ritual rules.[20]

The *literal* reading of the verse as a reference to real fish,[21] an interpretation that is hermeneutically uninteresting and homiletically unproductive,[22] is not developed in the Palestinian amoraic tradition.[23] However the tannaitic midrashic compendia expound the verse somewhat differently, as in the following passage from *Sifré on Numbers*, 87:

> "*We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely*."
>
> And is it found in this connection that the Egyptians used to give them fish for free? Does it not already state: "*Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you*" (Exodus 5:18)? If they were not giving them straw freely, could they have been giving them fish freely?!
>
> What do I mean by *freely*?—Free from the commandments.[24]

Nothing in this formulation would suggest that it was referring specifically to sexual restrictions. Presumably, it refers to the full range of the Torah's precepts. If applied to the fish and other foodstuffs mentioned in the biblical passage, then it could allude to the dietary regulations, the requirements to recite blessings, and so on.

In a general sense, therefore, the interpretations ascribed to Rav and Samuel in the Babylonian Talmud can be viewed as corresponding to the respective approaches of the *Sifré* (which understood "fish" literally) and the *Tanḥuma* (which understood it euphemistically).[25]

Notes

1 The Yemenite MS JTS Rab. 270 (Enelow) adds "And [some] say: R' Ami and R' Asi."

2 As noted by Rashi, the root DGY connotes reproduction in passages such as Genesis 48:18: "*and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth*." See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 185 and Ginzberg, 6:70–71, n. 364. Several witnesses add: "ממש" (literally).

3 MSS Munich 95 and 140 add "since they were permitted like fish."

4 Some witnesses read "It is well for the one who says Fish." It can be objected that the literal interpretation hardly requires a proof text (see Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. פ). In this context, though, it fits nicely and provides a rhetorical transition to the next question.

5 Most witnesses: "It is well for the one."

6 Most witnesses: "However, for the one."

7 See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*.

8 On this phenomenon, see Melamed, 119–48 (especially 137–42).

9 Several texts insert "It is well for the one who says Illicit sexual relations, since it is written *freely*; however."

10 Rabbi Josiah Pinto ("Rif" to the *'Ein ya'aqov*) poses some incisive questions regarding the logic of this objection (based largely on considerations mentioned by Maharsha): Is it not easier to imagine catching fish from the river without cost than acquiring a sexual partner without cost? He suggests that the Talmud's objection is actually based on the redundancy of the word "*freely*" in this context. R' Judah Edel's *Iyyé Hayyam* (cited in the *'Eṣ yosef*) and R' Jacob Reischer explain more credibly that חנם ("*freely*") need not necessarily mean "without cost," but rather "without restrictions."

11 See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n.צ.
12 This citation is from *b. Soṭah* 11b (Liss, *Soṭah*, 152). See also *Exodus Rabbah* 1:12 (ed. Shinan, p. 54). See the additional parallel passages and textual variants listed in Liss's and Shinan's notes.
13 This verse is expounded in various midrashic contexts with respect to the chastity of the Israelite women at the time of the Exodus in spite of the slanders leveled by the nations of the world concerning the purity of their children's pedigrees. See *Mekhilta Pisḥa* 5 (Horovitz and Rabin, 14; Lauterbach, 1:34–35 and notes; *Pesikta de-rav kahana* 11:6 (Mandelbaum, 180–83; Braude and Kapstein, 204–206); *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4:12:1 (ed. Dunsky, 4:24, pp. 120–21).
14 Several texts: "Why is Scripture praising them?"
15 Several witnesses of Spanish provenance have "forbidden." See following note.
16 Textual witnesses are confused about this. (See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke Soferim*, n.ר). At any rate, the general meaning, as explained by Rashi, is that the Israelites meticulously observed the Noachide incest regulations but resented the imposition of the additional laws at Sinai.
17 The printed editions insert an explanatory gloss "that it was forbidden to them to lie with them," which is missing from all other witnesses. The wording seems to have been inspired by the passage in *b. Shabbat* 130a. See also *y. Ta'anit* 4:8 (68d).
18 This passage is found in substantially the same form in Buber's edition, #27 (4:61). See also *Numbers Rabbah* 15:24 and Ginzberg, *Legends*, 3:246–47; 6:86–87 (nn. 468–70).
19 Albeck, *Mavo la-mishnah*, 229; Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, 2:70–149 (see 131).
20 For rabbinic views on the roles of intention and joy in the observance of religious commandments, see Urbach, *Sages*, 385–99.
21 See Margoliot, 40–41, 58.
22 See De Vries, 284–89.
23 But cf. *t. Soṭah* 6:7 (Lieberman, [*Tosefta*] 186-87; Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-feshuṭah*, 672; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:86, n. 468).
24 Horovitz, 86. Cf. *Sifré Zuta*, 269.
25 R' Jacob Reischer hints at a correlation between this view in the Talmud and the *Sifré*. I emphasize again that, if a relation of historical or textual dependence exists between the Babylonian and Tanḥuma traditions, there is (as far as I can tell) no easy way of determining in which direction it goes.

9 : *Sevenfold*

b. Rosh Hashanah 21b:

This passage has come down to us in two principal versions:

MS Munich 95	*Standard text*
"[*The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth*], *purified seven times over*" (Psalm 12:6).	"[*The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth*], *purified seven times over*" (Psalm 12:6).
Rav and Samuel both say:[1]	Rav and Samuel—One says:
Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moses[2] except for one, for it says (Psalm 8:6) "*For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.*"[3]	Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moses except for one, for it says (Psalm 8:6) "*For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.*"
Rav and Samuel—One says:	
Ecclesiastes sought to be like Moses our Master, as it says: "*Ecclesiastes sought to find out acceptable words*" (Ecclesiastes 12:10).[4] A heavenly voice issued and said to him: "*and that which was written was upright, even words of truth*" (ibid.). "*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses*" (Deuteronomy 34:10). And one says: Among the prophets there did not arise—among the kings there did arise.[5] Then, how am I to uphold "*Ecclesiastes sought to find out acceptable words*"? >	"Ecclesiastes sought to find out acceptable words" (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Ecclesiastes sought to be like Moses our Master. A heavenly voice issued and said to him: "*and that which was written was upright, even words of truth*" (ibid.). "*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses*" (Deuteronomy 34:10). And one says: Among the prophets there did not arise[6]—among the kings there did arise. Then, how am I to uphold "*Ecclesiastes sought to find out acceptable words*"? >

> MS Munich 95	> *Standard text*
Ecclesiastes sought to adjudicate cases that are in the heart without witnesses and without admonition. A heavenly voice issued and said to him "*and that which was written was upright, even words of truth*": "*At the mouth of two witnesses*, etc." (Deuteronomy 17:6).	Ecclesiastes sought to adjudicate cases that are in the heart without witnesses and without admonition. A heavenly voice issued and said to him "*and that which was written was upright, even words of truth*": "*At the mouth of two witnesses*, etc." (Deuteronomy 17:6).

As R' Rabbinowicz noted correctly,[7] the text of the printed editions is incoherent, since the dispute between Rav and Samuel is not over the Psalms verse but over Ecclesiastes 12:10. Their comment on Psalms is found (introduced as "Rav and Samuel both say") in *b. Nedarim* 38a, and it was probably transferred to *b. Rosh Hashanah* from there.[8]

At any rate, the version in the printed editions, with just a single set of "Rav and Samuel—One says ... One says" and no "both say," is supported by all five of the Genizah fragments to our passage.[9] This fact supports the hypothesis that, for all its bizarre features, this tradition is nevertheless the original one for the current *sugya*.

Notwithstanding its general coherence, the reading in MS Munich still suffers from a basic structural asymmetry. The standard pattern for talmudic disputes requires that the disputants propose conflicting interpretations for the same text.[10] In the present instance, however, although Rav and Samuel have opposing readings of the narrative facts, those readings do not necessarily arise from their interpretations of the same verse or word.[11] In light of these considerations, it is probable that the *lectio difficilior* of the majority of witnesses is primary, and that the tradition in MS Munich represents a conscious (but not completely successful) secondary attempt to overcome its deficiencies. Either way, the *sugya*'s chief structural problem arises from the redactor's insistence on presenting the dispute as a narrowly exegetical one. This tendency is typical of Babylonian midrash.

As far as the content of this passage is concerned, the central dispute is over whether Solomon/Ecclesiastes was permitted to achieve the same level of spiritual understanding as Moses.[12] "Understanding" might refer here to the ability to fathom the deepest meaning of the Torah. The intriguing question of what was included in that unattainable fiftieth gate is not spelled out here; and if we are to judge solely from the information provided, the allusion is not to a particular item or area of religious lore but to essential intellectual limitations of the human condition. The second opinion in the dispute holds that Solomon

was Moses' equal with respect to intellectual mastery of the Torah, and that whatever limitations Scripture ascribes to him have to do with supernatural access to the thoughts of defendants and litigants.[13]

The discussion, as described thus far, is of considerable interest but ultimately strikes us as uncomfortably vague and full of loose threads.[14]

The full significance of this exegetical dispute does not come to light until we compare it with the Palestinian *petiḥtas* for Numbers 19:1, the Torah section that introduces the law of the "red heifer" and constitutes the special pentateuchal reading for the first of the two Sabbaths preceding the new moon of Nisan.[15] The earliest extant versions of these *petiḥtas* are probably the ones that are preserved in *Pesikta derav kahana* 4:2–3:[16]

> R' Tanḥum bar Ḥanilai[17] opened: "*The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*"...
>
> R' Ḥanan bar Pazi[18] interpreted the biblical text in connection with the section on the heifer, which contains seven sevens: seven heifers, seven burnings, seven sprinklings, seven launderings, seven impure ones, seven pure ones, and seven priests.[19] If a person should say to you: Some are missing—Say to him: Moses and Aaron were also included.
>
> "*And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, This is the ordinance of the law*" (Numbers 19:1).
>
> Rabbi Isaac opened: "*All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me*" (Ecclesiastes 7:23).
>
> It is written: "*And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much*, etc." (1 Kings 5:9).
>
> R' Levi and the Rabbis:
>
> The Rabbis say: He gave him wisdom in proportion to all of Israel. Said R' Levi: Just as the sand is a barrier for the sea, so was wisdom made into a barrier for Solomon.
>
> The matter states: If you have acquired knowledge, what are you lacking? If you lack knowledge, what have you acquired?[20]...
>
> "*Who is as the wise man?*" (Ecclesiastes 8:1) [...]
>
> This is Moses, regarding whom it is written: "*A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty*" (Proverbs 21:22).
>
> "*And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?*" That he interpreted the Torah for Israel.
>
> "*A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine.*"
>
> R' Mani of She'av and Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin[21] in the name of R' Levi: Regarding each and every thing that the Holy One would speak to Moses, he would declare its impurity and its purity. But when he reached the section "*And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people*" (Leviticus 21:1), he said before him: Master of the worlds, if he should

become impure, how will he become purified? And he did not reply to him.

At that very moment, the face of our teacher Moses became pale. This is what is written "*and the boldness of his face shall be changed*" (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

But when he reached the section about the red heifer, the Holy One said to him: Moses, the same speech that I spoke to you, "*Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them*"; and you said before me: Master of the worlds, if he should become impure, how will he become purified? And I did not reply to you—Well, this is the means of his purification: "*And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer*" (Numbers 19:17).

Which is this?—"*This is the ordinance of the law*."

Although these Palestinian homilies are by no means identical to the Babylonian dispute between Rav and Samuel, it is reasonable to assume that they supply the dispute's original context (or at least, for one of the opinions found there), in a discourse about the red heifer, designed to be delivered on the Sabbath when the relevant Torah section is read in the synagogue.[22] From the *petiḥta*, we learn also the content of the elusive fiftieth gate of understanding, which was mentioned in Rav's and Samuel's first comment: the rationale behind the rite of the heifer's preparation, which constitutes rabbinic literature's quintessential instance of a biblical ordinance that cannot be reduced to a humanly understandable explanation.[23] In the Palestinian *midrashim*, the "*sevenfold*" is not applied to the forty-nine gates of understanding but to specific sevens that occur in the procedures for preparing and applying the purifying ashes.

Psalm 12:6 is expounded in the Palestinian traditions with reference to the red heifer and there is found as well a mention of Moses' initial ignorance concerning the means of purification from corpse-impurity. However, the specific interpretation about defining the limits of Moses' understanding might well be unique to the Babylonian Talmud.[24] In the Babylonian Talmud, it is Ecclesiastes 12:10 that teaches that Solomon failed to achieve perfect understanding; the Palestinian homilies, though, cite the more explicit 7:23.

The explanation that Solomon sought the ability to adjudicate cases without the due process of testimony and admonition appears here as a post facto invention of the anonymous redactors and would not normally be treated as integral to the original dispute. In this case, however, it is intriguing to note that in Palestinian midrashic compendia, this tradition is associated with Solomon's judgment of the two harlots in 1 Kings 3:16–28; it is entirely likely that the author of our present pericope is alluding to such traditions.[25]

This factor suggests a different reconstruction of how the Babylonian Talmud's dispute between Rav and Samuel came to be. The first opinion is revealed

as rooted in Palestinian proems to Numbers 19; whereas the second originated in a midrashic retelling of the judgment of Solomon, most likely in the context of a proem to Ecclesiastes or Song of Songs.

Both Palestinian midrashic traditions touch on topics of considerable theological importance, involving the relation between wisdom and prophecy or the rationality of the Torah's commandments as embodied in the archetypal figures of Solomon and Moses. But the laconic statements in the Babylonian Talmud provide no thematic development beyond narrow interpretations of the cited verses. By choosing to focus exclusively on the midrashic interpretations of selected biblical texts, the Talmud's editors have produced an awkward and incomplete unit whose homiletical purposes have been all but obliterated.

Notes

1 This wording is also found in MS Oxford 366 and the *editio princeps* of *'Ein ya'aqov*.

2 Some texts add: "at Sinai." Others add: "our master."

3 As explained by Rashi, the concept of "fifty gates of understanding" was derived midrashically from these two verses from Psalms on the understanding that "*seven times over*" means 7 × 7, totaling forty-nine. After we have made allowances for the one level by which Moses was kept "*lower than the angels*," this produces the number fifty. Additional sources that refer to units of forty-nine or fifty, or other numbers, in connection with discourse about the Torah are assembled in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:284, n. 25.

4 MS Munich alone has this sequence. In other traditions: "'*Ecclesiastes sought to find out acceptable words*'—Ecclesiastes sought to be like Moses." Cf. the Targum to Song of Songs 1:2 (Alexander Sperber, *Bible in Aramaic*, 127): "Said the prophet Solomon: Blessed is the name of the Lord who has given us the Torah through the agency of Moses the great scribe, inscribed upon two tablets of stone, and six orders of Mishnah and Talmud transmitted orally; and he would speak of them face to face like a person who kisses his fellow out of the greatness of his affection."

5 The phraseology here appears to be modeled on the tannaitic *midrash*: "'*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses*'—*In Israel* there did not arise, but among the nations of the world there arose; and who is it?—It is Balaam son of Beor." *Sifré* on Deuteronomy 357:10 (Finkelstein, *Sifre*, 383 and 512–13 n. 21; Hoffmann, 227; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 20:1. See also Urbach, "Homilies," 542–43; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:125, n. 727.

6 Some texts add "but."

7 *Dikduke soferim*, nn. סנ.

8 Although two additional witnesses read "Rav and Samuel both say" (rather than "One says") after the citation from Psalms 12:6, MS Munich remains unique in introducing the dispute later on. This situation gives the impression that some of the manuscripts were incompletely emended, but that their prototypes resembled the text of the printings. Rabbinowicz infers that Rashi's reading was as in MS Munich, athough I fail to see how he deduced this. On the contrary, Rashi's long-windedness could perhaps be regarded as evidence that he had before him the difficult reading of the printed editions. Ḥananel's commentary provides no clues to his reading either. If the standard reading is the correct one, then perhaps it came into existence because, at an early stage of the transmission, the words "Rav and Samuel, one says: Ecclesiastes sought" were somehow omitted; and later scribes tried to remedy this incomprehensible situation by emending "both say" in

the previous section to "one says." This development would have predated most of the extant manuscripts of the pericope.

9 The fragments were assembled by D. Golinkin. They include: TS F2(2)/1 and TS F1(1)/33 [p. 11]; TS F(1)/93 [p. 57]; Antonin 502 [p. 126]; JTS ENA 4189/1a [p. 132]; TS NS 329/790 [p. 139].

10 Or, in non-midrashic contexts, for a single halakhic situation.

11 A better arrangement might have been the following:

> "*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses*" (Deuteronomy 34:10).
> Rav and Samuel—
> One says: Among the prophets *there did not arise*—among the kings there did arise.
> And who was it? Ecclesiastes….
> And one says: No one at all arose like Moses—at all.

12 Margoliot, proposes an ingenious but forced interpretation (54–55), according to which Rav, who traced his ancestry back to the Davidic line, tended to expound biblical passages about David and Solomon in a way that presented them in a more favourable light; whereas Samuel, being of priestly descent, was more likely to prefer Aaron or Moses. He applies the same reasoning to other disputes, including those in *b. Gittin* 68b and *b. Soṭah* 11a.

13 See Neusner, 2:193–94.

14 A useful survey of rabbinic attitudes to the relation between prophecy and wisdom (i.e., rabbinic scholarship) can be found in Urbach, *Sages*, 305–308, 577–80, and the sources cited there. The classic typology that depicts Moses as the greatest of prophets and Solomon as the wisest of mortals virtually invites some discussion about whether Solomon's wisdom exceeded that of Moses. Nevertheless, I am not aware of the question being posed anywhere else in rabbinic literature.

15 See *m. Megillah* 3:4; *t. Megillah* 3:3 (ed. Lieberman, p. 353).

16 Ed. Mandelbaum, 55–56; trans. Braude and Kapstein, 60–71. Principal parallel versions are found in: *Pesikta rabati* 14:6–7, 10 (ed. Friedmann, 58b ff. 63a–b; ed. Ulmer, 220–21, 239–41; trans. Braude, 267–70 and 284–85); *Tanḥuma Ḥuqqat* 5; *Tanḥuma*, ed. *Buber, Ḥuqqat*, 9, 10 (pp. 108–109); 20 (p. 115). See also *Midrash on Psalms* 9:2; *Numbers Rabbah* 19:2; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:23.

17 A second-generation Palestinian *amora*; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 192; Marguliesand Aizenberg, 2:355.

18 A third-generation Palestinian *amora*; Margulies and Aizenberg, 1:140.

19 For the detailed itemization, see *Mattenot kehunnah* and *Aderet eliyahu* to *Numbers Rabbah* 19:2; Braude and Kapstein, 64, nn. 31–37. *Pesikta rabati* concludes: "And why so? Rather, just as the Torah is expounded in forty-nine aspects, so does this have forty-nine aspects, for it is of equal weight to the entire Torah." That citation is from the genizah fragment JTS 8195 (based on Ulmer, 220), which is substantially identical to the *editio princeps*. MS Parma, however, has only a truncated formulation: "for it is equal in weight to the entire Torah."

20 This saying is brought with some frequency in rabbinic literature. For a listing, see Margulies's notes to *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:6 (p. 19).

21 These third- or fourth-century Palestinian *amoraim* normally appear as tradents of R' Levi; Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim* 331; Margulies and Aizenberg, 190, 255.

22 This possibility is suggested by Jacob Reischer in his *'Iyyun ya'aqov*.

23 See Urbach, 377–85. The "mysterious" character of the red-heifer rite is equated by some rabbis with its paradoxical nature (e.g., athough it produces purifying waters, those who prepare it are defiled), and by others to the apparent arbitrariness of its details.

24 See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 3:216; 4:130; 6:283–84, n. 25. Rashi to *b. Rosh Hashanah* 21b equates the forty-nine gates of understanding with forty-nine hermeneutic possibilities. Evidently, he is trying to harmonize the talmudic text with interpretations that are more common in midrashic literature.

25 As reported succinctly in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 10:17 and *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:10 (ed. Dunsky, 2): "Rabbi Meir says: They [i.e., the two "harlots"] were spirits. And the Rabbis say: They were sisters-in-law. Rabbi Simon in the name of Rabbi Joshua says: They were actual harlots, and he issued his judgment without witnesses or admonition."

A more elaborate statement of this theme is found in the later collection *Midrash on Psalms* 72:2 (ed. Buber 324; trans. Braude 1:558–59):

And [concerning] Solomon he also said: "*Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son*" (Psalms 72:2). It does not say "my judgments" but "*thy judgments.*" Said David: Master of the Universe, grant thy own wisdom to the king's son. Even as you judge without witnesses and without admonition, so let Solomon judge without witnesses and without admonition. The Holy One said to him: Thus shall he do; as it says (1 Chronicles 29:23): "*Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord.*"... So what is "*on the throne of the Lord*"?—That he passed judgment like his Creator, without witnesses and without admonition. And thus did he adjudicate the case of the two harlots.

See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4:130; 6:263–64 n. 25. The halakhic requirement of admonition (i.e., that witnesses must warn perpetrators of the legal consequences) should apply only to cases involving capital or corporal punishment, whereas Solomon's judgment here was essentially over a child-custody dispute. See *m. Sanhedrin* 5:1; *t. Sanhedrin* 11:1 (ed. Zuckermandel, 431); *b. Sanhedrin* 8b, 80b; *Genesis Rabbah* 34:14 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 325); and additional sources cited in Zevin, 11:291–314. In *Song of Songs Rabbah*, therefore, Maharzu observes that the "admonition" does not strictly fit the context there. However, in this *b. Rosh Hashanah* pericope, where the reference is not to a particular case but to Solomon's aspiration to general wisdom, the expression is appropriate.

10 : "From India Even unto Ethiopia"

b. Megillah 11a:

"*From India even unto Ethiopia*" (Esther 1:1).

Rav and Samuel:

One says: India is at [one] end of the world, and Ethiopia is at [the other] end of the world.

And one says: India and Ethiopia are adjacent to each other.

And just as he reigned over India and Ethiopia, so did he reign over the entire world.

In a similar vein it says: "*For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the river, from Tiphsah even to Gaza* (1 Kings 4:24).

Rav and Samuel:

One says: Tiphsah is at [one] end of the world, and Gaza is at [the other] end of the world.

And the other says: Tiphsah and Gaza stand next to each other.

And just as he reigned over Tiphsah and Gaza, so did he reign over the entire world.

I analyzed this passage in detail in the *Babylonian Esther Midrash*. I shall limit myself here to a summary of the conclusions that were reached there, with special reference to the concerns of the current study.[1]

The dispute about the relation between India and Ethiopia is ultimately over the question of whether to read it as a statement of the geographical *vastness* of Ahasuerus' empire or of the *power* of his control over it. According to the latter explanation, his hold over the (undefined) farthest reaches of his domains was just as powerful as his dominion over these neighbouring provinces. An identical dispute is recorded concerning a verse in 1 Kings that describes the territories ruled by King Solomon.

Although this blatantly non-literal midrashic exegesis can be explained as the result of an apparently superfluous singling out of these two provinces (when we have already been informed explicitly that the total number of his provinces was 127), I find it more difficult to construct a convincing homiletical rationale for the interpretations.[2]

A unique version of this text, contained only in MS Munich 140, proposes a negative interpretation of the second position, which holds that India and Ethiopia are neighboring provinces. According to this reading, Ahasuerus's effective control was confined to these two provinces, implying that he ruled over the other 125 provinces in name only. Underlying this reading is an evident dissatisfaction with the standard text, which presents Ahasuerus in an uncharacteristically favourable (or, at best, neutral) light.

The basic geographical premise of this *midrash* is factually untenable. Even by ancient standards, India and Ethiopia were not neighbouring states, and the rabbis must have had some familiarity with the locations of such well-known places as India, Ethiopia, and Gaza.[3] The weak link in this reasoning is the obscure Tiphsah, mentioned in 1 Kings. Hence the *midrash* probably originated as a comment on 1 Kings, and was only secondarily applied to the context of Esther. For this reason, the biblical texts were interpreted only as glorifications of royal conquests and not as ways of belittling or minimizing the kings' achievements. This phenomenon makes better sense if we assume that it was applied originally to Solomon.

While merely extolling the greatness of a figure such as Solomon could be an adequate homiletical theme, this motif could also have fitted neatly into a sermon about how (according to midrashic tradition) Solomon's pride led to his being deposed from the throne and forced to wander as an unrecognized beggar—a powerful object lesson about the perils of arrogance. The mightier we portray his original empire, the more intensely do we feel his fall from glory.

Indeed, in Palestinian midrashic literature, it was always the 1 Kings passages that attracted exegetical attention from the rabbis.[4] Thus, in *Song of Songs Zuṭa* 1:1[5] and *Midrash on Proverbs* 20:9,[6] the 1 Kings verse is expounded without any reference to Esther. Each of these *midrashim* includes some additional exegetical material about Solomon that is not found in our passage. However, the *midrashim* on both Esther (*Esther Rabbah* (1:4) and *Panim aḥerim* B)[7] include discussions of the 1 Kings verse. Yet neither adds any exegesis to the Esther verse beyond what is found in our passage in the Babylonian Talmud. In other words, the Babylonian Talmud has taken a piece of "*pseudo*-exegesis" that was originally composed with reference to King Solomon and then applied it as a real exegetical rule for expounding "from ... unto" in connection with Ahasurerus's dominions. In its new context, the interpretation has lost the homiletical thrust that it had in the original sermon.

While the Babylonian Talmud limits itself to an exegetical explanation, *Esther Rabbah* takes this approach a step farther and incorporates the material into a more elaborately structured homiletical framework. After interpreting the same verses from Esther and 1 Kings, the *midrash* continues as follows:

In a similar vein it says: "*From the temple to Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee*" (Psalm 68:30).

But is not from the temple to Jerusalem a negligible matter?

Rather, just as the offerings are common from the temple to Jerusalem, so will there be a procession of messengers bringing gifts for King Messiah.

This is what is written: "*Yea, all kings shall prostrate themselves before him*" (Psalm 72:11).

R' Kohen the brother of R' Ḥiyya bar Abba[8] said: Just as the divine presence is found between the Temple and Jerusalem, so shall the divine presence fill up the earth from one end to the other.

This is what is written: "*And let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen and Amen*" (Psalm 72:19).

The last two verses from Psalms culminate in a rousing messianic peroration, appropriate to a synagogue sermon.[9]

It is hard to determine the original liturgical context for this discourse, since 1 Kings 4 is not known to comprise a *haftarah* in the triennial cycle, and the connection to Esther is rather tenuous. Most likely, what we have here is an artificial proem that was fashioned by the redactor of *Esther Rabbah*.

The view that situates India and Ethiopia at opposite extremes of the empire is, of course, closer to the literal intent of the verse. It is worth noting, therefore, that this opinion is not recorded at all in the Palestinian parallels, all of which take it as obvious that the provinces are adjacent to each other.

Notes

1 Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:127–34. I have omitted all textual notes in my presentation of the Talmudic passage here, since the information can be consulted there.
2 Margoliot ascribes the first explanation to Rav, since it is closer to the verse's literal sense and therefore consistent with Rav's normal exegetical stance (59).
3 For additional sources regarding the rabbis' perceptions of the size and location of Ethiopia, see *y. Berakhot* 1:1 (2c); Ginzberg, *Commentary*, 1:52–53; *b. Ta'anit* 10a; Malter, 34; *Genesis Rabbah* 15:2 (Theodor and Albeck, 136–67); *Song of Songs Rabbah* 6:9.
4 See also *b. Sanhedrin* 20b.
5 Buber, *Midrash zuta*.
6 Visotzky, 144–46. These passages link up with Solomon's authorship of the respective biblical works.
7 Buber, *Sifre*, 56.
8 A third-generation Palestinian *amora*; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 255–56 (and 236–37).
9 Scholarly discussions of this phenomenon are surveyed in *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:134, n. 106. However, cf. Stern, 62–68; he notes that these perorations are more characteristic of the "*gufa*" of homiletical midrashic compilations (i.e., exegetical portions that follow the sequence of *petiḥtas*) than of the proems themselves.

11 : *Ahasuerus, a Clever King or a Stupid King?*[1]

b. Megillah 12a:

"*And when these days were expired, the king made [a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace]*" (Esther 1:5).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: He was a clever king.

And one says: He was a stupid king.

The one who says he was a clever king—He acted well in that he called together those who were distant at the beginning, because the inhabitants of his own city were subject to him; whenever he wanted he could win them over.[2]

And the one who says he was stupid—He ought to have called together the inhabitants of his own town at the beginning, so that if those rebelled against him, then these would stand by him.[3]

Apparently the present dispute is focused not on any particular word or phrase but on the sequence of events. Ahasuerus first banqueted the provincials; and only afterwards did he convene a second feast for the inhabitants of his capital, Shushan. Rav and Samuel debate the political wisdom of this arrangement. Why should he entertain the "strangers" first, and only afterwards the "natives?"[4] The rabbis seem to approach the story as a model of political wisdom (or folly, as the case might be), not as a source of religious or moral instruction.

The issue underlying this disagreement seems to be the question of how much of a hold Ahasuerus had over the natives of Shushan at the time of the banquet, whether by force or by actual loyalty? The debate over whether Ahasuerus was a clever or stupid monarch is a recurring one in the Talmud's retelling of Esther, although it does not seem to have a parallel in *Esther Rabbah* or other early Palestinian sources.

This passage is purely exegetical, but its lessons can easily be applied to general communal or family situations. There is no prima facie reason why it could not have been incorporated into a homily, whether on Esther or on some other biblical text (for instance, by comparing or contrasting Ahasuerus with Joseph,

Moses, Pharaoh, or some other biblical leader). In the absence of parallel materials, however, the reconstruction of these homilies would be a purely speculative endeavour.[5]

Notes

1 I have included a more extensive analysis of this passage, including textual variants, in *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:202–205.

2 On "win them over," Spanish witnesses have: "call them together."

3 Genizah fragment TS R I (2) 67 has a different reading for the entire preceding passage: "'*And when these days were expired*'—Rav and Samuel: One says he was a stupid king because he ought to have called together the inhabitants of his own city first, so that if the distant ones would rebel against him, these would stand beside him. And one says he was a clever king, because he called together the distant ones in the beginning, because he could honor the inhabitants of his own city whenever he wanted."

While the uniqueness of this reading lies primarily in the abbreviated *arrangement* of the material—the fragment is from an aggadic anthology, not a full text of the Talmud—note that the last phrase differs substantially in its *content* from the remaining witnesses. The genizah version does not seem worried (as are the other texts) about appeasing dissatisfied citizens, but it does seem interested in the unselfish bestowing of honours upon them.

4 Cf. *Panim Aḥerim* B 58; (see Buber, n. 35) and *Second Targum of Esther* 1:5: "Upon the completion of the days in which he had made feasts for all the provinces, he said: I shall [now] make a feast for the inhabitants of my own place."

5 Margoliot, 59; he notes the similarity between this passage and *b. Sanhedrin* 94a, which I will discuss below. Margoliot sees these passages as applications of Rav's dictum in *b. 'Avodah Zarah* 20a: "It is forbidden for a person to say 'How attractive is this gentile!' etc." By disparaging Ahasuerus, the wise kings of Israel are placed in a more complimentary light—a pattern that Margoliot regards as typical of Rav's pro-Davidic approach (as I have previously noted).

12 : "The Court of the Garden…"

b. Megillah 12a:

> "*In the court of the garden of the king's palace*" (Esther 1:5).
>
> Rav and Samuel—
>
> One says: Him who was worthy of the court, to the court; and him who was worthy of the garden, to the garden; and him who was worthy of the palace, to the palace.
>
> And one says: He seated them in the court and it did not contain them. He seated them in the garden and it did not contain them. Until he brought them into the palace.[1]
>
> In a *baraita* it taught: He seated them in the court, and opened two entrances, one to the garden and one to the palace.

Following is a summary of the more extensive discussion from my work on the *Babylonian Esther Midrash*.[2]

The simple sense of Esther 1:5 implies that there is a structure called a *bitan*, which has an attached garden, and that in that garden is a courtyard, in which the king's banquet took place. The midrashic interpretations read the verse differently, as if it refers to three distinct places, each of which was used as a venue for the feast.

Each of these three interpretations accounts in its own way for the mention of all three locations:

1. The first interpretation states that guests were assigned to a place appropriate to their social standing. This explanation was probably influenced by the *baraita* below, in which the "*beds of gold and silver*" (in verse 6) are given a similar rationale.
2. The second interpretation states that the three locales were mentioned in the order in which they were filled.
3. The *baraita* takes a different view, one more in keeping with the simple meaning of this verse: the guests ate in the courtyard but gained access from it to the palace and garden.

There is not much evidence here of any serious attempt to elicit moral, ideological, or religious teachings. The overwhelming impression is that the rab-

bis were interested not only in explaining and clarifying the details of this biblical story but also that they were caught up in the extravagance and grandeur of its description; they used the tools of midrashic hermeneutics in order to magnify the sumptuousness and general magnificence of this event. Several midrashic interpretations of this episode, in fact, are governed by the same assumption: whatever might be said about the king himself, his banquet is a model of the ideal feast.

A debate among R' Judah, R' Nehemiah, and R' Phineas in *Esther Rabbah* 2:6 reflects a similar confusion about how those three terms relate to each other, understanding that both the court and the garden (not only the court *of* the garden) were in use. That passage is purely exegetical and has no discernible homiletical overtones.[3]

Note that the following passage in the Talmud contains a dispute between Rav and Samuel about the meaning of *ḥur* ("white") in Esther 1:6. Textual witnesses belonging to the Spanish family formulate that dispute according to the "One says ... One says" pattern.[4] I have not included it here, though an analysis of the passage may be found in *The Babylonian Esther Midrash*.[5]

Notes

1 Printings and genizah fragment add: "and it contained them."
2 1:213–17.
3 Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 15:2 (pp. 136–37), where a similar disagreement is related concerning the relation between Eden and the garden (in Genesis 2:8).
4 Cf. Margoliot, 59–60.
5 Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:217–18.

13 : *Treasure Cities*

b. Soṭah 11a:[1]

"*And they built for Pharaoh treasure* [*miskenot*] *cities*" (Exodus 1:11).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Because they endanger [*mesakkenot*] their owners.

And one says: Because they impoverish [*memaskenot*] their owners.[2]

For the master has said: Whoever occupies oneself with construction becomes impoverished.

This disagreement over midrashic etymologies has no parallels in the classic midrashic collections. Rashi initially explains both interpretations as foreshadowing the sufferings that will later be inflicted on the Egyptians, "danger" alluding to the Egyptian deaths at the Red Sea[3] and "poverty" to their spoiling by the Israelites (Exodus 12:36).[4]

The final comment originates in *b. Yevamot* 63a,[5] where it evidently[6] forms part of a dictum in which Rav Pappa advises against rebuilding an entire wall where patching or plastering over the damage will do instead.[7] As Rashi correctly notes, whoever cited the statement in *b. Soṭah* presumably did not understand the interpretation as foreshadowing specific events of the Exodus but rather as a general misgiving about large-scale construction projects.[8] He therefore concludes that his initial interpretation requires deletion of the quote.

In light of the fundamental ambivalence about the meaning of this passage and the absence of comparative material in other rabbinic compendia, no useful conclusions can be drawn from this dispute between Rav and Samuel. Clearly, the "foreshadowing" interpretation could be incorporated easily into homiletical discourses about the Exodus. However, it is not hard to imagine ways in which general observations about the hazards of construction could also be put to a similar use or applied to completely different topics.[9]

Notes

1 Liss, *Yevamot*, 1:149.

2 The printed editions of *Exodus Rabbah* 1:10 read "their builders," although this is evidently a mistake (see Shinan's critical apparatus [51] and Maharzu). If the reading were

correct, it would suggest a different possibility: namely, that these references are to the physical and financial damages that were caused to the Israelite slaves.

3 This reference could presumably be to a plague such as that of the firstborn.

4 Against this interpretation Maharsha objects that צוי מסכנות are also mentioned in connection with Solomon (1 Kings 9:19; 2 Chronicles 8:4, 6), where no events of this sort are (apparently) being foreshadowed. He does not propose a solution to this difficulty. At any rate, we should not expect absolute consistency in this kind of midrashic word-play. See also *'Es yosef*.

5 See Maharsha in *Yevamot*; Liss, *Yevamot*, 2:410–12, n. 92.

6 A measure of doubt arises concerning the unity of this dictum, because the quoted sentence is in Hebrew, whereas the preceding portions of Rav Pappa's statement are in Aramaic. Perhaps Krauss (see below) was alluding to this phenomenon when he characterized the Hebrew comment as a *Spruch*. MS Oxford 367 (recorded in Liss's edition) introduces the sentence with the formula: "דאמר מר." Rav Pappa is famous, of course, for his reliance on popular maxims and proverbs (using the formula כדאמרי אינשי), although these are usually in Aramaic. See Margulies and Eisenberg, 2:297–98. Cf. Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 2:205, n. 424.

7 On the realia related to Rav Pappa's statement, see Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:20 and 1:302, n. 261; Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 1:2:274. He cites similar maxims from Plutarch and Cato.

8 According to one interpretation, such enterprises invite accidents and injuries; according to the other, they are financially draining. See Shinan's commentary on *Exodus Rabbah* pp. 50–51 (although I think that he misread Rashi's preference).

9 For example, in connection with building the Tabernacle or the Temple.

14 : *Pithom and Raamses*

b. Soṭah 11a:[1]

"Pithom and Raamses" (Exodus 1:11).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Pithom is its name. And why is its name called Raamses?—Because the first part keeps crumbling [*mitroses*].[2]

And one says: Raamses is its name. And why is its name called Pithom?—Because the mouth of the deep [*pi tehom*][3] keeps swallowing up the first part.

Even though the kind of creative etymology ascribed to Rav and Samuel[4] is quite commonplace in rabbinic literature, it is not clear why they found it necessary to posit that Pithom and Raamses were actually the same city,[5] since this stands in stark contradiction to the words of the verse that refer to "*treasure cities*" in the plural.[6] Perhaps it reflects the redactors' insistence on turning the two etymologies, which could seemingly have coexisted, into a conventionally patterned dispute.[7] As we observe with respect to virtually all the name-etymologies that are discussed in this study, they follow a stereotypical pattern that begins with an assertion that two names refer to the same person.

Shinan[8] notes two possible rationales for the midrash:

- to indicate that divine justice would not permit the Egyptians to derive benefit from their exploitation.[9]
- to demonstrate the wickedness of the Egyptians, who imposed such a task Sisyphean[10] on their victims.

Since we cannot determine the precise point of the comments, and we have no parallels in Palestinian rabbinic sources, there is not much that can be derived from this example with respect to the origins of the exegetical dispute or its possible functions within homiletical discourses.

Notes

1 Ed. Liss, 1:149.

2 See Kohut, 7:284–85. The *'Arukh* itself (6:466) had a different reading: מתמסמם, a reading that is attested in *Midrash ha-gadol* and elsewhere. See Liss, nn. 146–47; and Kasher, 8:28.

3 On the history of this concept, see: Daniel Sperber, "Abyss"; idem, *Magic and Folklore*, 47–59. Sperber traces to ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs rabbinic references (both halakhic and aggadic) to the primordial waters (as well as to impure forces threatening to burst forth from their incarceration in the deeps) and their suppression by means of potsherds and magical formulas. Cf. Buber, *Midrash agadah*, 121: "They dug so far until the deep waters rose, and they would lay the bricks but the deep waters would swallow them up, for this reason it was called Pithom. Do not read *Pithom*, but rather *pi tehom*."

4 Maharsha argues that the need to expound these names was driven by their essential redundancy for the needs of the narrative (since it was ostensibly enough just to state that they built treasure cities). In reality, no justification is required for this common midrashic trope.

5 The widespread midrashic tendency to equate biblical names is discussed by Isaac Heinemann, 29–32; he provides examples (31) of identifications of places bearing different names.

6 This objection was argued forcefully by Maharsha. His solution, that one has to distinguish between the *regions* of Pithom and Raamses (the latter was mentioned in Genesis 47:11) and the newly built treasure city of Pithom-Raamses, is overly sophisticated. Though ready to concede that Pithom and Raamses might have been regions containing several towns, *'Eṣ yosef* observes that he still cannot account for the fact that the names are separated by disjunctive את particles—a strong indication (according to accepted midrashic hermeneutics) that the names refer to separate towns.

7 In his commentary on *Exodus Rabbah* (51), Shinan cites some additional suggestions. Reischer offers the intriguing (but not quite persuasive) suggestion that the opinions expressed in this passage are consistent with the two opinions in the previous one about the meaning of *miskenot*. Crumbling structures would cause personal injury, whereas the ones that were swallowed up into the earth cause financial losses to their owners. Cf. Buber, *Midrash agadah*, p. 121: "Israel would struggle [מתרוצצים] under the structure."

8 Ibid.

9 Cited from Buber, *Lekaḥ ṭov*, 2:4. This interpretation is incorporated into Ginzberg's paraphrase in *Legends* 2:249.

10 Shinan employs this expression in passing without indicating whether he is positing a conscious borrowing from the Greek myth. The question is indeed a legitimate one. It should at any rate be noted that the association arises according to Rashi's interpretation of the text, which formed the basis for my translation. The passage is really quite obscure and might lend itself to different renderings.

15 : *Shiphrah and Puah*

b. Soṭah 11b:

"And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah" (Exodus 1:15).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: A woman and her daughter.

And one says: A woman and her daughter-in-law.

The one who says A woman and her daughter—Jochebed and Miriam.

And the one who says A woman and her daughter-in-law—Jochebed and Elisheba.[1]

It was taught [in a *baraita*] in accordance with the one who says A woman and her daughter;

As it was taught: Shiphrah is Jochebed. And why was her name called Shiphrah?—Because she would cleanse [*meshapperet*] the baby.[2]

Another explanation: Because Israel were fruitful [*shepparu*] and increased in her days.

Puah is Miriam. And why was her name called Puah?—Because she would call [*po'ah*] to the baby.[3]

Another explanation: Puah, because she would call [*po'ah*] through the holy spirit and say: My mother is destined to give birth to a son who will redeem Israel.

The passage operates on two distinct but interrelated planes. The actual dispute between Rav and Samuel concerns the identification of the Hebrew midwives who disappear from the scriptural narrative after this episode, never to be mentioned again.[4] This approach conforms to the widespread midrashic practice of minimizing the numbers of unknown minor characters by identifying them with more central ones.[5] The choices of Jochebed, Miriam, and Elisheba cover virtually all of the available options, since no other prominent women figure in the events of that generation.[6]

The *baraita* consisting of midrashic etymologies on the names Shiphrah and Puah is not connected explicitly with this episode but presupposes that identification.[7]

In *Sifré on Numbers* 78,[8] a passage very similar to the *baraita* cited here is incorporated into a lengthy and complex discourse in praise of proselytes; this discourse was stimulated by the mention of Hobab-Jethro in Numbers 10:29. The *Sifré* discourse adduces examples of various biblical proselytes and God-fearers who merited divine help, each example concluding with the refrain "And behold, the matters can be deduced *a minori*: Just as they [who belonged to a rejected or forbidden nation] ... because they brought themselves near, the Almighty brought them near—should this not be true all the more so of Israel, who observe the Torah!"

The premise of this deduction is then challenged:

> And if you should say: In Israel it was not so—
>
> Behold, it has already been stated: "*And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives*, etc."
>
> Shiphrah is Jochebed. Puah is Miriam.
>
> Shiphrah—because she is fruitful [*shepparah*] and multiplies.
>
> Shiphrah—because she cleanses the infant.
>
> Shiphrah—Because Israel were fruitful and multiplied in her days.
>
> Puah—Because she would call [*po'ah*] and cry over her brother, as it says (Exodus 2:4) "*And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him*."

Other Palestinian midrashic compendia incorporate versions of this interpretation into homilies on the theme of the value of a good name, usually in connection with Ecclesiastes 7:1.[9]

By comparison, the bare exegesis in *b. Soṭah* is not incorporated into any literary structure; nor does it teach an explicit lesson. The special character of this exegesis is particularly noticeable in connection with the identification of Puah with Elisheba, an arbitrary-looking view that has no parallel anywhere else in the rabbinic traditions and is not defended or justified.[10]

Notes

1 Some textual traditions suggest that the identifications were not provided by the Talmud at this stage in the presentation. See Liss's edition, pp. 1:157–58, n. 123. At any rate, there does not appear to be any serious doubt about who was intended. See also *Yefeh to'ar* to *Exodus Rabbah* 1:13: "It would appear that Rav and R' Samuel bar Naḥmani [according to the reading in *Exodus Rabbah*] did not specify their names, but one simply said 'a daughter-in-law and her mother' while the other said 'a mother and her daughter'; and the midrash provided the names of these women. And thus does it seem from the *gemara* in Soṭah."

2 See Preuss, 37, 404; cf. Shinan, *Midrash*, 57.

3 The printed editions and a few Ashkenazic texts add: "and take out the baby." See readings and citations in Liss, 158–59, n. 130. The implication that the calling was done in connection with birthing contradicts the interpretation of Rashi, who says that the reference is to chattering in order to soothe or amuse the infant.

4 See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:251–53 ; 5:393, n. 17.

5 Isaac Heinemann, 28.

6 As explained by Maharsha and *'Eṣ yosef*. The traditional commentators do not regard the etymologies as the actual reasons for the respective identifications, raising the exegetical question of what really did prompt Rav and Samuel to propose their interpretations. In his supercommentary to Rashi on the Pentateuch, R' Elijah Mizraḥi resigns himself to the thesis that they possessed received traditions on the matter. Perhaps it was a response to the grammatically definite form of the noun ("the *midwives*"), implying that they were known from elsewhere. Maharsha, on the other hand, proposes that the interpretation was suggested by the unusual formulation of this verse; it specified the names "*of the one* [...] and [...] the other" before establishing that there were two of them, implying that the antecedents are known from elsewhere. The *Yefeh to'ar* to *Exodus Rabbah* and *'Eṣ yosef* prefer to base their interpretations on the fact that the consonantal text reads למילדת. A grammatically singular form, it implies that the two women were relatives. As I have noted on similar occasions, seeking any strict textual basis for midrashic etymologies is superfluous.

7 Note that only the last etymology, which refers to Moses, necessarily presupposes the identification of these midwives with Jochebed and Miriam. Cf. Stemberger, 193.

8 Horovitz, 72–75.

9 Thus in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:3. Cf. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4:13 (Dunsky, 112) where this tradition is attached to Song of Songs 4:5: "*Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies*"; *Midrash on Samuel* 23:5 (ed. Buber, 113), (applied to the death of Samuel in 1 Samuel 25:1); *Tanḥuma Vayyaqhel* 4, applied to Exodus 31:2: "*See, I have called by name Bezalel.*"

10 Reischer suggests that it is connected with the statement below that their rewards included "houses of priesthood." However, this requires a forced reading of the data, which refers more naturally to Aaron as Jochebed's son. Cf. Shinan, p. 65. Aptowitzer (63–65) discerns in these diverse traditions traces of older polemics between supporters and opponents of the Hasmonean monarchy. Those who supported Hasmonean reign and wanted to legitimize the wielding of political power by a priestly dynasty presented Moses as the model of kingship; the tradition connecting Miriam with King David, on the other hand, originated as a rejection of Hasmonean claims and was based on the principle that authentic power can reside only in the Davidic family—that is, from the tribe of Judah. The material, including evidence from targumic traditions and attempts to emend the textual traditions of rabbinic passages, is subjected to a thoroughgoing investigation in Joseph Heinemann, *Aggadah*, 85–89. Heinemann supports Aptowitzer's reading of the evidence, noting how forced and unconvincing are the exegetical attempts to link David with Miriam and Caleb. Whereas Aptowitzer claimed that the original pro-Hasmonean exposition spoke of Jochebed (mother of "King" Moses) and Elisheba (mother of Priest Aaron) and argued that Miriam (as an ancestor of David) was introduced later as an anti-Hasmonean move, Heinemann argues that the Jochebed-Elisheba tradition is a pre-Hasmonean one that arose out of purely exegetical considerations and was only later conscripted for polemical purposes. Cf. Margoliot, 69.

16 : *Coats of Skin*

b. Soṭah 14a:[1]

"*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them*" (Genesis 3:21).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Something that comes from the skin.

And one says: Something from which the skin derives benefit.

The dispute concerns the syntactic structure of the expression "*coats of skins*." Does "skin" denote the *material* from which the coats were made or the *purpose* to which they were put? The precise meaning of both positions is left unclear. It would appear that the first view is intended to be a literal one—which is to say that the garments were made from animal skin or leather.[2] The second view could refer to any material at all, even though it does not necessarily rule out animal skin. But most commentators, influenced by targumic and midrashic interpretations, have understood both views as being non-literal.[3]

Various speculations about the material from which the coats were made are assembled in *Genesis Rabbah* 20:12[4] and *Tanḥuma* (Buber *Tanhuma*).[5] Both passages are of an exegetical nature, and neither is incorporated into a proem or any other identifiable homiletical structure. In the *bavli*, the dispute between Rav and Samuel is situated within a diverse but unstructured series of rabbinic statements and homilies about the virtues of clothing the naked—a precept that is characterized there as a form of imitatio dei.

Notes

1 Liss, 1:213.

2 This is how it was understood by Margoliot (70). In keeping with his general approach, he thereby identifies the author of the view as Rav.

3 The tone was set, predictably, by Rashi, who explained that neither view refers to actual skins but rather to either wool or flax (linen). This approach is consistent with the *Onqelos*, *Pseudo-Jonathan*, and *Neofiti targumim*, all of which render "skins" as למשך בשרהן ("for the skin of their flesh"). See Grossfeld, *Onqelos*, 46–47; Maher, 29; McNamara, 62, n. 21. Midrash Aggadah (Buber, 10) paraphrases the biblical story in the same spirit.

The widespread eschewal of a straightforward literal translation has been explained on various grounds. Thus, Joseph Bekhor Shor (Nevo, 12), the "*Ḥizzequni*" commentary on the Pentateuch for Genesis 3:21 (Chavel, *Ḥizzequni*, 23), as well as Maharsha, note

that the world had not yet existed long enough to flay an animal and prepare the skin—an assumption that sets curious limitations on the Creator's abilities. This phenomenon might be connected with the fact that meat was permitted for consumption only after the Flood. Rashi's associations with flax and wool are evidently based on Genesis Rabbah 20:12 (pp. 196–97): "Says Rabbi Johanan: Like these fine linen garments that come from Beth Shean ... R' Samuel bar Naḥman: They were from the fleece of camels and the fleece of hares; '*coats of skins*' is written—that they come from the skin." Most commentators have understood Rabbi Johanan as stating that the garments were not skins at all. However, Krauss, who was uncomfortable with positing such a blatant disregard for the plain sense of the verse, has argued cogently that Rabbi Johanan was merely comparing the material with linen and might well have been referring to fine leather—as indeed is connoted by the form כבלי rather than simply כלי (Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:136, 529–30, nn. 78–81; Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 1:1:33–35]. At any rate, if these rabbinic sources refer to linen garments, then they probably arrived at that interpretation by emphasizing the word בתנת, which normally designates flax in rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic (Krauss, *Talmudische*, 138–40, 536 n. 118; Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 56, n. 4).

4 Pp. 196–97. The opinions are discussed in detail by Theodor, in his notes, as well as by Krauss, ibid., and in the designated entries in his *Lehnwörter*.

5 Buber, *Tanhuma*, Bereshit 24, pp. 17–18.

17 : *To Do His Business*

b. Soṭah 36b:

Says Rav Ḥana bar Bizna:[1] Says R' Simeon the Pious:

For Joseph, who sanctified the name of Heaven in secret, they added one letter from the name of the Holy One.

Judah, who sanctified the name of Heaven in public, was called entirely by the name of the Holy One.

What is [the reference to] Joseph?—As it is written "*And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business*" (Genesis 39:11).

Says Rabbi Johanan: Both of them intended to commit a transgression.

"*Joseph went into the house to do his business.*"

Rav and Samuel—

One says:[2] His business, literally.

And one says: He went in to satisfy his needs.

Is it possible that there was no person in the large house of this wicked man?

—It was taught in the School of Rabbi Ishmael:[3] That same day was their holy day, and they had all gone to their idolatrous rites. And she said to everyone: I am ill ...

At that moment the image of his father appeared to him[4] in the window and said: Joseph, Joseph! Your brothers are destined to be inscribed on the stones of the breastplate, and you will be among them. Is it your wish that your name will be erased from among them, and that you will be called "*he that keepeth company with harlots*"; as it is written (Proverbs 29:3) "*he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance*"?

Immediately: "*But his bow abode in strength*" (Genesis 49:24).

Rabbi Johanan says: This teaches that his bow returned to its natural condition: "*and the arms of his hands were made strong*" (Genesis 49:24).

> He thrust ten fingers into the ground and his seed went out from between his fingernails.
>
> "*By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*"—who caused his name to be inscribed upon the stones of the breastplate.

Taken in isolation, without comparing it with any related traditions, either in the local passage or elsewhere, the dispute between Rav and Samuel appears to focus on the exegetical question of whether "*to do his business*" should be understood literally[5] or as a circumlocution. The former opinion, which favours the literal reading apparently, presupposes the existence of a contrary, non-literal, interpretation to which it is responding. The second opinion was explained by Rashi as referring to sexual intentions. Understood that way, it portrays Joseph as beginning the episode with sinful designs and then, at the last minute, submitting to the dictates of honour and morality. This reading of the story makes for a more powerful dramatic effect, although it is not clear if a conceptual or homiletic point is being made. At the very least, Joseph's behaviour is meant to set a standard for other men who find themselves confronted by overwhelming temptation.

Rashi's interpretation would make the view consistent with the numerous rabbinic dicta according to which Joseph and his mistress both had sinful intentions.[6] If that is so, then the point of the comment becomes even more obscure. At any rate, it presents a contrast to the previous explanation, which demonstrates how industrious and diligent Joseph was in going in to work outside of normal hours.[7]

Ultimately, the original significance of both interpretations can be derived only by referring to the additional narrative traditions cited in the Talmud or to parallel passages such as *Genesis Rabbah* 87:7:[8]

> R' Judah says: It was the day for worshipping[9] the Nile and everybody had gone to observe it.[10] And he came home to work on his master's accounts.
>
> R' Nehemiah says: It was a day of the theatre, and everybody had gone to see it. And he came home to work on his master's accounts.[11]
>
> R' Samuel bar Naḥman says: "*to do his business*"—really. But instead: "*And there was no man*"—He checked, but he did not find himself a "*man*." For R' Samuel bar Naḥman said: The bow became taut and then was released. This is what is written (Genesis 49:24) "*But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*."[12]

The phraseology of Samuel bar Naḥman in *Genesis Rabbah* is virtually identical to the second opinion in *b. Soṭah*, although its significance is the opposite: In *b. Soṭah*, *mamash* designates the literal reading, whereas in *Genesis Rabbah*, its

cognate *vadai* alludes to a sexual euphemism.[13] The interpretations of Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah both implicitly praise the righteous Joseph for abandoning the idolatry or immoral acts in which everyone else was indulging and choosing instead to serve his master faithfully. From this passage, we may also plausibly deduce that the sexual reading of "*to do his business*" in *b. Soṭah* 36b was based on the subsequent phrase "*and there was no man*," which was read as a reference to sexual dysfunction (as in *Genesis Rabbah*). This crucial exegetical link was not spelled out in the Babylonian pericope.

The main theme is formulated also in a *petiḥta*-like unit in *Midrash on Samuel* 5:16:[14]

> "*He will keep the feet of his saints*" (1 Samuel 2:9)—This is Joseph.
>
> "*And the wicked shall be silent in darkness*"—This is the wife of Potiphar.
>
> "*For by strength shall no man prevail*"—As we have learned in the Mishnah [Avot 4:1]: Who is mighty?—One who overcomes his desire.
>
> "*But his bow abode in strength*"—Says Rabbi Samuel bar Naḥman: The bow became taut and then was released. This is what is written: "*But his bow abode in strength*."
>
> Says Rabbi Isaac: His seed was scattered and emerged through his fingernails.
>
> "*By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*"—R' Huna in the name of R' Mattanah: He beheld the image of his father, and his blood went cold.
>
> R' Menaḥama in the name of R' Abin: He beheld the image of his father, and his blood went cold.

The several verses from the Prophets and Hagiographa that appear in various traditions indicate that these narrative traditions had their origins in homiletical proems, although the atomistic state of the quotations makes it impossible to reconstruct complete literary units.[15] Nor can we easily identify the Torah lections to which these proems would have been attached, since neither Genesis 39:11 nor 49:24 is known to have introduced sections in the Torah-reading cycles.[16] The material could have been part of a homily on the theme of temptation and chastity, introducing the triennial lection of Numbers 5:11, which commences the laws of the suspected adulteress.

Rav's and Samuel's laconic dispute in *b. Soṭah* has isolated the exegetical elements that create the scriptural links to the opinions of Rabbi Johanan and the school of Rabbi Ishmael in the Babylonian Talmud or of Rabbis Judah, Nehemiah, and Samuel bar Naḥman in *Genesis Rabbah*. However, the Talmud's formulation does not of itself indicate the paths through which their exegetical readings were crafted into religious lessons and literary sermons. In fact, by promoting the impression that midrashic interpretation is exclusively (or even primarily) a matter of textual exegesis, the formulators of this passage have seriously misrepresented the character of homiletical creativity.

Notes

1 A third-generation Babylonian *amora* who specialized in *aggadah*; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 288; *Bacher*, 77–78.

2 This is probably the correct reading of this passage, although several variations are attested. See ed. Liss, 2:133–34, n. 75; Kasher, 7:1497–98, n. 95.

3 See Epstein, 521–44. Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 39–43.

4 Cf. Joseph Heinemann, *Aggadah*, 124–25.

5 Margoliot (51–52, 72) links the style of this passage with that of *b.* ʿ*Eruvin* 53a. Additionally, he cites an impressive number of attributed exegetical disputes in the Talmud and Midrash (*b. Shabbat* 151a; *b. Pesaḥim* 16a; *b. Gittin* 52b; *b. Soṭah* 46b; *b. Bava Qamma* 52b, 61a; *b. Bava Batra* 123a; *b. Sanhedrin* 91b; *b. Horayot* 12b [however, cf. Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. ת]; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:19:4) between Rav and Samuel in which the former explains the term in question by using the word *mamash*. All of this is, of course, consistent with Margoliot's general claim that Rav was an advocate of literal exegesis.

6 Looked at in isolation from the Palestinian midrashic traditions, "satisfying his needs" might have been grasped in its more common sense as referring to a call of nature. See Melamed, 141.

7 For instance, Rabbi Johanan, *b. Soṭah*. Levinson notes that Josephus's retelling of this episode focuses on Joseph's fidelity to his master as the chief quality motivating him in his virtue (269–301). Levinson provides extensive references to previous studies, in particular Kugel.

8 See p. 1071–72. See also *Tanḥuma*, *Vayyeshev*, 9.

9 See Albeck's Mishnah commentary.

10 This detail figures also in the *b. Soṭah* passage, cited as a *baraita* from the school of Rabbi Ishmael.

11 Note Levinson's astute analysis of the cultural implications that underlie these variations (274–78) as well as textual elements (e.g., the redundant expression "*on this day*" and the unlikely emptiness of the courtier's house) that might have stimulated them. Levinson traces various motifs to pre-Rabbinic traditions (e.g., the *Testament of Joseph*) and the stock plots of Greek romantic novels or mimes. Moreover, he notes that the talmudic sages transformed the erotic plots of the earlier prototypes into statements about cultural and religious temptations.

12 This verse is from Jacob's blessing of Joseph. Cf. *y. Horayot* 2:6 (46d).

13 See Sokoloff, 169.

14 Ed. Buber, p. 63.

15 Levinson (299 n. 34) summarizes the "complicated process of redaction" that was undergone by the tradition, noting the major differences between the *Genesis Rabbah* and *y. Horayot* passages, and the further reworking and reordering in the Babylonian version. He treats the respective texts as integrated presentations, not as collections of individual sayings by assorted rabbis.

16 Joel, 130.

18 : *Orpah and Harafah*

b. Soṭah 42a:[1]

It is written "*Harafah*" (2 Samuel 21:16);[2] and it is written "*Orpah*."

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Harafah was her name. And why was her name called Orpah?—Because everybody would enter her from her rear [*'orefin*].

And one says: Her name was Orpah. And why was her name called Harafah?—Because everyone would thresh her like groats [*harifot*].[3]

And thus does it say (2 Samuel 17:19): "*And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn* [*harifot*][4] *thereon*."

Or if you wish, say from here (Proverbs 27:22): "*Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat* [*harifot*] *with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him*."

Both of these name-etymologies presuppose the identification of "Harafah" as Goliath's mother, and as Orpah, the sister-in-law of Ruth. The homiletical theme implicit in this interpretation is illuminated in a discourse that appears in several midrashic contexts, including the current page of *b. Soṭah*:

Rava expounded: As a reward for the four tears that Orpah shed[5] for her mother-in-law, she merited that four mighty warriors should issue from her, as it says (Ruth 1:9): "*and they lifted up their voice, and wept*."

Although the Talmud's name-etymologies do not appear elsewhere, the general theme is developed in more elaborate detail in several Palestinian sources,[6] such as *Ruth Rabbah* 2:20:[7]

Rabbi Berakhiah in the name of Rabbi Isaac: Orpah walked forty paces with her mother-in-law, and her son [i.e., the decree of his death] was suspended for forty days, as it says (1 Samuel 17:16): "*And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days*."

> Rabbi Judan in the name of Rabbi Isaac: Orpah walked four miles with her mother-in-law,[8] and four mighty warriors issued from her, as it says "*These four were born to the giant*" (2 Samuel 21:22).[9]

The point made by these traditions is a simple one: God, in his compassion, rewards even the smallest acts of virtue. The modest acts of kindness and consideration that Orpah performed for Naomi were reciprocated by allowing her (as Harafah) to be the mother of four illustrious soldiers. The point remains a valid one even if the midrash does not embellish Orpah's personality beyond the details provided by the biblical narrative. She is portrayed there in a neutral manner, though of an inferior moral standing to Ruth, and yet her modest deeds of kindness are esteemed and rewarded by the Almighty.

The additional details of her depraved sexual life, which form the basis of both Rav's and Samuel's interpretations,[10] set God's fairness in more extreme relief: So great is his righteousness that even a creature as debased as Ofrah-Harafah, whose entire existence was marked by immorality and licentiousness, is recompensed for her few expressions of morality. The same idea, with a different exegetical rationale, is found in the Palestinian midrashic traditions:[11]

> Says Rabbi Isaac: Throughout the night that she separated from her mother-in-law,[12] there mixed within her the foreskins of one hundred men.[13] This is what is written (1 Samuel 17:23) "*And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies* [ממערכות] *of the Philistines.*"
>
> It is actually written ממערות—that is, from a hundred foreign foreskins that penetrated [*nit'aru*] her all night.[14]
>
> Rabbi Tanḥuma says: A dog was also one of them, as it is written (17:43) "*And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog.*"

Although it is possible that the exaggerated depictions of Orpah's immorality are intended to underscore God's evenhanded treatment of the wicked,[15] it is at least as likely that they originated in the widespread rabbinic tendency to portray all gentiles (that is, heathens) as wicked.[16] These embellishments also suit the needs of dramatically preaching the Goliath story before the common folk by filling the audience with scorn and loathing for the depraved villain. Such extreme burlesques are standard fare in the homiletical repertoire and must have provided immense emotional satisfaction to Jews whose day-to-day existence was marked by oppression at the hands of latter-day successors to those biblical scoundrels.[17]

The Babylonian dispute between Rav and Samuel presupposes familiarity with the other traditions about Orpah and Goliath.[18] Whereas those other sources, whether in their Babylonian or Palestinian versions, use expansions to

the biblical narrative in order to teach lessons about God's treatment of the unrighteous, Rav and Samuel confine themselves to the bare mechanics of the midrashic name-etymology.[19]

Notes

1 Ed. Liss, 2:219–20.

2 See also 1 Chronicles 20:6, 8. Most English versions translate the word as "*the giant*." Smith, (378) treats it as a proper name, "apparently an eponym." He writes that "The text is corrupt. It gave originally the name of a Philistine who was one of the Rephaites. The name is now lost, and even the description given of him is now unintelligible" (378). On the other hand, McCarter translates "one of the votaries of Rapha" (447–50); see his extensive survey of the diverse interpretations that have been proposed for this expression.

3 Concerning the phonetic basis of this interpretation, see Isaac Heinemann, 112–13. Below in the passage we find: "'*named Goliath, of Gath*' (2 Samuel 17:4)—Rav Joseph teaches: Because everybody would tread his mother like a wine-press (*gat*)."

4 See McCarter's discussion. As he notes, the two verses cited in the Talmud are the only instances of this word in the Bible. See also Smith 354. The word *harafah* as a designation for groats does not appear in rabbinic Hebrew; see Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:93–97; Krauss, *Kadmoniyot*, 2:1:160–62.

5 See Rashi for an explanation of the exegesis.

6 See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4:31; 4:85–87; 6:189, nn. 41–42; 6:250, nn. 27–31, 33.

7 A similar formulation appears in *Midrash on Samuel* 20 (ed. Buber, pp. 106–107).

8 In *Midrash on Samuel*: "As a reward for the four tears that Orpah shed for her mother-in-law."

9 See Isaac Heinemann, 66.

10 Rashi notes that they are ascribing to her subhuman, beast-like behaviour.

11 *Ruth Rabbah*, 2:20; *Midrash on Samuel*, 20

12 See Isaac Heinemann, 27.

13 See *y. Yevamot* 4:2 (5c).

14 In his notes to Buber, *Shemuel*, n. 26, Buber cites commentators who explain this as a *notariqon* word play on ממאה ערות.

15 A different use of this motif underlies the *midrash* in Tanḥuma (ed. Buber), *Vayyigash* 8 (1:207–208; trans. Townsend, 1:277–78). In a discourse expounding Judah's confrontation with Joseph in Genesis 44:18 is explained that Judah's offer to be a "surety" for Benjamin (verse 32) was discharged years later when David (from the tribe of Judah) served Saul (a Benjaminite) by slaying Goliath. This leads to an excursus on the theme "When a wicked person performs acts of charity, the Holy One throws it in his face in this world so that he can cause him to perish in the World to Come; however for the righteous, he saves their righteousness for the World to Come." This rule is exemplified by relating how the blaspheming Goliath was allowed to go unpunished for forty days owing to the merits earned by his mother Orpah. In this version, which reflects a much more hostile and polarized attitude towards gentiles, God's ostensible fairness to Orpah is no more than a pretext for denying her a place in the next world. Regarding the various approaches taken by the rabbis with respect to the apportioning of rewards and punishments in this world and the next, see Urbach, *Sages*, 439–44, 513–23; *Genesis Rabbah* 33:11 (p. 299); *Leviticus Rabbah* 27:1 (p. 614); *Pesikta de-rav kahana* 9:1 (ed. Mandelbaum, 146; trans. Braude and Kapstein, 167–68); *Tanḥuma*, *Emor* 5; ed. Buber, 7, p. 3:86 (trans. Townsend, 2:323); etc.

16 Isaac Heinemann, 47–49. Notwithstanding the obvious exaggerations, the descriptions are largely consistent with the rabbis' own perceptions of the sexual habits of their

Roman and Greek contemporaries—perceptions that affect practical halakhic determinations (e.g., regarding the pre-conversion status of proselytes).

17 Cf. Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash* 3:120.

18 See Maharsha.

19 Margoliot (50–51, 72) regards this passage as another instance of a dispute over the hermeneutical status of the book of Chronicles, with Rav preferring to expound the Chronicles names. See my discussion of *b. ʿEruvin* 53a (Nimrod-Amraphel), above.

19 : *Shobach and Shophach*

b. Soṭah 42b:

> "*The children of Ammon came for the victory of Shobach.*"[1]
>
> It is written "*Shobach*" (2 Samuel 10:18); and it is written "*Shophach*" (1 Chronicles 19:16).
>
> Rav and Samuel—[2]
>
> One says: Shophach was his name. And why was his name called Shobach?—Because he was built like a dovecote [*shobakh*].[3]
>
> And one says: His name was Shobach. And why was his name called Shophach?—Because whoever beheld him would be spilled out [*nishpakh*] before him like a bowl.[4]

The citation of this example in the Mishnah as one of Israel's great military exploits might have been expected to inspire numerous midrashic expositions, and yet it has evinced little interest in rabbinic literature. The passage is structured as a pair of conventional name-etymologies, based on the orthographic discrepancies between Samuel and Chronicles.[5] By enhancing the might and fearsomeness of David's foe,[6] both interpretations justify the episode's inclusion in the Mishnah as an illustration of Israel's ability to overcome large armies. However, there is no decisive reason to suppose that the dispute originated in connection with the Mishnah, rather than in the course of studying the Bible.[7]

A more elaborate discourse on this episode is found in *Midrash on Psalms* 3:4.[8] The wording and structure there appear sufficiently dissimilar to indicate that the discourse derives from a source other than our talmudic passage:[9]

> "*Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me*" (Psalm 3:2).
>
> Great [literally: *many*] in stature, great [literally: *many*] in Torah.
>
> "*Shobach*"—Why was his name called Shobach?—Because his stature was like this dovecote.
>
> "*Shophach*"—Why was his name called Shophach? Because he used to shed [*shofekh*] blood…
>
> "Great in Torah"—Doeg and Ahithophel…
>
> Say, indeed: "*How are they increased that trouble me!*"

The *Midrash on Psalms* passage appears to have been excerpted from the beginning of a proem, although its conclusion has not survived, nor does it lend itself to speculative reconstruction. The extant portion attests to a more refined creation than the Talmud's bare exegetical dispute. It explicitly locates the name-etymologies within the context of David's thanksgiving psalm and demonstrates a well-crafted literary symmetry.

Notes

1 A *pisqa* from *m. Soṭah* 8:1, describing the motivational speech delivered by the "priest anointed for war" as he encourages the army.

2 Cf. the reading from the *'Ein ya'aqov* cited by Liss. It probably emanates from a misplaced marginal correction.

3 This image apparently indicates his immense size; see the midrashic sources cited below; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4:93; Krauss, *Talmudische*, 1:46; 2:138; 2:525–26, n. 975.

4 This image is employed frequently in the Talmud to express terror. See, e.g., *b. Shabbat* 62b; *b. Sukkah* 36a; *b. Ḥullin* 45b, 47b.

5 Margoliot sees this passage as yet another of Rav's and Samuel's controversies over the midrashic status of names in the book of Chronicles (50–51, 72). Elsewhere, he argues that the image of "spilling like a bowl" is distinctive of Rav (47).

6 In his commentary, Smith says that the biblical account itself is exaggerated and not quite credible (316). See also Curtis and Madsen, 240–41.

7 See Neusner, ed., 2:202.

8 Ed. Buber, 38; trans. Braude, 1:56.

9 However, the formulation might well have been influenced by our text. At any rate, Buber (n. 66) emphasizes correctly that the interpretation is not identical to it. The *shophach/shobach* etymologies appear also in *Midrash on Samuel* 26:3 (ed. Buber, 126) in an exegetical passage attached to 2 Samuel 7:9 and built around the statement: "David had ten enemies, five in Israel and five among the nations of the world." Midrash on Psalms is probably citing from *Midrash on Samuel* (or from its source). In *Midrash on Samuel*, the *shophach* etymology is worded "because his blood was spilled on the earth."

20 : *Elishah and the Children*

b. Soṭah 46b–47a:

"And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." (2 Kings 2:24)

Rav and Samuel—

One says: A miracle.

And one says: A miracle inside a miracle.[1]

The one who says: A miracle—there had been a wood, but there had not been bears.

The one who says: A miracle within a miracle—There had been neither a wood nor bears.

And let it be that there had been bears but there had not been a wood!

—Because[2] they were frightened.[3]

The aggadic tradition cited here is not attested elsewhere in classical rabbinic literature. It could be a fairly conventional attempt to magnify the divine assistance that was extended to biblical heroes and apply it to a situation that is already miraculous in its character.

The Talmud introduces the story of Elishah and the bears in connection with an extensive *sugya* about the importance of escorting guests and travelers. Other than the fact that it deals with the same biblical episode, there is no indication either that Rav's and Samuel's dispute relates to that theme or that it originated as part of such a discourse.

Notes

1 The expression "a miracle inside a miracle" is used in several places in connection with the Egyptian plague of hail, where fire was contained within the ice. See *Pesikta de-rav kahana* 1:3 (Mandelbaum, 6; Braude and Kapstein, 10); *Song of Songs Rabbah* 3:20 (ed. Dunsky, 97); *Tanḥuma, Va'era* 14. In that instance, the image of one miracle inside another is intended quite literally. In other examples, however, it is used in a more general manner in order to show that the miracle was performed in a way that was more wondrous than was strictly necessary to get the job done—thereby enhancing God's omnipotence.

Thus, in *b. Shabbat* 97a, the idiom is used to describe how Aaron's rod swallowed up those of the Egyptian magicians. Rashi explains that this refers to Exodus 7:12, where "*Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods*"—i.e., the achievement was especially wondrous because it occurred while it was in the form of a rod, not that of a serpent.

In *b. Pesaḥim* 117a–b, the expression appears in a legend (expanding on Daniel 3) about how God agreed to have Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah rescued from the fiery furnace through the agency of Gabriel in his capacity as Prince of Fire, rather than by the Prince of Hail, in order to produce a "miracle within a miracle."

In *b. Ḥullin* 127a, it is used to describe how the residents of Va'ad illegally cross-bred a snake and a toad, resulting in a dangerous *'arod*. According to Rashi, this was perceived as a double miracle because (1) the two parents were biologically incompatible; and (2) the offspring bore no resemblance to either parent.

In *Tanḥuma Beshallaḥ* 24, in a *yelammedenu* proem for Exodus 15:1, this expression is used to characterize the sweetening of the waters of Marah: "He puts something injurious inside something that is injurious in order to produce a miracle inside a miracle." Note, however, that in the analogous examples adduced in that passage (Isaiah's curing of Hezekiah with a plaster of figs in Isaiah 38:21; Elishah's sweetening of the waters in 2 Kings 2:21—immediately preceding the episode of the bears!) the equivalent expression is simply "in order to produce a miracle."

Out of all these instances, Margoliot (73) singles out the one in *b. Ḥullin* in which the expression is ascribed to Rav; he cites this as evidence that in our current *sugya* as well, Rav was the one who spoke of "a miracle inside a miracle."

2 Cf. Liss, 2:294, nn. 5–6.

3 See Rashi and Maharsha.

21 : *Staff or Goblet*

b. Gittin 68b, *b. Sanhedrin* 20b:

"*And this was my portion of all my labor*" (Ecclesiastes 2:10).

What is "*and this*"?[1]

Rav and Samuel—

One says: His staff.

And one says: His goblet.[2]

In both *b. Gittin* and *b. Sanhedrin*, this dispute is brought in connection with the *aggadah* about how Solomon was deposed by Ashmedai and forced to become a beggar;[3] this is probably the correct narrative context, although it is possible to imagine some alternative possibilities. Both interpretations refer to essential articles that would be carried around by the poorest mendicant.[4] Beyond that observation, it is impossible to identify a conceptual, exegetical, or theological principle underlying the dispute.[5]

Notes

1 The plain sense of the biblical expression is that this refers back to the preceding words: "*I withheld not my heart from any joy*." See, e.g., Seow, 151. The *midrash* reads it atomistically, and in accordance with the widespread premise that the indicative pronoun *zeh* implies literally pointing at an object. See Fox, 278–91.

2 Two readings are attested for this word: קודו (apparently referring to a goblet) and גונדו (or: גודנו, apparently a garment). Both words have been discussed extensively by philologists and lexicographers. See references to Kohut, Krauss, Geiger, and Epstein in my *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:151; Feldblum; Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim* to *b. Sanhedrin* 20b, n. ר. MS Parma 3010 to *b. Sanhedrin* reads "מקדו."

3 The elaborate legend cited in the Talmud and other traditions is clearly a composite of diverse folkloristic and exegetical elements. See the many sources assembled by Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4:165–72; 6:299–302 nn. 80–93 (especially n. 93); Lévi, 58–65.

4 In *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:10 and 9:11, in passages that appear to be based on the Babylonian Talmud, we find some additional variants, notably קשריה (generally understood as "belt") and קניה (a variant for "staff").

5 Textual and lexicographical variants place additional obstacles in the path of this quest.

22 : *King and Commoner*

b. Gittin 68b:

Rav and Samuel—

One says: He was a king and a commoner.

And one says: He was a king and a commoner and a king.

I discussed this passage in detail in my *Babylonian Esther Midrash*.[1] Following is a summary of the main arguments presented there:

The most complete version of the story about Solomon's fall from power is a dictum ascribed to Resh Laqish in *b. Sanhedrin* 20b, which adduces various verses in order to trace the diminishing of his dominion, from ruling "over the upper realms," and concluding:

> In the end he ruled only over his staff, as it says: "*and this was my portion of all my labor*" (Ecclesiastes 2:10)[2]...
>
> Did he return or did he not return?[3]
>
> Rav and Samuel—
>
> One says: He returned, and one says He did not return.
>
> The one who says that he did not return—He was a king and a commoner.
>
> The one who says that he did return—He was a king and a commoner and a king.

The Sanhedrin passage is being utilized by the redactor of the *Gittin* passage.

A similar tradition is brought in the Palestinian midrashic collections *Song of Songs Rabbah* (1:1:10) and *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:1:12:

> "*I Kohelet was king over Israel in Jerusalem*" (Ecclesiastes 1:12)—
>
> He saw three worlds in his days and in his life.
>
> R' Judan[4] and Rabbi Ḥoniah[5]—
>
> R' Judan said: He was a king and a commoner and a king; a wise man and a fool and a wise man; a rich man and a poor man and a rich man.
>
> What is the reason?—"*All things have I seen in the days of my vanity*" (Ecclesiastes 7:15).
>
> A person never relates his distress until the time of his relief, after he has been restored to his wealth.

And R' Ḥoniah said: He was a commoner and a king and a commoner; a fool and a wise man and a fool; a poor man and a rich man and a poor man.

And what is the reason?—"*I Kohelet was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*"

The *b. Gittin* passage was compiled from several discrete traditions about Solomon that developed independently in connection with various biblical verses from Ecclesiastes (notably: 1:12; 2:7; 7:15) and Song of Songs (3:7). Such narrative traditions could have evolved either in connection with the individual verses or as parts of proems introducing the biblical books that were ascribed to Solomon. The sophisticated combining of the different elements—especially those about the dethroning of Solomon and the Ashmedai story—displays signs of late and developed editorial activity.

The Talmud seems justified in identifying the Rav-Samuel disputes in *b. Gittin* and *b. Sanhedrin* as two formulations of the selfsame positions. How these two versions arose is not quite clear.

In spite of its successful joining together of so many traditions pertaining to the rise and fall of King Solomon, the *b. Gittin* passage lacks the literary coherence that was evident in its *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* and *Song of Songs Rabbah* counterparts. The Rav and Samuel unit cannot really be viewed in isolation, since it presupposes other narrative traditions about Solomon's fall from greatness.[6] Even after we have filled in the necessary background and proof texts, the dispute relates only to the narrative, but does not utilize the midrashic details for any rhetorical or homiletical purpose.

Notes

1 Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:149–56.
2 See previous section.
3 That is, to the throne.
4 Presumably the fourth-century Palestinian sage; see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 332.
5 The identity is unclear. It is improbable that the reference would be to the first-generation *amora* R' Ḥoniah of Divrat Ḥawran (see Albeck, *Mavo la-talmudim*, 164–65).
6 Cf. Margoliot, 54–55, 67; and my discussion of *b. Rosh Hashanah* 21b, above.

23 : *Ezekiel's Cry*

b. Ḳiddushin 72b:

"And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (Ezekiel 11:13).

Rav and Samuel—

One says:[1] For good.

And one says: For evil.

The one who says For good—Like the case of the Governor[2] of Mesene who was the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar.

He sent to him: From all the captives that I have brought to you, you have not sent me any to stand before us.

He wanted to send him some from Israel.

Pelatiah the son of Benaiah said to him: We who are of importance ought to stand before you here,[3] and let the slaves go there.

And the prophet said:[4] Shall one who did good in Israel die in the middle of his days!

The one who says For evil—As it is written (Ezekiel 11:1) "*and brought me unto the east gate of the Lord's house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.*" And it is written (8:16) "*and he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men,*[5] *with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.*"

From the fact that it says "*and their faces towards the east*" can I not know that their backs are "*towards the temple of the Lord*"?![6] What does it teach us by saying "*with their backs toward the temple of the Lord*"?—This teaches that they uncovered themselves and defecated

upwards.[7] And the prophet says:[8] Shall the one who has done this evil in Israel die on his bed!?

You may designate that Samuel was the one who said For evil, since Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba says in the name of Samuel: Moshekheni is like the Captivity with respect to pedigrees. They did not have qualms about Mesene neither on account of slavery nor on account of *mamzerut*. Rather, the priests who were there were not scrupulous regarding divorcées.

I can still tell you that it was Samuel who said For good. And Samuel follows his own view, since he says: One who declares his slave ownerless, the slave goes free and does not require a bill of manumission, since it says (Exodus 12:44) "*But every man's slave that is bought for money*."

"*Every man's slave*" and not "every woman's slave"?!—Rather, a slave whose master exercises control over him is called a "*slave*," but a slave whose master does not exercise control over him is not called a "*slave*."

Ezekiel 11:1–13 tells of twenty-five leading citizens of Jerusalem, including Jaaziniah and Pelatiah, who are disparaged for obscure offenses.[9] The prophet is instructed to condemn them, foretelling how they will be removed from Jerusalem and given over to an enemy in whose hands they will fall by the sword. Pelatiah son of Benaiah fell dead even as Ezekiel was speaking,[10] prompting the outcry that is the topic of this pericope. The Bible's account, taken on its own terms, offers no indication that Pelatiah was anything other than an unredeemed villain. Precisely for this reason, Ezekiel's apparent distress at his death can be viewed as puzzling.[11]

The original context of Rav's and Samuel's dispute[12] is not clear. The favourable assessment of Pelatiah is likely to have arisen in connection with the book of Lamentations, although it might plausibly have evolved out of the *sugya* in *b. Ḳiddushin* that examines the halakhic pedigrees of various regions in Babylonia. By the same token, the unfavorable opinion might have been formulated with reference to *m. Sukkah* 5:4, which touches on the phenomenon of bowing towards the east with one's back to the Sanctuary.[13]

A similar tradition, about a Pelatiah son of Joiada (!), who inspired his fellow Levites not to sing before Nebuchadnezzar, is included in the *Second Targum of Esther* (1:2) as part of a retelling of Jewish history after the destruction of the first Temple. The targumic passage seems to be based on Psalm 137, and might be rooted in a lost proem to Lamentations.[14]

Notes

1 MS Vatican 111 reads "Rav says"; however, since the second opinion is introduced as "and one says," this is certainly a scribal error.

2 On this word (אסתנדרא) see Kohut, 1:206; Funk, 425–36, 433, n. 5; Obermeyer, 104; Geiger's comments in Kohut, 52.

3 The word "here" is missing from most witnesses.

4 Perhaps this should be read as "And he cried." The Hebrew ונבי׳א and ונקא are graphically difficult to distinguish.

5 Most commentators agree with the Talmud's assumption that the twenty-five men described in Ezekiel 11 are the same group that appeared in 8:16. See Greenberg, 185 (and 171–73). Greenberg points out that the number twenty-five appears with unusual frequency in Ezekiel. However, cf. Cooke, 121, who categorically rejects this identification. Some scholars prefer a tradition that reads "twenty" as the decisive number in 8:16. Maharsha delineates some of the similarities between the two passages.

6 This is the reading in most witnesses. The printed editions have "towards the west."

7 This is an ultimate expression of arrogant blasphemy towards Heaven. MSS Munich 95 and Vatican 111 read: "downwards," a euphemistic usage.

8 Or: "And he cried"? See above.

9 On the historical and exegetical difficulties of this passage see Cooke, 122–24; Greenberg, 185–89. Most of the commentators understand that the twenty-five were being condemned for their "business as usual" overconfidence as expressed in their refusal to take seriously Ezekiel's threats of Jerusalem's imminent destruction. Cooke, however, concedes that to fit this understanding into the Hebrew text "requires a good deal to be supplied in thought!" Fisch (57) adds that the culprits were planning a revolt against Babylonian authority. Cf. Ehrlich, 2:303.

10 The chapter is introduced as a vision that Ezekiel experienced while in captivity in Babylonia, and the commentators disagree about how literally that presentation should be taken. In particular, this question affects the one of whether Pelatiah's death is being presented as part of the vision or as an objective fact. It gives rise to some strange speculations about *what* is the prophet's role in this process and whether he is being credited with supernatural powers. See the discussions in Cooke, 123–24; Fisch, 59; Greenberg, 188– 89.

11 See, e.g., Greenberg, 189: "We cannot say why his death was so portentous. Was there something particularly ominous in the sudden death of one whose name meant 'Yah delivers [a remnant], son of Yah builds up'?" Several commentators suggest that Ezekiel was shocked by the speed with which his threat was carried out.

12 R' Jacob Reischer proposes that the two opinions need not be viewed as mutually contradictory. See his explanation in the *'Iyyun ya'aqov* commentary to the *'Ein ya'aqov*.

13 On the controversies surrounding the proper directions for prayer, see Urbach, *Sages*, 57–63 and the literature designated in his notes.

14 Ginzberg, *Legends* 6:383–84, n. 8; Grossfeld, 120–23.

24 : *Mahlon and Chilion*

b. Bava Batra 91b:

It is written "*Mahlon and Chilion*" (Ruth 1:2).

And it is written: "*Joash, and Saraph*" (1 Chronicles 4:22).[1]

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Mahlon and Chilion were their names. And why were their names called Joash and Saraph?[2]—Joash, because they despaired [*nitya'ashu*] of redemption; Saraph, because they were deserving of burning before the Omnipresent.

And one says: Joash and Saraph were their names. And why were their names called Mahlon and Chilion?—Mahlon, because they profaned [*ḥullin*] their bodies;[3] and Chilion, because they were deserving of extinction [*killayon*].[4]

It was taught [in a *baraita*][5] in accordance with the one who says Mahlon and Chilion were their names. For it was taught: "*And Jokim, and the men of Chozeba, and Joash, and Saraph, who had the dominion in Moab, and Jashubilehem. And these are ancient things.*"

"*And Jokin*"—This is Joshua who upheld [*heqim*][6] the oath for the people of Gibeon.

"*And the men of Chozeba*"—These are the men of Gibeon who deceived Joshua.

"*And Joash, and Saraph*"—These are Mahlon and Chilion. And why were their names called Joash and Saraph?—Joash, because they despaired [*nitya'ashu*] of redemption; Saraph, because they deserved to be burned.[7]

"*Who had the dominion* [*ba'alu*] *in Moab*"—That they married Moabite women.

"*And Jashubilehem*"—This is Ruth the Moabite, who returned [*shavah*][8] and clung to Bethlehem of Judah.[9]

"*And these are ancient things*"—Those things were said by the Ancient of Days.[10]

Notwithstanding their formal dispute, in the guise of very standard name-etymologies, the interpretations of both Rav and Samuel are substantially identical in content. They conform to a well-established homiletical tradition that portrayed Mahlon and Chilion as archetypes of faithless Jews who abandon their homeland in times of economic hardship. Of course, this portrayal was more accurate in its diagnosis of contemporary social problems[11] than in its exegesis of Ruth.[12]

The midrashic reading of 2 Chronicles 4, and the identifying of its names with those of better-known biblical figures, represent a tradition going back to tannaitic times.[13]

An instructive parallel appears in *Ruth Rabbah* 2:1:[14]

> "*And the name of the man was Elimelech*" (Ruth 1:2).
>
> Says R' Simon in the name of R' Joshua ben Levi and R' Ḥama the father of R' Hosha'yah ... : The Book of Chronicles was allowed only to be expounded."

At this point, the various rabbis cited in the midrash proceed to expound all the names in 1 Chronicles 4:22 as referring to the episode of Rahab the harlot and Joshua's spies, to King David, to Moses, and, finally, to the beginning of the book of Ruth:

> Another explanation: "*And Jokim*"—This is Elimelech.
>
> "*And the men of Chozeba*"—Because he made the words of the Holy One as if they were lies [*kezabim*].
>
> Another explanation: "*And the men of Chozeba*"—These are his sons who were deceivers.
>
> "*And Joash*"—Because they despaired of life.
>
> Another explanation: "*And Joash*"—Because they despaired of the Land of Israel.
>
> "*And Saraph*"—Because they burned their sons and their daughters to idols.
>
> Another explanation: "*And Saraph*"—Because they burned the Torah.
>
> R' Menaḥama and R' Sodar in the name of R' Aḥa say: And did they burn it?—Rather, this comes to teach you that whoever abolishes one thing from the Torah, it is as if he burned it.
>
> "*Who had the dominion in Moab*"—Because they married Moabite wives.
>
> Another explanation: "*Who had the dominion in Moab*"—Because they abandoned the Land of Israel and went and settled in the fields of Moab.
>
> "*And Jashubilehem*"—This is Naomi who returned to Bethlehem.
>
> "*And these are ancient things*"—Each one was already explained by itself.

As we learn from this passage,[15] 1 Chronicles 4:22–23 was used as a proem text for several scriptural lections, including the book of Ruth.[16] Characteristic of the genre of Chronicles-based discourses was the way in which they revolved

around name-etymologies that allowed obscure genealogies to be identified with figures in other books in the Bible. The Babylonian Talmud's dispute between Rav and Samuel over name-etymologies was obviously extracted from a more extensive homily on Ruth. As in most instances of midrashic name-etymologies, this example strikes us as a playful and conventional rhetorical device, and it is difficult to imagine either scholar going to the trouble to defend his interpretation or challenge the opposing one—notwithstanding the Talmud's insistence on supporting one view with a proof text.

Like the *baraita* cited by the Talmud, the *Ruth Rabbah* passage reflects the view that Mahlon and Chilion were the real names, while Joash and Saraph were epithets.

Notes

1 Cf. Curtis and Madsen, 104: "The meaning, date, and connection of these genealogical notices are very if not entirely obscure. They look almost like a gathering of genealogical pebbles rolled together from various quarters, consisting of older and younger parts that are kept together only by the common connection with the tribe of Judah." A similar assessment is offered in Braun, 57; Braun notes also that "The names ... Beth-ashbea, Jokim, Cozeba, Saraph and Netaim ... are all unique to this passage in biblical literature" (60).

2 See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. נ.

3 Several texts read "themselves." See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, nn. ס ע.

4 Some witnesses add "before the Omnipresent" [לפני המקום]; see Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. פ.

5 MS Hamburg: "It stands to reason" (Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. פ).

6 Or: *qiyyem* (MS Hamburg; Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. ח).

7 At this point, the addition "before the Omnipresent" is found in several witnesses (cf. above).

8 Some texts read "who came" (*shebba'at* [*ah*]).

9 Myers 24, 26, actually emends the biblical text in a similar manner.

10 *'Ein ya'aqov* adds: "As it is written (Psalms 89:21) '*I have found* [מצאתי] *David my servant*'; and it is written (Genesis 19:15) '*and thy two daughters, which are here* [הנמצאות]'." This passage, which was copied into later printings of *b. Bava Batra*, is based on *b. Yevamot* 77a.

11 Daniel Sperber, *Roman Palestine*, 102–18.

12 See Lerner, 1:105–106.

13 *Sifré* on Numbers 78 (Horovitz, 73–74). On this phenomenon, see my *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 2:22–34.

14 Lerner, 2:43–56. The extensive parallel that was included in Horovitz's edition of *Sifré Zuṭa* (263–65), which was taken from *Midrash ha-gadol*, is to all appearances a slightly embellished version of the *Sifré* (with additions from *Ruth Rabbah* and other sources), not from *Sifré Zuṭa* at *all*; it is not found in the *Yalquṭ shim'oni*. This fact was determined correctly in Epstein, *Prolegomena*, 743. Nor were those pages used by Lieberman, *Sifré Zuṭa*. Cf. Rabbinowitz, *Midrash*, 146 l. 8; Kasher, *Tora*, 38:106–11.

15 And, to some extent, from the *baraita* cited in the talmudic discussion.

16 Cf. Margoliot 68 and previous instances of name-expositions from Chronicles.

25 : *His Eldest Son*

b. Sanhedrin 39b:

> "*Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall*" (2 Kings 3:27).
>
> Rav and Samuel—
>
> One says: For the sake of Heaven.
>
> And one says: For the sake of idolatry.
>
> It is well for the one who says For the sake of Heaven—this is what is written: "*And there was great indignation against Israel*."
>
> However, for the one who says For the sake of idolatry—for what reason "*and there was great indignation against Israel*"?
>
> —Like the saying of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi; for Joshua ben Levi threw together [contradictory sources]:
>
> "*Neither have done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you*" (Ezekiel 5:7); and it is written (11:12) "*but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you.*"[1]
>
> —As the most respectable of them you have not acted, but like the most perverse of them you have acted.[2]

The question of the Moabite king's motives is dealt with in *Pesikta de-rav kahana* 2:5, which is part of a composite proem to Exodus 30:12.[3] The passage is built around Proverbs 14:34 "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*," which is interpreted in various ways as indicating contrasts between Israel and the nations of the world. In this connection we read the following:

> R' Neḥuniah ben Haqqanah says: "*Righteousness exalteth a nation*"—these are Israel. "*But sin is a reproach to any people*"—The deeds of kindness [*ḥasadim*] that the nations of the world perform are sins for Israel.
>
> From whom do you learn this?—From Mesha.

This *midrash* proceeds to retell the story of the Moabite monarch's sacrifice of his firstborn heir. That came as a response to learning from his astrologers that Israel were invincible, because they benefited from the merits of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac.

He said to them: If miracles are performed for one who did not actually sacrifice him, if he had sacrificed him all the more so! And now, that man[4] has an only son who is ordained to rule in his place. He shall go and sacrifice him so that miracles might be performed for him.

This is what is written "*Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall* [החמה]." It is written החמה:[5] implying that he worships the sun.

And what is written there? "*And there was great indignation against Israel*." Said the Holy One to Israel: My children, the nations of the world, who do not recognize my power, rebel against me. But you, who do recognize my power, rebel against me!

In the larger framework of the *Pesikta de-rav kahana* passage, this story is one of several interpretations to the Proverbs verse that are not brought to a formal conclusion; they do not produce discourses that can serve as introductions to lections.[6] Only the last-cited explanation of the verse, employing a completely different mode of interpretation, culminates with the quotation from Exodus 30:12. It would therefore be misleading to claim that in the Palestinian *midrash*, the story of Mesha's sacrifice has been incorporated into a literary homily. A discourse on this topic could be easily incorporated, for instance, into a sermon about the "binding of Isaac" story (Genesis 22) that constituted a separate reading in the Palestinian cycle[7] and is the designated lection for the second day of Rosh Hashanah according to the Babylonian rite.[8]

On the other hand, the talmudic dispute between Rav and Samuel restricts itself to a particular question in the interpretation of the narrative and has no broader literary context at all.[9]

It is interesting to observe that the view that this Moabite king acted "for the sake of Heaven" does not have any real parallels in Palestinian midrashic traditions, all of which manipulate the biblical narrative so as to give a negative slant to the king's sacrifice.[10]

Notes

1 MSS Parma 3010 and London 406 add: "How is this so?" [הא כיצד].
2 See Rashi, Maharsha.
3 Mandelbaum, 20–25; Braude and Kapstein, 26–29. An adaptation of the same homily is found in *Tanḥuma Ki Tissa*, 5.
4 This is a euphemistic circumlocution for first-person.
5 The *lene* spelling more naturally fits the vocalization of "the sun."
6 I am referring here not only to Exodus 30:12 but also to any other lection that it might have introduced. Composite *petiḥtas* are often collections of originally independent oral proems; these were subsequently assembled by the editors of the written compendia in which they are now found.
7 See Mann, 1:173–81.

8 *b. Megillah* 31a.
9 Margoliot, finds a consistent refusal (representing the belief of Rav, in his view) to admit that a heathen could have performed a praiseworthy or pious deed (59, 79).
10 As far as I am aware, none of the rabbinic sources sees anything inherently abhorrent in the phenomenon of human sacrifice. The comparison with the binding of Isaac makes such a position close to impossible.

26 : *Achan and Zimri*

b. Sanhedrin 44b:

Mishnah:[1] Whence do we know that his confession brought him atonement? Because it says (Joshua 7:25) "*And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day*"—*This day* are you troubled, but you are not troubled in the world to come.

And it is written (1 Chronicles 2:6): "*And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and Heman, and Calcol, and Dara: five of them in all.*"

What is "*five of them in all*"?

—Rabbi Johanan says:[2] They are five in all for the world to come.[3]

It is written "*Zimri*" and it is written "*Achan.*"[4]

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Achan is his name. And why was his name called Zimri?—Because he did an act of Zimri.[5]

And one says: Zimri is his name. And why was his name called Achan?—Because he brought upon them [*'ikken*][6] the sins of Israel.[7]

The dispute between Rav and Samuel[8] recalls the following proem in Leviticus Rabbah 9:1:[9]

"*Whoso offereth thanksgiving glorifieth me*" (Psalm 50:23).

R' Huna in the name of R' Aḥa says: "Whoso offereth a sin-offering," "Whoso offereth a guilt-offering" is not written here, but rather "*Whoso offereth thanksgiving glorifieth me.*"

R' Judan says in the name of R' Abba bar Kahana: "יכבדני" is not written here, but rather "יכבדנני." He glorifieth me in this world and he glorifieth me in the world to come.

Another explanation: יכבדנני glorification after glorification.

Another explanation: "*Glorifieth me*"—This is Achan who offered up his inclination like a thanksgiving offering. This is what is written (Joshua 7:19): "*My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession* [*todah*] *unto him.*"

"*And he ordereth his way aright*" (Psalm, 50:23)—That he showed a way for the penitent.

This is what is written: "*And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and Heman, and Calcol, and Dara: five of them in all.*"

"*Zimri*"—R' Joshua ben Levi says: That he did the deed of Zimri.

R' Ishmael bar Naḥman says: That Israel were pruned [*nizdameru*] on his account.

"*Ethan*"—This is our father Abraham, even as you say (Psalm 89:1) "*Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.*"

"*Heman*"—This is Moses "*who is faithful in all mine house*" (Numbers 12:7).

"*And Calcol*"—This is Joseph.

"*And Dara: five of them in all*"—And do we not know that they are five in all?!—Rather, this teaches that even Achan was with them for the world to come.[10]

"*Will I shew the salvation of God*" (Psalm 50:23)—"*This day*" are you troubled, but you are not troubled in the world to come.[11]

This passage forms part of a composite proem. It consists of several expositions of Psalm 50:23, the last of which[12] develops the theme of how "a thanksgiving offering which does not come on account of a sin" is the most desirable form of offering, and therefore culminates with Leviticus 7:12 "*If he offer it for a thanksgiving.*"

It is not clear exactly how our discourse on Achan originally functioned.[13] Margulies[14] states simply that it was a homily on Joshua 7:25, although it is unlikely that that verse would have merited homilies—especially proems.[15] Maybe it originated in connection with Leviticus 7:12, but this is purely speculative.[16] A more plausible hypothesis would be that the homily introduced Hosea 14:2, ("*O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God*"), the Prophetic reading for the Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.[17]

Name-etymologies serve an ornamental function for these homiletical expositions. The exegetical identification between Zimri and Achan was not learned from them. Nor was the spiritual lesson about the effectiveness of confession.

Notes

1 The printed editions of the Talmud cite this as a *baraita* introduced by the formula "Our rabbis taught." See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. ק.

2 See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduke soferim*, n. ש.

3 This *midrash* appears already in *t. Sanhedrin* 9:5 (Zuckermandel, 429).

4 Identification of the names in these two verses is far from obvious, but is accepted in a general way by most modern commentators. The Septuagint reads Zambr(e)i in place of both Zimri and Zabdi in the respective passages, as the father of Achan and Achar (1 Chronicles 2:7)—who are also understood to be one and the same. See Curtis and Masden, 84, 218; Myers, 12, 13.

5 The precise point of the comparison inspired considerable discussion among the commentators. See Rashi, Margulies to *Leviticus Rabbah* (1:174), etc.

6 The meaning of this word is unclear. The *'Arukh* (Kohut, 6:198) connects it with the noun *'akhan*, a snake, in the sense that it coils or encircles its victims in the same way that

Achan's personal transgression encompassed the entire Israelite nation. Rashi gives a very similar explanation, although he might be alluding to the belief that snakes could bite their own tails and turn themselves into wheels. The essentials of this etymology are accepted also in Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 2:415–16; Krauss derives *'akhan* from the Greek ἔχις, ἐχῖνος. See also Ben-Yehudah, 9:4472.

7 MS Munich reverses the order of the opinions.

8 Rashi in fact observes with justification that Rav and Samuel agree more than they disagree; both accept the most questionable premise of the *midrash*, namely that both verses refer to the same person. See below.

9 Ed. Margulies, 1:173–80. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:176–77 n. 31. Cf. Sabato, 285.

10 A concise arrangement of this material, with some interesting variants, is found in *y. Sanhedrin* 6:3 (23b): "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says: Zimri is Achan who did an act of Zimri. Rabbi Samuel bar Naḥman says: Heman is Achan: "*Indeed* [*omnah*] *I have sinned*" (Joshua 7:20). "*Five of them in all*"—And do I not know that they are five?!—Rather, this teaches that Achan also has a portion in the future world."

11 See also *Avot de-rabbi natan* B:45 [Schechter, *Aboth*, 126]; Kister, 99–100.

12 9:4; p. 180.

13 Margoliot views it (78) as another dispute over the exposition of names from Chronicles, several of which have been dealt with above.

14 Margulies, 175, to l. 2.

15 In *Tanḥuma*, *Vayyeshev* 2, elements from the story are used to illustrate the power of *ḥerem* in connection with a *ḥerem* that Joseph's brothers supposedly made together in order to prevent them from divulging Joseph's real fate. The *Tanḥuma* passage is an exegetical expansion of the narrative and does not show signs of originating in a literary homily.

16 The version of the proem found in *Tanḥuma Ṣav* 7 and in Buber, 9 (p. 3: 17) does not include this segment.

17 See, e.g., *Pesikta de-rav kahana* 24 (ed. Mandelbaum, 2:347–78; trans. Braude and Kapstein, 363–84.

27 : *Ham and Noah*

b. Sanhedrin 70a:

> "*And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him*" (Genesis 9:24).
>
> Rav and Samuel—
>
> One says: He castrated him.
>
> And one says: He sodomized him.
>
> The one who says He castrated him[1]—Since he did his wrongdoing with respect to the fourth,[2] therefore did he curse him with respect to the fourth.
>
> And the one who says He sodomized him—He derives it from an analogy between "*saw*" and "*saw*."
>
> It is written here (verse 22) "*And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father*"; and it is written there (Genesis 34:2) "*Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her*, etc."
>
> It is well for the one who says He castrated him, for this reason he cursed him[3] regarding the fourth. However, for the one who says He sodomized him, what is special about the fourth? Let him curse him explicitly!
>
> —Both this and this occurred.

In *Genesis Rabbah* 36:7,[4] we encounter only the opinion that Ham had castrated his father:[5]

> "*And he said, Cursed be Canaan*, etc." (Genesis 9:25).
>
> Ham sinned and Canaan is cursed! ...
>
> —Says R' Berakhiah: Noah was greatly grieved in the ark because he did not have a young son to serve him. He said: When I go out, I shall sire a young son who will serve me. When Ham did that deed to him, he said: You have prevented me from siring a young son who will serve me; therefore that man shall be a slave to his brothers.
>
> R' Huna in the name of R' Joseph: You prevented me from performing an act that is done in darkness;[6] therefore his descendents will be ugly and charred.

Both R' Berakhiah's and R' Huna's interpretations posit a measure-for-measure correspondence between the punishment and the crime: servitude for depriving Noah of a potential servant; darkness for preventing an act done in darkness. Both accept the logic that punishment was exacted from the offspring, because the crime consisted of preventing the birth of offspring. This latter assumption is similar to the premise of the talmudic passage that Ham's fourth son should be punished because Ham prevented the birth of Noah's fourth son. This explanation, we must recall, is supplied by the anonymous talmudic discussion, and we do not know what the original reason of Rav or Samuel was.

While the *Genesis Rabbah* passage is presented as a directly exegetical interpretation of the relevant biblical verses, the talmudic dispute is embedded in a collection of sources on the perils of drunkenness, built around Proverbs 23:29–35. The passage has strong affinities with *Leviticus Rabbah* 12:1.[7] Although the story of Noah's drunkenness is cited there as an example,[8] the episode is related without notable midrashic embellishments. The question of why Canaan was punished for Ham's sin is not posed, nor is Ham's wrongdoing described except as a matter of immodesty—as in the biblical narrative.[9]

Unlike the castration tradition, which is attested in rabbinic and Christian traditions, *b. Sanhedrin* appears to be the sole source for the tradition about Ham sodomizing his father.[10]

Notes

1 In *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 23 (Friedlander, 170): "Canaan entered and saw the nakedness of Noah, and he bound a thread (where the mark of) the covenant was and emasculated him."

2 D. Noy (= Dov Neuman) has observed that Syrian-Byzantine traditions mention a fourth son of Noah, Jonithos, who was sent to pursue studies in the Orient; he became the learned inventor of geometry. Noy speculates that this legend originated in attempts to Judaize (and thereby de-paganize) the origins of this important science. The Yemenite MS Maimon reads "fourth son" (Neuman, 106–107).

3 Instead of "for this reason ... him," MS London, 406 reads: "This is what we say: 'he cursed him.'"

4 Pp. 340–41. Similar material appears in *Tanḥuma, Noaḥ* 15; ed. Buber, 21 (48–49); Townsend, 52–53. Printed editions insert a comment: "This is in accordance with the one who says Ham arose and castrated his father." This is clearly a late interpolation based on *b. Sanhedrin*, as observed by Buber, n. 230. The tradition that Ham had prevented the birth of a fourth son to Noah is also incorporated into *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Genesis 9:24 (trans. Maher, 46 and n. 20; Maher notes that "Ps.-J is the only Targum to hint at the rather crude idea."). See Shinan, *Embroidered Targum*, 150, n. 260.

5 This tradition was known also to some of the Church Fathers, such as Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolycus* 3:19); see Ginzberg, *Haggada*, 84–87; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:191–92, n. 60.

6 On the rabbis' aversion to sexual relations by day or by light, see e.g., *y. Pesaḥim* 4:4 (31a); *y. Niddah* 2:3 (50a); *y. Pesaḥim* 53b; *b. Pesaḥim* 112b; *b. Megillah* 13a; *b. Sanhedrin* 107a; *b. Nid-*

dah 16b–17a; *Genesis Rabbah* 64:5 (pp. 704–705) and additional material cited in my *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 2:60–61.

7 Ed. Margulies, 2:243–46. See also *Esther Rabbah* 5:1. See Margulies's discussion about the textual history of the passage, p. 243, to l. 2.

8 Margulies, ibid., p. 243.

9 See Joseph Heinemann, "Art," 69–79 (on the use of the Noah material, see especially 77–78). Heinemann observes that it is in keeping with the homiletical thrust of the anti-drunkenness sermon to place the blame on Noah himself, since he was the one who put himself into the compromising position through incontinence. See also Elboim, 122–25.

10 This notion evidently reflects rabbinic beliefs about the unbridled sexual promiscuity of the Canaanites and of their contemporary pagan heirs. The *gezerah shavah* from the story of Shechem is supplied by anonymous talmudic redactors, and there is no reason to assume that it reflects the actual origin of the interpretation.

28 : *Sennacherib, Clever or Stupid?*

b. Sanhedrin 94a:

"*Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land.*" (2 Kings 18:32; Isaiah 36:17).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: He was a clever king.

And one says: He was a stupid king.[1]

The one who says He was a clever king[2]—If I tell them it is[3] superior to your land, they will say: You are lying.

And the one who says He was a stupid king[4]—If so, what significance is there to where he exiled them?

Sifré on Deuteronomy 37:[5]

"*Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth*" (Proverbs 8:31).

"*The habitable part* [*tevel*]"—This is the Land of Israel. Why is its name called *tevel*?—On account of the spice [*tevel*] that is in it.

What is the spice that is in it?—Torah, as it says (Lamentations 3:9): "*among the Gentiles there is no Torah.*"[6]

From here [we deduce] that the Torah is in the Land of Israel.

And thus do you find with respect to Sennacherib, that when he came to entice Israel, what did he say to them?—"*Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land.*"

"To a land better than your land" is not written here, but rather "*to a land like your own land.*"

And are not these things an *a minori* argument: If one who had come to speak the praises of his own land could not speak disparagingly of the Land of Israel, all the more so with respect to the praises of the Land of Israel!

Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai says: This man was a fool and did not know how to entice. It is comparable to a man who went to marry a woman. He said to her: Your father is a king and I am a king. Your father is wealthy and I am wealthy. Your father gives you meat and

> fish to eat, and he gives you old wine to drink, and I give you meat and fish to eat, and I give you old wine to drink.—This is not enticement.
>
> How ought he to address her?
>
> Your father is a commoner and I am a king. Your father is poor and I am wealthy. Your father gives you greens and pulse to eat, and I give you meat and fish to eat. Your father gives you new wine to drink and I give you old wine to drink. Your father takes you to the bath house on foot, and I take you in a litter.
>
> And are these things not an *a minori* argument: If one who had come to speak the praises of his own land could not speak disparagingly of the Land of Israel, all the more so with respect to the praises of the Land of Israel!

The "stupid" interpretation supplied by the Talmud for the dispute between Rav and Samuel[7] is very similar to Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai's argument in the *Sifré*: Sennacherib,[8] in his attempt to persuade the Judeans to acquiesce voluntarily to exile, was less than persuasive in not promising them that their new location would be better than their present homes. However, the diverse contexts confer diverse meanings on the contrary views in the respective passages. In *b. Sanhedrin*, the "clever" assessment seems to go a step farther than the "stupid" one. Even though inflated praises of their exilic destinations would serve the short-term interests of Sennacherib's propaganda, their patent untruth would in the long term destroy his credibility and defeat his purposes. In the *Sifré*, on the other hand, Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai is not really disagreeing with the previous view; he is strengthening it by pointing out its underlying logic: In spite of the fact that Sennacherib's lukewarm recommendation of the new land was "foolish" and counterproductive to his purposes, he still could not bring himself to disparage the Land of Israel.[9]

Thus, the opinion that Sennacherib was exhibiting cleverness in his words appears to be unique to the talmudic *sugya*[10] and is not found in the *Sifré*.[11]

In the Talmud, Rav's and Samuel's dispute is incorporated into a *sugya* about Hezekiah and Sennacherib. This, in turn, is a spin-off from a compendium on the theme of messianic redemption. In assuming that anyone who claims that another land could be better than the Land of Israel would inevitably be belied, the theme of praising the Holy Land is only incidental. For the *Sifré*, on the other hand, extolling the Land of Israel (as the land of Torah) is the passage's main theme, which perhaps originated in a *petiḥta* built around Proverbs 8:31.[12]

Notes

1 Margoliot identifies this opinion as Rav's (59, 80), which is consistent with his tendency to exalt the qualities of Davidic monarchs at the expense of all others. See my discussion of *b. Megillah* 12a, above.

2 MSS Parma 3010 and London 406 insert "He said." The Yemenite MS Maimon adds "this is the reason why he said to them 'like [?] your own'; he said: If I tell."

3 MS Florence adds: "a land."

4 MS Maimon adds: "because they should say to him."

5 Ed. Finkelstein, 71; trans. Hammer, 71.

6 Translated in accordance with the midrashic usage.

7 Although the Aramaic explanations of the two positions display the formal characteristics of later additions by the anonymous talmudic redactors, the actual words ascribed to Rav and Samuel are so vague and laconic that it is hard to imagine that they would have been recorded without the interpretation. This is true as well of the similar passage regarding Ahasuerus on *b. Megillah* 12a.

8 In the biblical passages, it is actually Rabshakeh who speaks on Sennacherib's behalf.

9 Thus Rabbi David Pardo, in his commentary to the *Sifré* (100): "It seems that he is bringing support for the argument of the first *tanna*." Hammer interprets the sequence differently: "R' Simeon's statement is another comment on the verse from 2 Kings and is not part of the main discussion" (407, n. 13).

10 This is to be distinguished from the opinion, ascribed to Rabbi Johanan in the previous passage of the Talmud, which praises Sennacherib for the respect he demonstrated towards the Holy Land.

11 This applies as well to a similar statement found in *Avot de-rabbi natan* B 20 (Schechter, *Aboth*, 43; Saldarini, 128 and n. 3):

> Judah ben Ṭabbai says: ... and be careful in your words with regards to the listeners; since out of your words they will listen and learn to lie.
>
> And thus do you find with respect to Rabshakeh, that he was caught only by his words; as it says "*Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land*."
>
> They said to him: If our land is not beautiful for you, leave us in our place.

This example serves as an object lesson "against asking leading questions which let the witness know how much he can lie without being caught" (Saldarini, 128).

12 I have not found any other rabbinic sources that use the Proverbs verse in this manner. It is more commonly expounded as a continuation of the previous verse in connection with the pre-existence of the Torah. See, e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 85:9 (p. 1043); *Avot de-rabbi natan* A 31 (Schechter, *Aboth*, 91); Buber, *Midrash agadah*, 76:2 (p. 146). For rabbinic ideas about the pre-existence of Torah (equated with the primordial Wisdom of biblical Wisdom literature), see Urbach, *Sages*, 287, 814 (*Sifré* on Deuteronomy 37 is cited in n. 5 there).

29 : *Copper Precious as Gold*

b. ʿArakhin 10b:

Our rabbis taught: There was a pipe *abub*[1] in the Temple. It was smooth.[2] It was thin. It was of reed. And it was from the days of Moses, and it had a pleasing sound.[3] The king commanded, and they trimmed it with gold, and its sound was not pleasing.[4] They removed the trimming and its sound was as pleasing as it had been.

There was a cymbal in the Temple. It was of copper, and it was from the days of Moses,[5] and its sound was pleasing, and it became damaged. And the sages sent and brought in artisans from Alexandria in Egypt, and they repaired it, but its sound was not pleasing. They removed its patch and its sound was as pleasing as it had been.

There was a mortar in the Temple. It was of copper, and it was from the days of Moses, and it would crush all the spices. It became damaged, and the sages sent and brought in artisans from Alexandria in Egypt, and they repaired it, but it would not crush as it had previously.[6] They removed the patch, and it would crush as it had previously.

These two implements[7] were left over from the first Temple, and they became damaged, and they had no remedy.

And concerning them David said[8] (1 Kings 7:45): "*of bright brass*"; "*of bright brass*" (2 Chronicles 4:16); "*... Fine copper, precious as gold.*" (Ezra 8:27).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Each one weighed as much as two of gold.[9]

And one says: The two of them weighed as much as one of gold.[10]

Rav Joseph taught [in a *baraita*]: Two of them were worth as much as one of gold.

These traditions about the flute, cymbal, and mortar are found in roughly the same form in *t. ʿArakhin* 2:5[11] and *y. Sukkah* 5:6 (55b).

The only significant differences relate to their exegeses of the Ezra verse, the subject of the dispute between Rav and Samuel in *b. Arakhin*. The *Tosefta* concludes as follows:[12]

> This teaches that it weighed as much as two of gold.
> R' Nathan says: There were two vessels, as it says "*two*."

That is to say, it accords with the first of the two positions in the Babylonian Talmud, the one that was supported by Rav Joseph's *baraita*.[13]

In *y. Sukkah*, on the other hand, we find the following conclusion:

> Two *Amora'im*:
> One says: One of them was as two of gold.[14]
> And the other one says: Two of them[15] were as two of gold.

As in *b.'Arakhin*, two interpretations are proposed, and both are ascribed to *amora'im*, not to the original *baraita*. The first view is identical to that of the *Tosefta* and the first position in the Babylonian passage. The second view, however, gives us a third option that is not attested elsewhere.[16] At the very least, this indicates that the comment about the weights of copper and gold was not found in the version of the *baraita* that was used by either Talmud. It is difficult to draw conclusions about relations between the Babylonian *sugya* and the Palestinian.

All of these interpretations have in common the fact that they are fundamentally exegetical, concerned with unraveling the difficult syntax of Ezra 8:27.[17] Considering that no overt theological or moral lessons are derived from the discussion, it is arguable that the passage should not really be classified as aggadic. Although the topic is of historical rather than halakhic interest (which would usually be considered "aggadic" according to the conventional categorization), it is reasonably certain that the pericope was introduced in the framework of academic Talmud study and not in a homiletic setting.

Notes

1 See Epstein 237.
2 MSS Parma 3010 and London 406 add: "It was small."
3 This last clause, missing from printed editions, is found in most witnesses.
4 Instead of "and its sound was not pleasant," MS London 406 reads: "and it was changed."
5 This last clause, missing from printed editions, is found in most witnesses.
6 Instead of "as it had previously," MS Oxford 370 reads: "the spices."
7 The cymbal and the mortar (Rashi).
8 This introductory formula would be appropriate to a citation from Psalms, ascribed to King David, but not to the texts cited here, which refer to vessels fashioned by Solomon. Tosafot and Asheri (cited by Shiṭṭah mequbbeṣet) therefore emend the text to the generic "Scripture said." The Tosefta and Jerusalem Talmud (see below) have simply "it says."

9 For "Each one … gold," MS Munich reads: "was more precious than gold."
10 For "The two … one of gold," MS Munich reads: "like two of gold."
11 Ed. Zuckermandel, 544. Some textual notes are found in Liebermann, *Tosefeth* 2:276.
12 This passage is brought in a similar (but very corrupt) form in *Qohelet Zuṭa* 11:18 (ed. Buber, 151).
13 See Pardo; Melamed, 522 (item #300).
14 In *Qohelet Zuṭa*, only the first opinion is found, in slightly corrupt wording, although it is introduced by this formula: "Two *amora'im*, one says." Buber (n. 95) emended the text according to *y. Sukkah*.
15 The word מינהון is not in the original Leiden MS; it was added by a different hand.
16 The *Penei Moshe* commentary characteristically emends the text to bring it into agreement with the Babylonian Talmud. Cf. *Yefeh mar'eh* and *Shiarei qorban*.
17 Batten, 324: "the construction is ungrammatical and the mng. obscure." Maharsha explains that the dispute between Rav and Samuel in *b. 'Arakhin* is based on the syntactically awkward placement of the word שנים, which implies that it is to be read as a measurement rather than simply the number of vessels. Each authority interprets the comparison between copper and gold according to his particular view. In *Ḥasdei*, Pardo takes a similar approach in interpreting the rabbis' underlying exegetical motivations in the Tosefta.

30 : *Non-Babylonian Examples*

Therapeutic Leaves

y. Sheqalim 6:2 (50a):[1]

> "*And the leaf thereof for medicine* [*li-t'ruphah*]." (Ezekiel 47:12).
>
> Rabbi Johanan says: For healing [θεραπεία].[2] He sucks its leaf and his food is digested.[3]
>
> Rav and Samuel—
>
> One says: To release the upper opening [*lehatir peh*].[4]
>
> And one says: To release the lower opening.
>
> R' Haninah and R' Joshua ben Levi—
>
> One says: To release the mouth of barrenness.[5]
>
> And one says: To release the mouth of the mutes.

Ezekiel's eschatological vision of the river issuing from the Jerusalem Temple was a popular one for rabbinic preachers,[6] and midrashic embellishments of chapter 47 were incorporated into several midrashic compendia. In *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4:23,[7] the *midrash* is attached to Song of Songs 4:15 "*Thy plants* [*shelaḥayikh*] *are an orchard of pomegranates*":

> The Holy One will one day make you like an orchard of pomegranates in the future times.
>
> What is this? This is the river, as it is written "*And by the river upon the bank thereof … and the leaf thereof for medicine*."
>
> What is "*for medicine*"?—Rav and Samuel: One says …

The concluding allusion to God's releasing "the mouth of barrenness" might well indicate the homily's origins as a *petiḥta* to a biblical episode that refers to miracles—in particular the cases of Sarah[8] and Hannah.[9]

The opening section of *Deuteronomy Rabbah* attaches our passage to a *yelammedenu* proem that culminates in the opening words of Deuteronomy "*These be the words which Moses spake*." The *midrash* observes that Moses' earlier speech impediment was evidently cured when he received the Torah at Mount Sinai.[10] Our exposition of Ezekiel 47:12 is cited in this context, with special emphasis

on the interpretation "to release the mouth of the mutes." This is understood as stating that "whoever is mute and chews from it, his tongue is healed and is immediately polished with words of Torah."

In a reversal of the normal situation, the Babylonian Talmud also interprets this verse, but it ascribes the views of Rav and Samuel to different *amora'im*:

b. Sanhedrin 100a and *b.* Menaḥot 98a:

What is "*the leaf thereof for medicine*"?

Rabbi Isaac Bar Abudimi and Rav Ḥisda—

One says: To release the upper mouth; and one says: To release the lower mouth.

It was stated: Hezekiah says: To release the mouth of the mutes; Bar Qappara says; To release the mouth of barrenness.

Seven Days

Esther Rabbah 2:5:

"*And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present … seven days*" (Esther 1:5).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: Seven excluding the one hundred and eighty.

And [one] says:[11] Seven including the one hundred and eighty.

Esther 1:3–4 describes a great banquet for the Persian nobility that lasted one hundred and eighty days, after which verse 5 tells of a week-long feast for the entire citizenry of Shushan. The Bible's explicit statement that the second banquet did not begin until after the days of the first had expired makes the contrary assertion very puzzling, to say the least.[12]

This passage thus replicates several features that we encountered in the Rav-Samuel disputes in the Babylonian Talmud: Of the two interpretations, one is contrary to any reasonable reading of the biblical text, while the other would have been redundantly self-evident had it not been juxtaposed with the former. Neither teaches any useful religious lesson, nor are they incorporated into any homiletical or rhetorical framework. The absence of any parallel versions of the dispute makes it impossible to reconstruct its evolution.

"For It Is Great"

Esther Rabbah 4:10:

"[*And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire,*] *for it is great*" (Esther 1:20).

Rav and Samuel—

One says: This empire is too great for this crime.[13]

And one says: This crime is too great for this empire.

This dispute relates to a legitimately perceived exegetical ambiguity in the verse: What is the antecedent of the clause "*for it is great*"? Is Vashti's insolence so grave that it cannot go unpunished, or is the kingdom so great that it cannot tolerate disobedience? From a strictly grammatical perspective, the feminine pronoun would seem to refer to the immediately preceding noun מלכותו, "*his empire*," but the other option is not unreasonable.[14]

Notes

1 Translated according to MS Leiden.
2 See Löw, 133–37; Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 594; *Kohut*, 8:286; Bacher, *Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer,* 1:275, n. 8; Sokoloff, 593.
3 See Preuss, 433.
4 All these expositions are built around the word play between *terupah* [cure] and *lehatir peh* [release a mouth/opening].
5 Preuss, 411.
6 Thus, the chapter is expounded in *Pirke de-rabbi Eli'ezer chap.* 51 (Friedlander, 418–19), which is a rich collection of portraits of miraculous changes in the natural order that will take place in future times.
7 Ed. Dunsky, 123.
8 Genesis 21:1–34, the portion that is read on Rosh Hashanah. See *Pesikta rabati* 42; ed. Friedmann, 174b–149a (as well as his notes on 164b–165b); trans. Braude, 734–51. Although *m. Megillah* 3:5 lists only Leviticus 23:23 as the festival reading, *t. Megillah* 3:6 (ed. Lieberman, 354) designates Genesis 21 as an acceptable alternative ("some say"). This option is cited also in *y. Megillah* 3:7 (74b) and *b. Megillah* 31a. In his long commentary on the Tosefta, Lieberman observes (1170) that the Ehrfurt manuscript reverses the order of primary and optional readings, and that the Babylonian Talmud completely eliminated the Leviticus lection, establishing the consecutive sections of Genesis 21 and 22 as the readings for the two days of Rosh Hashanah.
9 This is the *haftarah* that accompanies the above-mentioned reading from the Torah. See *Pesikta rabati* 143 (179a–182b; Braude, 752–68).
10 The same theme is developed in *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 7 (Lieberman, 4–5) without any reference to the Ezekiel verse or to any of the other material in this passage. The passage is structured as a reverse *petiḥta*, effecting a transition from Deuteronomy 1:1 to Proverbs 15:4.
11 The editions actually read: "And Samuel says," which I presume to be an error.
12 The traditional commentators proposed several solutions to this difficulty. The *Yefeh 'anaf,* for example, derives its interpretation from the phraseology: "*when these days were expired* [or: *completed*]." The Hebrew words can be read as implying that the conclusion of the one hundred and eighty days *consisted of* the seven; and that if the text was supposed to mean something else, then it ought to have said "*these days were expired, and* [*then*] *the king made a feast*." This explanation recalls the Talmud's justification (*b. 'Eruvin* 53a; *b. Soṭah* 11a) for not interpretating the "*new king*" of Exodus 1:8 literally, "since it is not written 'and he died, and he reigned'" (see my discussion of that passage above). Alkabes, on the other hand, links this passage with the previous one, which dwells on the unusual *plene* spelling of the word ובמל את; that, says Alkabes, should be read as "were completed by." None of these suggestions is the least bit persuasive.
13 On the word חטיתה and its cognates, see Sokoloff, 196.

14 Paton, 158: "*i.e.*, the kingdom, not the decree ... for *decree* is m. and *great* is f." See Hakham, "Esther," 11. Without citing the midrashic discussion, Hakham expresses his preference for the first interpretation. But he acknowledges that the second is possible, since biblical Hebrew does occasionally use the feminine grammatical form as a neuter (citing Genesis 42:18). The *First Targum of Esther* attaches the clause to the decree (as noted in Paton, 158), whereas the *Second Targum of Esther* retains the biblical text's ambiguity; see Grossfeld, *Two Targums*, 38. Hartum, reads the verse (Hartum, 110) in the sense of "the edict will be published throughout the empire *even though* it is vast" (cf. Paton, 158, 160). The expression is untranslated in the Greek Esther (see *Septuagint*), although some traditions insert either οτι πολλη or οτι αλεθηϛ see Hanhart, 142). Similarly, most versions of the Latin Vulgate omit this expression, although some read *quoniam verum est* (the equivalent of LXX's αλεθηϛ, clearly modifying the decree). See Paton; Fischer and Weber, 714. See also Moore , who regards the omission as an indication that the Hebrew phrase is a later gloss. Moore cites Ehrlich (for whom the antecedent is the decree) and Ryssel (for whom it is "the success of the order") but notes that "most scholars rightly see it as referring to the 'kingdom,' which would require the feminine pronoun." See also Albrecht, 115.

Conclusions

Of the thirty-two disputes between Rav and Samuel that were examined in this study, we were able to identify or surmise parallel Palestinian traditions for twenty-four . This fact is remarkable of itself, when we bear in mind that the scriptural texts that were interpreted span the Bible's full range, including not only the Torah but also verses from Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Esther, Ezra, and Chronicles—texts that were not necessarily central to the liturgical reading of the Bible in the synagogue.[1]

These passages were formulated according to stereotypical dispute formats that bore a closer resemblance to the structures of halakhic discourse than to distinctive aggadic models. For this reason, no significant purpose would be served here by subjecting them to aesthetic, literary, or rhetorical analysis. Rather, they must be studied for their content, primarily as instances of biblical interpretation. When viewed from this perspective, most of the comments contained in them were exegetically unsatisfying. The few explanations that approximated literal exegesis were too obvious to be of interest. They did not deepen our understanding of textual difficulties or enhance our sensitivity to the subtleties of scriptural narrative. The non-literal explanations were usually so far-fetched that they inspired more confusion than enlightenment. It is instructive to note how frequently the ingenuity of the Talmud's traditional commentators was channeled towards contriving hypothetical problems in the biblical verses that might have provoked Rav's and Samuel's comments.

Almost one quarter of the examples fall into the category of midrashic name-etymologies, usually involving the identification of two different biblical figures[2] by means of the pattern "X was her/his name, and why was her/his name called Y?"[3] Many dozens of these expositions are strewn across rabbinic literature, and there is nothing distinctive about the ones that are ascribed here to Rav and Samuel.[4]

A useful point for comparison would be the many exegetical disputes between Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah that are scattered throughout talmudic literature.[5] Some 180 of these disputes have been preserved,[6] distributed through *Mekhilta*, *Sifré*, *Tosefta*, classical and late midrashic compendia, and *baraitot* in the two Talmuds.[7]

The Judah-Nehemiah disputes share many literary features of standard tannaitic halakhic discourse. They are usually formulated in Hebrew in a succinct

style. Although the disputes are occasionally embedded by editors into proems and other rhetorical structures, it is evident that they were originally the products of an academic process of scriptural interpretation, one that involved a thoroughgoing study of the Bible. As regards halakhic arguments in tannaitic literature, particularly in post-Yavneh sources we are often unable to determine whether the dispute forms were imposed upon their opinions by the redactors, or if they indeed reflect original face-to-face discussions between the rabbis. In several of the Judah-Nehemiah aggadic disputes we are given indications of live debates, as rabbis challenge one another with objections and proof texts.[8]

The Rav-Samuel disputes, whether in halakhic or aggadic matters, are indistinguishable from tannaitic traditions. In general, this means that they do not display signs of face-to-face encounters. Thus, among the pericopes examined here there was not a single instance where Rav or Samuel responded to his counterpart's words; whatever argumentation appeared in the talmudic passages was added by anonymous formulators or redactors. Nor did we encounter cases where their opinions were cited or argued by named *amora'im* of later generations.

A full study of the Judah-Nehemiah passages would exceed the bounds of this study.[9] Nevertheless, I can offer some general observations by way of comparison of those disputes with the Rav-Samuel pericopes under discussion here.

Most of the exegetical disputes ascribed to Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah relate to legitimate questions of interpretation that emerge from the biblical texts when approached from a midrashic perspective. Those disputes that are not exegetical are transparently homiletical and dwell on familiar themes that are based on conventional rabbinic value-concepts. In the Rav-Samuel disputes, on the other hand, most of the interpretations seemed superfluous and cryptic.

That observation lends support to the thesis that the Rav-Samuel passages evolved out of earlier versions—out of scriptural interpretations that figured in homiletical discourses (as was suggested in detailed comparative studies of the individual passages). By contrast, the logical coherence that typifies the Judah-Nehemiah pericopae demonstrates that, for the most part, they retain their original exegetical forms.

Central to the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian works is the fact that the former are fundamentally intertextual—based on encounters between two or more verses that shed light on one another.[10] This premise is central to the liturgical practice of linking the pentateuchal readings on Sabbaths and festivals to related passages from the Prophets. That is the most salient feature, in fact, of the earliest midrashic texts;[11] one scholar of early Jewish exegesis was even led to conclude that "the *midrash* is an exegetical form in which a passage is interpreted in light of a second passage."[12] It is the essence of the clas-

sic Palestinian *petiḥta*, which is the most conspicuous feature in Palestinian preaching and midrashic compendia.

After excluding the three passages from non-Babylonian collections that were examined in chapter 30, we find Palestinian parallels for twenty-three[13] of the twenty-nine remaining Babylonian periocopae. In this corpus, between thirteen and seventeen of the Palestinian parallels can be characterized as being incorporated into rhetorical structures.[14] The rhetorical structures most commonly assumed the form of *petiḥtot*[15] but also included closing perorations[16] or other elements.

In the course of our analysis of comparative passages, we were repeatedly confronted with novel interpretations of biblical expressions; these interpretations had been inspired by comparisons with other verses, usually in the context of a *petiḥta*. In these cases, the differences between Babylonian and Palestinian counterparts hinged precisely on the fact that the Babylonian versions interpret isolated verses without explaining how those interpretations had been stimulated by intertextual cross-fertilization. This omission sometimes creates the impression that the rabbis were indulging in capricious attempts to argue the least likely of imaginable interpretations.

Such are the conventions of midrashic interpretation that it would be futile to base a comparison of Babylonian and Palestinian sources on their respective degrees of literalness or non-literalness. In relatively few instances does it appear that the quest for the "plain sense" (even if we allow a very broad scope for this problematic concept) was of any concern to the rabbis.[17]

Nevertheless, several passages suggested the possibility that one of the opinions in the Rav-Samuel disputes had been proposed merely in order to serve as a hypothetical foil for a bolder homiletical interpretation that blatantly defied the literal sense. Viewed from this perspective, we might speculate, for example, that a scenario of this kind lay at the root of the pericope about decrees of the "new king."[18] The Babylonian view that posited a literal reading of the scriptural expression was devised as a counterbalance to the homiletical interpretation that stressed the newness of the decrees.[19]

It must be emphasized that the phenomena embodied in these texts or in other samples of aggadic *midrash* from the Babylonian Talmud should not be misconstrued as either harbingers of literalist *peshat* exegesis (of the sort that would rise to prominence in the work of the medieval Jewish commentators)[20] or as stages in the evolution of the "retold Bible" genre (as found in ancient Pseudepigrapha, in later midrashic compendia such as the *Tanḥuma* literature, and in medieval Hebrew expansions of biblical stories).[21] What sets this corpus apart is, for the most part, the fact that hermeneutic methods and structures more appropriate to the study of *halakhah* are being applied to aggadic traditions.

To be precise, the dialectical structures used here are not the technical hermeneutics that we usually associate with halakhic *midrash*[22] but rather those of talmudic discourse in general.[23] The Rav-Samuel examples are limited, at the most, to very rudimentary structures of argumentation. After setting out opposing interpretations of biblical verses, proof texts are sometimes adduced to support or challenge the respective positions; these are followed occasionally by arguments to refute those proof texts.[24] There are, however, no occurrences of the dialectical complexity that is encountered so often in halakhic discussions, which are characterized by multiple proof texts, digressions, alternate versions, and so on.[25]

It is important to bear in mind that most of the Palestinian parallels were attributed to *amora'im* from the second to the fourth generations. If we choose to see the Babylonian versions as a later stage in the evolution of those traditions, then this calls into question the authenticity of the attributions to Rav and Samuel—who were active during the first amoraic generation.

Ostensibly, it might be argued that this is a good reason to reject my initial thesis and postulate instead that it is the Babylonian Talmud that preserved the earliest versions of these traditions, which were later reworked by Palestinian sages or editors and incorporated into their more sophisticated sermons. On further reflection, however, this argument is not very persuasive. In several examples, the premise that traditions had flowed from the Land of Israel to Babylonia made it possible to reconstruct how and why the talmudic disputes assumed their peculiar Babylonian forms; comments were removed from their original homiletical settings and subjected to academic methods of analysis to which they were not really suited. To reverse the direction of the transmission would require us to declare that the versions contained in the Babylonian Talmud were the original ones, thereby precluding any reasonable explanation of why or how they had arisen in the first place.[26]

If the attributions to Rav and Samuel are fundamentally pseudepigraphic, then this would suggest that the Babylonian editors who introduced them were doing so consciously, perhaps out of an awareness that the material so designated constituted a distinct and identifiable corpus.

I can offer no conclusive reason why Rav and Samuel should have been selected for this purpose. Like most talmudic rabbis, especially among the *amora'im*, the literary depiction of these sages has a generic quality to it that does not allow them to be easily distinguished from their colleagues, whether in their scholarly approaches or in their religious outlooks.[27] Whatever distinctiveness they might claim lies in their historical position at the beginning of autonomous rabbinic study in Babylonia, which fuelled the view of posterity that they were the founders of the great rabbinic academies or of the Babylon-

ian Talmud itself. The fact that Samuel was a "native" Babylonian, whereas Rav studied with Rabbi Judah the Prince in the Land of Israel, does not, as far as I can discern, play any significant part in the roles assigned to them as interpreters of aggadic *midrash*. Perhaps more significant for our immediate purposes is the fact that Rav and Samuel function as a recognizable "debating team," one of the most ubiquitous such teams in the Talmud, to the degree that their disputes can be viewed as stereotypical. The only other scholarly duo of comparable prominence is Abaye and Rava in the early fourth century. However, the "One said ... the other said" pattern does not appear in connection with Abaye and Rava, either in halakhic or aggadic contexts; it is restricted to earlier amoraic generations. As members of the transitional generation, between the tannaitic and amoraic eras, their disputes are formulated in the familiar laconic, minimalist style of the Mishnah or *baraita*—exactly like the disputes discussed here. If only for these rather prosaic reasons, it is understandable that Rav and Samuel would have suggested themselves to redactors as natural choices for pseudepigraphic attribution of midrashic disputes.

Of course, these suggestions are speculative, and I am unable to retrace in detail the channels through which the hypothetical corpus might have found its way into the final version of the Babylonian Talmud. The most that can be submitted at this point is that, in singling out the names of the two most prominent Babylonian rabbis of the first amoraic generation, our hypothetical editors intended to draw attention to the peculiarly Babylonian character of these aggadic midrashic interpretations.[28]

The blurring of the borders between exegesis and homiletics continued to be rampant in Jewish scriptural studies through the subsequent generations.[29] In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides vented his frustration on the credulous masses, who treated the midrashic rabbis' homiletical manipulations of scripture as authoritative exegesis without realizing that the ancient preachers had merely conformed to rhetorical conventions for incorporating biblical verses into their sermons—and that their efforts should be appreciated as a literary genre in its own right but not as exegesis. To do otherwise would either lead to mindless acceptance of outrageous and indefensible readings of the Bible or provoke utter disdain for those misguided rabbis. Either way, these undiscriminating readers failed to appreciate the true artistic achievements of the midrashic homilists in the context of their real literary objectives and standards. The only way out of this muddle, according to Maimonides, was to insist resolutely on the autonomy of homiletical *midrash* as an art form; its treatment of scripture should under no circumstances be confused with philological exegesis.[30] The quasi-canonization of Rashi's Bible commentaries, with their extensive reliance on talmudic and midrashic passages, has done much to perpetuate the obscuring of

distinctions between genres. So has the popularity of kabbalistic approaches to biblical exposition.

The situation decried by Maimonides has not improved significantly since his time. In traditional Jewish schools and synagogues, the rhetorical devices of those ancient Jewish preachers are still being presented as historical facts or as religiously obligatory interpretations; questioning them would be tantamount to wholesale repudiation of the ancestral tradition. Analogous situations are known in other faith communities. Consider, for instance, Christian portrayals of the Old Testament as a repository of allegorical prefigurations of the New,[31] or the elevation of the esoteric *baṭin* over the literal *zahir* in some Shi'ite schools.[32]

This phenomenon is not restricted to religious communities. The realm of academic discourse, particularly over the last generation, has been disturbingly vulnerable to the blurring of distinctions between rational argumentation and creative expressions of subjective opinion. *Midrash* itself has been invoked as a precedent to justify the dismissal of historical context and authorial intent as relevant factors in the interpretation of texts.[33] What begins as a theoretical inability to differentiate between literary genres can, if left unchecked, lead to a pernicious breakdown of coherent ethical discourse.

In this matter, the experiences of the ancient Babylonian rabbis might hold profitable lessons for our contemporary predicament.

But this is beginning to sound like preaching.

Notes

1 Though the choice of *haftarah* readings might have been flexible enough for us to consider any verse from the Prophets as a possible part of a *haftarah*, this cannot be argued with respect to the verses from Psalms, Ezra, or Chronicles.

2 In *b. Soṭah* 11a, the same pattern was applied to two cities, raising some exegetical difficulties. See also *b. 'Eruvin* 53a (on the name "Machpelah").

3 Two on *b. 'Eruvin* 53b (Machpelah; Amraphel and Nimrod); *b. Soṭah* 11a (Pithom and Raamses); *b. Soṭah* 11b (Shiphrah and Puah); *b. Soṭah* 42a (Orpah and Harafah); *b. Soṭah* 42b (Shobach and Shophach); *b. Bava Batra* 91b (Mahlon and Chilion); *b. Sanhedrin* 44b (Achan and Zimri).

4 In my comments on several pericopes, I alluded to R' Margoliot's theory that the issue underlying the dispute was the status of name-lists in the book of Chronicles. Stemberger discusses the frequent occurrences of this hermeneutic method in Babylonian midrashic texts, 200–201.

5 See Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, 2:225–74. As he notes (225, n. 1), Geiger and others raised doubts about whether the sages who figure so frequently in amoraic and post-amoraic midrashic compendia should be identified with the *tanna'im* bearing those names who flourished in the Usha generation. Although this matter cannot be settled with absolute certainty, Bacher is probably correct in pointing out that several aggadic debates between these sages are found in tannaitic compendia and in talmudic *baraitas* (even if some of those can be shown to be later interpolations). Of course, the possibility remains

that, while the "early" Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah did participate in a few such discussions, most of the material should be ascribed to namesakes from a later generation. However, it strikes me as very unlikely that not a single mention of this fact found its way into the rabbinic corpus.

6 A useful collection of the material is contained in Kanowitz, 24–41.

7 Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, 2:225–74 and 228, n. 3. His enumeration excludes duplicate sources. He includes instances that add a third opinion, that of "the rabbis." Bacher was duly sensitive to the problems posed by the large number of Judah-Nehemiah disputes in mediaeval midrashic collections such as *Exodus Rabbah*, *Numbers Rabbah*, various *Tanḥuma-yelammedenu* works, *Midrash on Psalms*, etc. While the bulk of the preserved material is found in *Genesis Rabbah* and consists of interpretations of verses from Genesis, the disputes range across the entire Hebrew Bible with the exception of Job, Leviticus [!] and some of the Minor Prophets. The largest proportion of disputes is on Genesis and Exodus.

8 Only two of the Babylonian passages studied here had parallels of some sort that belonged to the "Rabbi Judah-Rabbi Nehemiah" grouping. These were *b. Megillah* 12a (cf. *Esther Rabbah* 2:6) and *b. Soṭah* 36b (*Genesis Rabbah* 87:7).

9 Following are descriptions of several examples chosen at random from Bacher's and Kanowitz's listings:

Genesis Rabbah 3:1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 18–19): Was light created before the world or after it? The question arises naturally from the unclear relation between Genesis 1:1 and the subsequent day-by-day account of the creation. The dispute is incorporated into a *petiḥta* to Genesis 1:3, although other collections link it to Exodus 37:1.

Genesis Rabbah 26:1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 243–44): In how many generations was Noah righteous? The question is inspired by the peculiar wording of Genesis 6:9 and is based on the chronological information contained in the Bible. This dispute has been incorporated into a *petiḥta* to Genesis 5:32 by having Psalms 1:1-3 explained according to the respective positions.

Genesis Rabbah 31:13 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 287): Did the giant *re'em* enter Noah's ark? If not, how was it saved from the deluge? This whimsical speculation might have been inspired by Job 39:10, which is cited in support of one opinion. Otherwise, the question is suggested by the narrative situation.

Genesis Rabbah 41:7 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 413): With reference to Genesis 14:10, "*and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain*," was it the kings who fell and the populace who fled, or vice versa? While the simple reading of this verse seems to support the first view, the appearance of the King of Sodom in verse 17 presents a difficulty that is dealt with in this pericope.

Genesis Rabbah 53:5 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 559): The vagueness and apparent redundancy of Genesis 21:1, "*And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken*," invite specific identification of the allusions to God's "saying" and "speaking" previously. This is the exegetical issue over which Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah disagree here.

Genesis Rabbah 68:11 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 784): By midrashic conventions, Genesis 28:11, "*and [Jacob] lay down in that place to sleep*," is unnecessarily verbose (where would he lie down if not "*in that place*"?), and implies that previously he had not lain down to rest. Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah argue about the identification of this sleepless period in Jacob's life.

Genesis Rabbah 97:9 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 1249): Jacob's words to Joseph in Genesis 48:22 are very perplexing and open to various interpretations, especially the expression "*I have given to thee one shekhem*," which can designate either an extra portion or the

city of Shechem. Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah respectively uphold these two possibilities. These remain a source of disagreement in biblical scholarship and have broader implications for understanding both the remainder of the verse and the Genesis narrative in general.

Midrash ha-gadol to Exodus 6:14 (ed. Margulies, 100–101): The genealogy that commences with this verse surveys the tribes of Reuben and Simeon and then focuses on the story of Moses' birth to the tribe of Levi without ever resuming the account of the remaining tribes. Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah exchange views about why the Bible does not deal with either all twelve tribes or only the Levites. The source for this passage has not been identified. Cf. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4:15 (ed. Dunsky, 114); Kasher, 9:19, nn. 83–84.

Pesikta de-rav kahana 1:3 (ed. Mandelbaum, 6; parallels are listed there; trans. Braude and Kapstein, 10): The rabbis offer various metaphors to depict how (Exodus 9:24) "*fire mingled with the hail*" in the Egyptian plague. See the discussion of *b. Soṭah* 46b–47a above.

Mekhilta Wayyassa' 6 (ed. Horovitz and Rabin, 174; ed. Lauterbach, 2:131; Epstein and Melamed, 117–78): "*And the Lord said unto Moses, [*'*avor*] *before the people*" (Exodus 17:5). Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah argue over which of the many possible meanings of *'avor* is appropriate to this context. While the biblical usage invites interpretation on account of its ambiguity and possible redundancy, Rabbi Nehemiah's rendering of "pass by their sin" is patently homiletical, while Rabbi Judah's "pass on ahead of them," is to all appearances an attempt at a literal understanding.

Shabbat 28a; *Baraita de-melekhet hammishkan* 3 (Kirschner, 164, 228): Numbers 4:25 alludes to the Gershonites carrying two coverings, one of *taḥash* and one that is not identified or mentioned elsewhere. Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah argue over whether there were really two coverings or a single one with two colours. While Nehemiah's explanation seems somewhat farfetched, the obscurity of the verse is real.

Leviticus Rabbah 18:3 (ed. Margulies, 407; parallels are listed there). This is a three-way dispute; it includes the opinion of "the rabbis" as well as those of Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah. All three interpretations are based on what is clearly a fanciful and homiletic exposition of Exodus 32:16, where the tablets of the law are described as "*ḥarut* [graven] *upon the tables*." The sages midrashically alter the vocalization, changing the word to *ḥerut*, "free," and offer their various explanations of the things from which the Torah has liberated Israel: the angel of death, foreign dominion, and affliction.

Leviticus Rabbah 31:5 (ed. Margulies, 722): This three-way dispute involves homiletical readings of Proverbs 21:22 and clearly does not respond to any tangible difficulty in the biblical text—although it does follow familiar midrashic methods. All three explanations interpret the verse in connection with Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah on behalf of the Israelites in the face of protestations from the angels. The differences relate only to details. The dispute is used here as a *petiḥta* to Leviticus 24:2, although it could be adapted conveniently to many other lections. This *petiḥta* structure might reflect the passage's original form or forms.

y. Sanhedrin 1:4 (19c): A well-established tannaitic tradition has it that Moses was vexed by the problem of how to divide the seventy elders (Numbers 11:16) equitably among twelve tribes, and that the selection was arranged by means of a lottery. In this dialogue between Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah, two procedures are discussed. As Rabbi Nehemiah himself concedes at the end of the exchange, his theory, while having the advantage of fending off protests from tribes who lose the lottery, requires some miraculous assistance. Although neither explanation can be regarded as literal from a modern

perspective, the exegetical question they try to answer is an understandable one. The proposed solutions are valid by midrashic criteria.

Leviticus Rabbah 22:1 (ed. Margulies, 594–98), *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 5:8: Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah propose very different explanations for each unit of Ecclesiastes 5:8–9. Rabbi Judah interprets the verses in connection with cravings for wealth and land, whereas Rabbi Nehemiah applies them to the importance of apparent trivialities as essential components of Torah. In the midrashic compendia, this dispute forms part of a complex *petiḥta*, whose final exposition of the Ecclesiastes passage links it with Leviticus 17:3 (cf. Margulies's notes). Although these interpretations of Ecclesiastes are typical of *petiḥtot*, it is impossible to reconstruct the original function of the unit containing the Judah-Nehemiah dispute. Neither interpretation is crucial to the understanding of Ecclesiastes, although both are fully consistent with the normal midrashic hermeneutical objective of supplying the generalities of Wisdom texts with specific referents from the rabbinic value system.

Sifré on Deuteronomy 322, 323 (ed. Finkelstein, 372–74; trans. Hammer, 334–36). Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32 consists largely of a castigation of the Israelites for their disobedience. Verses 27 and 30 both make reference to Israel's enemies, raising the question of whether the severe denunciations in the following verses are directed towards Israel or its adversaries. This is the topic over which Rabbis Judah and Nehemiah disagree here. Although their respective positions might serve their homiletical purposes (within sermons of reproof, consolation, or apologetic), the exegetical controversy is an eminently valid one. See Kahana, 200–201; Fraade, 67–68, 228.

y. Nedarim 9:11 (41c): In David's dirge over Saul and Jonathan, the words "*Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul*" (2 Samuel 1:24) are interpreted not only literally but also allegorically as a reference to the Sanhedrin. The latter view is clearly a homiletical flourish that has no justification in the text, although the Talmud takes the trouble to explain the coherence of both views within the context. (What special reason did the women have for mourning Saul?). This dispute between Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah is formulated as "one says ... one says" [... חרנה אמר ... חד אמר] as in the Rav-Samuel disputes that we have been examining. The confrontation between an obviously literal and an obviously non-literal interpretation recalls several of the Babylonian pericopes.

Pesikta de-rav kahana 12:5 (ed. Mandelbaum, 207; trans. Braude and Kapstein, 231–32): Psalms 149:6 "*Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged* [פיפיות] *sword in their hand*" is expounded in three allegorical ways (including a third view of "the rabbis"). Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah (unlike the rabbis) believe that the sword represents Torah. Neither opinion follows naturally from the verse, but each is coherent according to the premises of midrashic homiletics, and each elicits an important Jewish value. The passage is part of a larger homiletical unit, possibly a *petiḥta*, although its complete structure has evidently not been preserved.

10 See Boyarin, *Intertextuality*.

11 The most conspicuous example of this method is probably the core midrash of the Passover Haggadah, which is built on very simple juxtapositions of verses from various parts of the Bible. See the excellent analysis of this passage in Goldschmidt, 30–47. Goldschmidt's discussion is directed primarily against Finkelstein's fanciful historical interpretation of the authors' supposed political and theological agendas (Finkelstein, "Oldest Midrash," 291–317), which he justly refutes. This leads him to the conclusion that the Haggadah *midrash* as we have it was not redacted before the end of the talmudic era. However, it is hard not to be impressed by the structural simplicity of the text; it limits itself to citations of parallel verses without the exegetical or homiletical sophistication that

we find in classic midrash. This quality argues for antiquity of this *midrash* (though not necessarily of its redaction). Readers who are accustomed to more conventional and coherent midrashic expositions, in fact, have found many of its passages utterly cryptic. See also: De Vries, 284–99.

12 Schiffman, 76. Schiffman uses this definition to distinguish between *midrash* and other exegetical terms, such as *perush* and *pesher*. See also Schiffman, 60; 2–4, which formulates a midrashic "principle of similarity" according to which "separate acts of biblical interpretation are completed when one thing (be it a word or phrase) is explained by means of another"; Safrai and Safrai, 130–31 (including comparisons with Qumran *pesharim*).

13 The exceptions were *b. Megillah* 12a ("clever or stupid king"); *b. Soṭah* 11a ("treasure cities" and "Pithom and Raamses"). With respect to the first passage, this fact might suggest that it was a secondary application of the similar dispute about Sennacherib in *b. Sanhedrin* 94a.

14 These include the cognates of *b. Berakhot* 10b (both instances), 61b (= *b. 'Eruvin* 18a), *b. Shabbat* 62b, *b. 'Eruvin* 53a ("Cave of Machpelah" and "new king"), *b. Rosh Hashanah* 21b, *b. Megillah* 11a, *b. Soṭah* 11b, 36b (uncertain), 42a, 42b (apparently), *b. Gittin* 68b, *b. Kiddushin* 72b (apparently), *b. Bava Batra* 91b, *b. Sanhedrin* 39b (uncertain), 44b, 94a. The uncertainty of these numbers reflects the ambiguity of some evidence.

15 *b. Berakhot* 10b, *b. 'Eruvin* 53a ("Cave of Machpelah" and apparently "a new king"), *b. Rosh Hashanah* 21b, *b. Soṭah* 42b (apparently), *b. Gittin* 68b, *b. Kiddushin* 72b (hypothetical), *b. Bava Batra* 91b, *b. Sanhedrin* 44b, 94a.

16 *b. Megillah* 11a.

17 However, an authentic attempt to grapple with the contradictory accounts of the creation of the first man and woman probably underlies *b. Berakhot* 61a and *b. 'Eruvin* 18a. In several other instances, I cited Margoliot's attempts to identify a pattern of literal interpretation that he ascribed to Rav.

18 *b. 'Eruvin* 53a; *b. Soṭah* 11a.

19 If we take a similar approach to some other passages, we might arrive at the following speculative reconstructions:

b. Berakhot 10b: Palestinian sources emphasize the homiletical symbolism of the wall; the comparison underlies their interpretations of King Hezekiah's turning his face to the wall to pray for his health. This might have provoked the Babylonian rabbis to note that the chamber provided by the Shunamite woman for Elishah consisted of more than just a wall, giving rise to a dispute over the precise nature of the construction.

b. Berakhot 10b: The Palestinian tradition's exclusive identification of Elishah's holiness with sexual abstinence was countered in the Babylonian Talmud by an alternative and more general model of holiness, symbolized by the absence of flies.

b. Yoma 75a: Palestinian sources rule out entirely the literal understanding of the Israelites' longing for the fish of Egypt. This would have virtually invited the Babylonian author to contrast that assumption with a literal reading of the verse.

b. Megillah 11a: The Palestinian homilies are all based on the premise that India and Ethiopia, like Tiphsah and Gaza, are neighboring localities—as against the evident intentions of biblical texts to stress the vastness of Solomon's and Ahasuerus's dominions. The Babylonian Talmud therefore supplies a literal reading.

b. Soṭah 14a: The meanings of Rav's and Samuel's interpretions are obscure, but one of them probably amounts to a literal assertion that the "*coats of skins*" were fashioned out of animal skins. If so, then it is reasonable to suppose that this assertion had to be made in order to counterbalance one of the more fanciful interpretations that were current among the rabbis.

b. Soṭah 36b: Notwithstanding opposition between Palestinian and Babylonian traditions over the literal meaning of "*to do his business*," the Babylonian understanding is

more plausible and might reasonably be viewed as an attempt to assert the simple meaning (to work on his master's accounts) against the euphemistic sexual reading that underlies most of the Palestinian homilies.

20 See Frankel; Halivni. A readable introduction to *peshaṭ* can be found in Greenstein, 213–60, especially 217–27. See also his annotated bibliography on 258–59.

21 See Dan 20–23, 133–141; bibliography on 270.

22 In the classic tannaitic compendia of halakhic *midrash*, the realms of *aggadah* and *halakhah* usually remained recognizably distinct. Thus, works ascribed to the schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael can be readily distinguished by the differing hermeneutic methods and terminologies employed in their halakhic sections; whereas the aggadic sections are so similar as to give the impression that the two schools were drawing from a common pool. See Strack and Stemberger, 271–73.

23 Examples of such talmudic tropes are provided in Stemberger, 199–200.

This is not to deny the existence of talmudic-style debates over aggadic interpretations in Palestinian rabbinic works as well. In fact, the phenomenon might have been caused there, too, by the incorporation of aggadic material in the Palestinian Talmud. This is a question that deserves separate investigation. In Palestinian sources, nonetheless, argumentation tends to have a more literary or playful tone—one that does not subvert its homiletical character.

24 This characterization is being applied only to the actual Rav-Samuel disputes and the talmudic materials that relate to them explicitly. Of course, several of those units (e.g., the ones in *b. Soṭah*) are incorporated into lengthy and complex aggadic *sugyas*.

25 It should be borne in mind, though, that much of the Talmud's characteristic intricacy is the product of late redactional strata.

26 The primacy of Palestinian over Babylonian versions, as well as the ingenuity of the Babylonian redactors in combining and reshaping earlier traditions, have been confirmed increasingly in recent literary and philological studies of specific traditions. For an excellent sampling of scholarship, see Rubenstein, 25–26; 310–12.

27 The principal that "the halakhah follows Rav in matters of ritual prohibitions and Samuel in issues of civil law" (*b. Bekhorot* 49b; see *b. Niddah* 24b) should not be seen as a declaration that they were actually more prominent or accomplished in those areas. For studies of their scholarly approaches, see the following: Bokser, *Samuel's*; Bokser, *Post Mishnaic Judaism*; Hoffmann; Weiss. I did not have access to Felten.

28 Stemberger enumerates (201–202) several points of methodological similarity between the extended Babylonian midrashic passages in *b. Soṭah* and *b. Megillah*. These include the introduction of angels to maintain divine control over events; the many name-etymologies and genealogical expositions; and an interest in eschatological dates.

29 On the coexistence of literal, allegorical, and other hermeneutical models for reading Jewish scriptures, see Talmage, 313–55.

30 See Eliezer Segal, "Midrash," 57–65.

31 Smalley.

32 Goldziher, 223–24.

33 See Eliezer Segal, *Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 1:7–11; Stern, 1–38.

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