

## **בן תמליון Ben Temalyon Daf Ditty Yoma 57:**



A **lutin** (French pronunciation: [lytɛ̃]) is a type of hobgoblin (an amusing goblin) in French folklore and fairy tales.

Otzar Laazei Rashi, Talmud, Meilah 1

2389 / (מעילה יז:) / בן תמליון

נוטיון / nutiun / שדון

אולי יש מקום לאחד לעזו זה עם nuitum (מס' 2345). הגרסה של התוספות (לומטו"ך), יכולה להיות שיבוש של לוטי"ן (לוטטי"ן?) - lutin - כצורת המלה הצרפתית של היום.

★ little demon

**Lutins are French house spirits, described as resembling goblins or imps. They're tricky and a bit temperamental but not malevolent, evil or harmful. If they like the people in whose house they live, they will serve as guardians. If**

angered, they play tricks: they'll hide your shoes, mismatch your shoes, tie the laces together or hide pebbles in them. They'll blunt knives and scissors. They can make themselves invisible but you may hear them giggling at your discomfiture.

Lutin can be charmed and bribed into becoming guardians. Be very nice and polite to them and leave food offerings for them in the kitchen after dark. They'll have a bit of whatever you're having except that they dislike salt. Salt placed strategically around a house keeps Lutins away. In exchange for kindness, affection and regular offerings, however the Lutin will guard children, animals, house and land. They will perform household chores at night while the family sleeps.

*The French Jews considered Ben Temalion a kind of "lutin" (goblin or brownie), who in French folk-lore is friendly and helpful to man, but teases him. The Tosafists (on Me'ilah l.c.) remark that Ben Temalion has the appearance of a child and is wont to have his sport with women.*

הַפְּרוֹכֶת אֵלָא כַּנְגַד הַפְּרוֹכֶת \*אָמַר ר' אֲלֵעֹזֵר  
בְּר' יוֹסֵי אֲנִי רְאִיתִיהָ בְּרוּמִי וְהָיָה עָלֶיהָ כְּמָה  
טִיפֵי דְמִים שֶׁל פֶּר וְשַׁעִיר שֶׁל יוֹם הַכְּפֹרִים  
וְדִילְמָא דְפֶר הָעֵלָם דְּבֵר שֶׁל צְבוּר וְשַׁעִיר  
עִזָּו הוּוּ דְחֹזָא דְעֵבִידִי כַסְדָּחַן וְתַנְנָן נְשִׁי  
גְבִי פֶר הָעֵלָם דְּבֵר שֶׁל צְבוּר כִּי הָאִי  
גּוֹנָא כְּשֶׁהוּא מִזָּה לֹא הוּוּ נוֹנְעִין בְּפְרוֹכֶת  
וְאִם נִנְעוּ נִנְעוּ אָמַר רַבִּי אֲלֵעֹזֵר בְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי  
אֲנִי רְאִיתִיהָ בְּרוּמִי וְהָיָה עָלֶיהָ כְּמָה טִיפֵי  
דְמִים שֶׁל פֶּר הָעֵלָם דְּבֵר שֶׁל צְבוּר וְשַׁעִיר  
עִזָּו וְדִילְמָא דְפֶר וְשַׁעִיר שֶׁל יוֹם הַכְּפֹרִים  
נִינְהוּ דְחֹזְנֵהוּ דְעֵבִידִי שְׁלֹא כַסְדָּחַן נְתַעְרְבּוּ

תָּנָא: כְּשֶׁהוּא מְזָה, אֵינּוּ מְזָה עַל הַפְּרוֹכֶת, אֵלָא כַּנְגַד הַפְּרוֹכֶת. אָמַר  
רַבִּי אֲלֵעֹזֵר בְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי: אֲנִי רְאִיתִיהָ בְּרוּמִי, וְהָיָה עָלֶיהָ כְּמָה טִיפֵי  
דְמִים שֶׁל פֶּר וְשַׁעִיר שֶׁל יוֹם הַכְּפֹרִים.

§ A Sage taught: When the High Priest sprinkles the blood, he does not actually sprinkle on the curtain but opposite the curtain. Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Yosei, said: I saw the curtain in Rome.

After a miracle was performed on his behalf and he healed the daughter of the Roman emperor, Rabbi Elazar was permitted to view the ruler's treasures and take whatever he wanted.

He saw the Temple vessels that the Romans captured, including the curtain. Rabbi Elazar continued: And on the curtain were several drops of blood from the bull and the goat of Yom Kippur.

This shows that the blood was actually sprinkled on the curtain.

### RASHI

אני ראיתיה ברומי - במסכת מעילה (דף יז):  
גבי בן תלמיון נעשה נס לר' אלעזר ברבי  
יוסי שריפא את בת מלך רומי שנכנס שד  
בגופה ששמו בן תלמיון והכניסוהו לאוצר  
המלך ליטול כל מה שירצה ולא היה חפץ  
אלא ליטול משם איגרות שכתבו גזירות  
שגזרו על ישראל ומצאם וקרעם ושם ראה  
כלי בית המקדש באוצר:

### Gilyon Hashas

רש"י ד"ה אני ראיתיה ברומי. ושם ראה  
כלי בית המקדש. באבות דר"נ פ' מ"א  
מכתשת של בית אבטינס שלחן ומנורה  
ופרוכת וציץ עדיין מונחים ברומי:

### Steinzaltz

ראיתיה את הפרוכת ברומי שלאחר  
שנעשה לו נס וריפא את בת קיסר רומי,  
ניתנה לו רשות לראות את גנזי הקיסר  
וליטול מהם כפי רצונו והיו שם כלי המקדש  
שנטלו הרומאים וביניהם הפרוכת, והיו  
עליה על הפרוכת כמה טיפי דמים של פר  
ושעיר של יום הכפורים. הרי שהיו מזים  
ממש על הפרוכת!

### Meilah 17b

וְהֵינּוּ דָאֵמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בַּר רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אֲנִי רְאִיתִיהָ בְּעִיר רוֹמַי  
וְהָיוּ עָלֶיהָ כַּמָּה טִיפֵי דָמִים

The Gemara adds: And this is the background for that which Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yosei said (Yoma 57a): I saw the Curtain of the Sanctuary in the city of Rome, and on the Curtain were several drops of blood from the bull and the goat of Yom Kippur. When the emperor took them into his treasury Rabbi Elazar saw the Temple vessels that the Romans had captured when they conquered Jerusalem, including the Curtain.

וְדִלְמָא דְפַר הָעֵלָם דְּבַר שֶׁל צְבוּר וְשְׁעִירֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה הֵווּ!

The Gemara questions this conclusion: But how can Rabbi Elazar be sure that these drops of blood were from the bull and goat of Yom Kippur? Perhaps they were from the bull for an unwitting communal sin or the goats for a sin of idolatry, both of whose blood is also sprinkled on the curtain.

דְּחִזָּא דְעֵבִידֵי כְּסֻדְרוֹן. וְתַנּוּן נְמִי גַבִּי פַר הָעֵלָם דְּבַר שֶׁל צְבוּר כִּי הָאִי  
גְּוֹנָא: כְּשֶׁהוּא מִזָּה, לֹא הָיוּ נוֹגְעִין בְּפְרוֹכַת, וְאִם נִגְעוּ — נִגְעוּ.

The Gemara explains that he saw that these sprinklings of blood were performed in their order, one drop after another, a sequence that is followed only in the Yom Kippur service. And we also learned in a mishna about a case like this with regard to the bull for an unwitting communal sin: When he sprinkles, the blood would not touch the curtain, but if it did touch, it touched, and this did not invalidate the service.

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בַּר־רַבִּי יוֹסֵי: אֲנִי רְאִיתִיהָ בְּרוֹמַי, וְהָיוּ עָלֶיהָ כַּמָּה טִיפֵי  
דָּמִים שֶׁל פַּר הָעֵלָם דְּבַר שֶׁל צְבוּר, וְשְׁעִירֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה. וְדִלְמָא  
דְּפַר וְשְׁעִיר שֶׁל יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים נִינְהוּ? דְּחִזְזִנְהוּ דְעֵבִידֵי שְׁלֵא כְּסֻדְרוֹן.

Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Yosei, said: I saw the curtain in Rome, and there were several drops of blood on it from the bull for an unwitting communal sin and the goats for a sin of idolatry. The Gemara asks: But how could he identify the source of the blood; perhaps they were from the bull and goat of Yom Kippur? The Gemara answers: He saw that they were performed not in their order and inferred that they must be sprinklings from communal sin-offerings, which are not presented in a sequence.

גַּתְעָרְבוּ לוֹ דָּמִים בְּדָמִים, אָמַר רַבָּא: נוֹתֵן אַחַת לְמַעְלָה וְשִׁבְעַ  
לְמַטָּה, וְעוֹלָה לוֹ לְכָאן וְלְכָאן.

The Gemara asks a question: What should the High Priest do if the blood of the bull became mixed with the blood of the goat before he finished all the sprinklings? Rava said: He should present from the mixture once upward and seven times downward, and that counts toward both this one and that one, as he has sprinkled from both of them.

אמרוה קמיה דרבי ירמיה, אמר: בבלאי טפשיאי, משום דדיירי  
בארעא דחשוכא — אמרי שמעתא דמחשכון! הא קא יהיב למעלה  
דשעיר מקמי מטת דפר, והתורה אמרה: "וכלה מכפר את הקדש",  
כלה דם הפר ואחר כך כלה דם השעיר!

They said this answer before Rabbi Yirmeya in Eretz Yisrael, whereupon he said: Foolish Babylonians! Because they live in a dark, low land, they speak darkened halakhot, devoid of logic. If this solution is followed, when the High Priest sprinkles the mixture of bull and goat blood, he thereby presents the upward sprinklings of the goat before he sprinkles the downward presentations of the bull; and the Torah said:

כ וכלה מכפר את-הקדש, ואת-אהל מועד ואת-המזבח; והקריב, את-השעיר הקי. 20 And when he hath made an end of atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting, and the altar, he shall present the live goat.

Lev 16:20

“And when he has finished atoning for the sacred place”, which teaches: He finishes the blood of the bull by sprinkling upward and downward, and only afterward he finishes the blood of the goat.

אלא, אמר רבי ירמיה: נותן אחת למעלה ושבע למטה לשם הפר,  
וחוזר ונותן אחת למעלה ושבע למטה לשם השעיר.

Rather, Rabbi Yirmeya said that the High Priest proceeds as follows: He presents once upward and seven times downward for the purpose of sprinkling the blood of the bull, as the blood of the bull is in this mixture.

And he again presents once upward and seven times downward for the purpose of sprinkling the blood of the goat. Although the blood is mixed together and by sprinkling for the purpose of the bull's blood he also sprinkles some of the goat's blood, since he has only the bull's blood in mind it is as though he did not sprinkle the blood of the goat at all.

## **A "HEKESH" THAT TEACHES A HALACHAH WHICH WAS DERIVED THROUGH ANOTHER "HEKESH"**

**Rav Mordechai Kornfeld** writes:<sup>1</sup>

The Mishnah (55b) discusses where and how the blood of the Par and Sa'ir were sprinkled on Yom Kippur. First, the blood of the Par was sprinkled in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim, with one Haza'ah upward and seven Haza'os downward. Second, the blood of the Sa'ir was sprinkled in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim in the same manner, one Haza'ah upward and seven downward. The Kohen Gadol then went from the Kodesh ha'Kodashim into the Heichal and performed similar Haza'os towards the Paroches: one upward and seven downward from the blood of the Par, and one upward and seven downward from the blood of the Sa'ir.

The Gemara (56b) cites a Beraisa which derives from a Hekesh that the blood of the Par and the blood of the Sa'ir were sprinkled in the Heichal in the same manner (towards the Paroches) that they were sprinkled in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim. The Hekesh (Vayikra 16:16) associates the Ohel Mo'ed (Heichal) with the Kodesh ha'Kodashim.

The Gemara here asks how such a Hekesh can teach a law about the Haza'os in the Heichal. The Gemara earlier (55a) teaches that the sets of Haza'os for the Par and the Sa'ir (one upward and seven downward) are themselves derived through a Hekesh. The Torah specifies only the number of upward Haza'os (i.e. one) that are done with the blood of the Sa'ir; the number of downward Haza'os (i.e. seven) is derived from a Hekesh to the Haza'os of the Par. With regard to the Par, the Torah specifies only the number of downward Haza'os (i.e. seven); the number of upward Haza'os (i.e. one) is derived from a Hekesh to the Sa'ir. How can another Hekesh teach that these Haza'os are also performed in the Heichal? There is a rule that a Hekesh cannot be used to teach a Halachah for Korbanos when that Halachah is derived in the first place through a Hekesh. Only when a Halachah is written explicitly with regard to one type of Korban can a Hekesh teach that the Halachah applies to a second type of Korban.

The Gemara suggests three answers to this question. In its third answer, the Gemara says that the sprinklings performed in the Heichal are derived from the sprinklings performed in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim "at one time."

What do these words mean, and how do they answer the question that a Hekesh cannot teach a Halachah that is derived only through a Hekesh in the first place?

**RASHI** (DH v'Iy Ba'is Eima) explains that the Haza'os of the Kodesh ha'Kodashim that are written explicitly (one upward sprinkling for the Sa'ir and seven downward sprinklings for the Par) may serve as the source for the Haza'os in the Heichal through a Hekesh, because only a single Hekesh is employed. Once a single Hekesh is used to teach a Halachah, that Hekesh can be used to teach laws which are derived from a different Hekesh in the first place (and which need a "double Hekesh" to transfer them, such as the seven downward sprinklings for the Sa'ir and the one upward sprinkling for the Par).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dafyomi.co.il/yoma/insites/yo-dt-057.htm>

**TOSFOS** (DH Chutz) questions Rashi's explanation. He cites a number of instances in which a Hekesh is used to teach a law that is written explicitly in the verse, but the same Hekesh is not used to teach a law that is derived only from an earlier Hekesh. Tosfos explains that Rashi's intention is to say that the case here is unique in that the explicit Halachah for which the Hekesh is originally used (one upward Haza'ah for the Sa'ir and seven downward Haza'os for the Par) is an intrinsic part of the other Halachah which is derived through a double Hekesh. Both laws describe the manner in which the Haza'os were done in the Heichal. Since some of the Haza'os performed in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim are derived from a single Hekesh, the entire procedure of the Haza'os may be learned through a Hekesh. (The **RITZBA**, cited by Tosfos, adds that the verse itself implies that the entire procedure of the Haza'os in the Heichal should be derived from the Haza'os in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim.)

(b) The **RI** (cited by Tosfos) explains that the Gemara means to say that the Hekesh indeed is not used to teach a Halachah that is derived only through an earlier Hekesh. Rather, the Hekesh teaches only Halachos that are written explicitly in the verse. The number of upward Haza'os is written explicitly with regard to the Sa'ir. The Hekesh which associates the Heichal with the Kodesh ha'Kodashim derives from the Sa'ir's single upward Haza'ah in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim that there also must be one upward Haza'ah for the Sa'ir in the Heichal, in addition to one upward Haza'ah for the Par in the Heichal. Similarly, the downward Haza'os in the Heichal for both the Par and the Sa'ir are derived through a Hekesh from the downward Haza'os of the Par in the Kodesh ha'Kodashim.

(c) **RABEINU CHANANEL** has a different Girsah in the Gemara. The Haza'os of the Heichal are learned with (and not from) the Haza'os of the Kodesh ha'Kodashim. That is, when the Torah says, "And so shall be done in the Ohel Mo'ed," it is as though it explicitly teaches the same instructions for the Ohel Mo'ed (Heichal) as it teaches for the Kodesh ha'Kodashim. A Hekesh does not teach which Haza'os are performed in the Heichal. Rather, the verse equates the Heichal with the Kodesh ha'Kodashim with regard to the Haza'os. The only Hekesh that is used is a single Hekesh which teaches that the number of downward Haza'os for the Par and Sa'ir are the same in both the Heichal and Kodesh ha'Kodashim, and the number of upward Haza'os for the Par and Sa'ir are the same in both the Heichal and Kodesh ha'Kodashim.

## **The Blood on the Curtain**

**Steinzaltz (OBM)** writes:<sup>2</sup>

Sprinkling the blood of the par (sacrificial bull) on the kaporet (ark cover) in the Holy of Holies as part of the Yom Kippur service is clearly commanded in the Torah (Vayikra 16:14). The Gemara on our daf quotes a baraita that teaches that in addition, there is a commandment is to sprinkle the blood in the direction of the parokhet (curtain), but not necessarily on the parokhet. This teaching brought Rabbi Elazar b'Rabbi Yossi to testify that on a visit to Rome he had the

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ou.org/life/torah/masechet\\_yoma\\_5157/](https://www.ou.org/life/torah/masechet_yoma_5157/)

opportunity to examine the parokhet, and he saw drops of blood that he recognized as being from the Yom Kippur service. This was clear to him because the drops were in a straight row, and only the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur sprinkled the blood with such precision.

The Me'iri points out that only on Yom Kippur did the kohen gadol stand close to the parokhet when he did the zerikat ha-dam. Other sacrifices that had zerikah on the parokhet were done with the officiating kohen standing behind the golden altar, a distance of more than twenty amot from the parokhet, so it would have been impossible for the kohen to sprinkle the blood with any accuracy.

Rabbi Elazar was the son of the tanna Rabbi Yossi ben Halafta, and lived in the last generation before the redaction of the Mishnah by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. Rabbi Elazar was, apparently, the greatest of Rabbi Yossi's five sons, and already during his father's lifetime he was recognized and honored by his generation.

During a difficult period for the Jews, Rabbi Elazar was part of a delegation to Rome together with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, which tried to get decrees against the Jews rescinded. Once in Rome they were miraculously given the opportunity to heal the Caesar's daughter, who had fallen ill. They took advantage of this opportunity, and after successfully healing her, were given the opportunity to examine the Caesar's coffers, which included the spoils of the Roman victory and sacking of the Land of Israel and the Temple. Rabbi Elazar's examination of the Temple remains allowed him to return to the Sages with information about a number of the utensils from the mikdash, including the parokhet, the tzitz, etc.

### *Superfluous mitzvah observance*

אלא אמר ר' ירמיה נותן א' למעלה ושבעה למטה לשם הפר וחוזר  
ונותן א' למעלה ושבע למטה לשם השעיר

Rather, R' Yirmiyah said: [The Kohen Gadol] places one application above and seven below for the sake of the bull and then one above and seven below for the sake of the goat.

Tosafos Yeshanim<sup>1</sup> asks why the prohibition against adding to the Torah (תוסיף בל) is not violated when the Kohen Gadol follows R' Yirmiyah's suggestion.<sup>3</sup>

They answer that the prohibition is not violated when one adds to a mitzvah as a response to a circumstance of doubt. Other Rishonim (2) dispute this contention and maintain that the prohibition against adding to the Torah is violated even if the addition is performed as a function of doubt.

Rav Moshe Shik (3) ruled that if a person is uncertain whether a mezuzah is supposed to be affixed on the right or left of a doorway he should not affix mezuzos on both sides out of doubt. This is because he is of the opinion that this may violate the prohibition against adding to the mitzvah, even though it is done out of doubt.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://dafdigest.org/masechtos/Yoma%20057.pdf>



Rav Betzael Stern (4), on the other hand, rules leniently. He addressed a case of a person who purchased a home and affixed mezuzos on the doorways. Subsequently, the person discovered that the previous owner had already affixed mezuzos on some of the doorways.

One of the questions addressed was whether there was a violation of the prohibition against adding to the mitzvah by affixing additional mezuzos because one is uncertain of the kashrus of the existing mezuzos. Rav Stern followed the lenient opinions that adding to a mitzvah because of doubt does not violate the prohibition (5).

1. באמצע ד"ה נותן וז"ל "ומשום בל תוסיף ליכא שלא נאמר בל תוסיף אלא כשהוא בעצמו וכו" ועוד דספיקא הוא"
2. ע' שדי חמד פאת השדה כללים מערכת ב' סי' ל"ה בשם הטור והמרדכי ע"ש
3. שו"ת מהר"ם שיק יו"ד סי' רפ"ז שכתב, "אבל לעשות ב' מזוזות לא נראה לפי ענ"ד דלאו שפיר דמי למיעבד הכי דאית ביה חשש דבל תוסיף... אבל כאן דהמזוזות שניהם כשרים אלא שאין צד מזוזות שמאל חייב במזוזות ולכך אם הניח גם בצד שמאל אפשר דעובר על בל תוסיף"
4. שו"ת בצל החכמה ח"ד סי' קס"ה
5. ע' בשו"ת שאילת יעב"ץ ח"א סי' א' שדן בענין מקום קביעת מזוזה שכתב וז"ל, "ולכן מתילה... ושוב נמלכתי וצויתי לעשות מזוזה שניה בימין כניסה מהחצר וכו' והצרכתיו כמו כן ב' מזוזות מפני הספק הנ"ל וכו'", וכן הביא בעל בצל החכמה שם מעשה רב מהרב בעל מנחת אלעזר הנזכר בספר דרכי חיים ושלוש אות תתקס"ה ■

**Mark Kerzner** writes:<sup>4</sup>

Once Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai travel to Rome to annul some evil decrees. They met a demon Ben Tamalyon who offered to help them. The demon possessed the Caesar's daughter, and she became insane.

When the two Sages healed her, the Caesar offered them anything from his treasury. They were only interested in annulling the decrees, which they did. It was then that Rabbi Elazar saw Temple articles and among them the Curtain. He now says that he saw it and it had multiple spots of blood. But there are ways to explain this in a different manner.

## **Foolish Babylonians!**

**RACHEL SCHEINERMAN WRITES:**<sup>5</sup>

If you've been with us a while, you likely recall that after the destruction of the Second Temple, rabbinic Judaism coalesced in two major geographic centers, one in Babylonia and one in the land of Israel. Though separated by many miles, difficult terrain and a border between empires, the two

<sup>4</sup> <http://talmudilluminated.com/yoma/yoma57.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/yoma-57/>

rabbinic communities maintained a strong connection. Scholars called nahotei travelled back and forth and teachings, love and support were exchanged. But as is the case in many large families, there was also a healthy rivalry between the two centers.

On today's daf, we meet one scholar who took that rivalry to the next level. We're still discussing the challenges of sprinkling the blood of the bull and goat on Yom Kippur when the Gemara asks what should be done if the blood of the two sacrifices becomes mixed before the high priest has a chance to sprinkle (a problem the rabbis sought to avoid, as we discussed yesterday, by placing the bowls on the right pedestal — or pedestals — at the right time):

Rava (a Babylonian scholar) said: He should present from the mixture once upward and seven times downward, and that counts toward both this one (bull) and that one (goat) as he has sprinkled from both of them.

Rava offers a simple solution to the problem of mixing up the two bloods: sprinkle in such a way that you will be sure to have done all the sprinkling required for both sacrifices.

Not everyone is satisfied with this solution, however:

*They said this answer before Rabbi Yirmeya (in the land of Israel), whereupon he said: Foolish Babylonians! Because they live in a dark land they speak darkened halakhot.*

Not nice! Rabbi Yirmeya goes on to explain that if the high priest does as Rava suggests, he risks presenting the upward sprinklings of goat blood before he has completed the downward sprinklings of bull blood which causes the entire ritual to be performed out of order, as per his interpretation of Leviticus 16:20. Rabbi Yirmeya offers a different and more complicated solution, sprinkling once upward and then down seven times, then again once upward and again down seven times so that the high priest can be sure to have completed the bull sprinklings before the goat sprinklings.

Who is this guy? Born in Babylonia, Rabbi Yirmeya moved to Israel when he was young. After that, he became convinced that scholars from the land of Israel are superior to their colleagues abroad. Throughout the Talmud, he often refers to those “foolish Babylonians” when he is frustrated by a halakhic opinion offered by a Babylonian scholar (Bekhorot 25b, Zevachim 60b, Menachot 52a and Pesachim 34b).

Occasionally, his teacher Rabbi Zeira does the same (Beitzah 16a, Nedarim 49b).

Rabbi Yirmeya was much respected as a scholar, but he also seems to have been a ... challenging personality. He was once called out for prolonging the final word in the Shema, echad, too much (Berakhot 13b). And he was known to interrupt his own teacher when it was time for prayer (Shabbat 10a). At one point, he asked a particularly arcane and detail-oriented question and got himself booted out of the house of study (Bava Batra 23b). All of this adds up to the image of a scholar who could be a performative know-it-all.

It's interesting that the Babylonian Talmud (which one might expect to have an agenda in this debate) is so tolerant about Rabbi Yirmeya's insults. On Ketubot 75a, he gets the last word in a particularly heated exchange in which a verse from Psalms is brought to bear on the rivalry between Babylonia and the land of Israel:

*“And of Zion it shall be said, this man and this man were born in her, and the Most High shall establish her.” (Psalm 87:5)*

*Rabbi Meyasha, son of the son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, said: Both the man who was actually born in Zion and the one who looks forward to seeing her (are equally considered sons of Zion).*

*Abaye said: And one from there (the Land of Israel) is superior to two of us (from Babylonia).*

*Rava said: And one of us (Babylonians), when he ascends (to the Land of Israel), is superior to two (born and raised in the Land of Israel). As Rabbi Yirmeya, when he was here (in Babylonia) did not even know what the sages say. But when he ascended there, it was he (and not the other sages of the land of Israel) who called us foolish Babylonians.*

In this exchange between Babylonian rabbis, Rabbi Meyasha’s peace-making statement that scholars in both lands are on par is quickly steamrolled by Abaye’s claim that scholars from Israel are superior. Rava sneaks in a final twist, however, claiming that in fact the best scholars are those born in Babylonia who make aliyah and live in the land of Israel — just like Rabbi Yirmeya. It’s an ingenious way of honoring his colleagues in both lands, even the challenging ones, and still scoring a point for team Babylonia.

**Rabbi Johnny Solomon** writes:<sup>6</sup>

A significant disagreement in *our daf* (Yoma 57a) concerns the blood of the Yom Kippur bull and goat offerings that were sprinkled towards the curtain of the Kodesh Kodashim. Specifically, the question raised in the Gemara is whether the blood merely needed to be sprinkled towards the curtain (with its drops not needing to make contact with the curtain), or whether it needed to be sprinkled onto the curtain (such that the drops did need to make contact with the curtain).

As part of the discussion, the Gemara cites testimony of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Yossi who declared that when he (along with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) went to Rome to plead that several decrees be rescinded by the Romans (see Meilah 17b), he saw the curtain (which had been taken by the Romans) and that, on the curtain, were many drops of blood which – as the Gemara then proceeds to explain – were sprinkled with some drops above and seven progressively lower, in accordance of the sprinkling requirements of these offerings. Yet notwithstanding this, the Sages seemed somewhat unconvinced.

However, if Rabbi Elazar saw the curtain, then surely this should be sufficient evidence to support the view that the drops did need to make contact with the curtain? This point is raised by a number of commentaries who explain that it is possible that the law only requires that the blood be sprinkled towards the curtain, but that were the blood to make contact, it would still be permissible. Given this, notwithstanding the reliability of Rabbi Elazar’s testimony it did not conclusively prove whether the blood must make contact with the curtain.

Yet a further point is raised by Rabbi Moshe Druk (in his ‘Birkat Moshe’), based on Yoma 9a, where we learn that many of the Kohanim Gedolim during the second Temple period were not spiritually worthy, and where it is implied that some of them died on Yom Kippur while failing to

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<sup>6</sup> [www.rabbijohnnysolomon.com](http://www.rabbijohnnysolomon.com)

fulfil their responsibilities and duties as they should. Given this, the question he asks is how can any halachic weight whatsoever be given to the blood drops on the curtain that were sprinkled by these Kohanim?

Admittedly, Rav Druk leaves this question with a צריך עיון – meaning that he did not have an answer to this question but thinks that a solution may be found with further consideration. Yet I think that it is important to note that Gemara Yoma does not specifically state that these Kohanim Gedolim performed the sprinkling incorrectly.

Still, I would like to attempt to answer his question by suggesting that while some Kohanim Gedolim did die in the midst of their improper service, if evidence exists of the service of individual Kohanim Gedolim – which in this case is the blood on the curtain - then this evidence lends legitimacy to what they did. And why do I think this? Because while it is easy to think that all actions of flawed people are flawed, then were this to be so, all these flawed Kohanim Gedolim would have died the moment they began their service.

But this is not the case, which suggests that even imperfect Kohanim Gedolim may have done some of their divine service in a perfect manner, and that we can rely on the evidence we have of what they did. And why? Because even an imperfect Kohen standing in the holiest place would have been inspired by the holiness of both the space and time in which he stood.



**Meilah 17b**

## הִכִּירוּ בּוֹ שֶׁהוּא יְהוּדִי הַחֲזִירוּם אָמְרוּ מִי יֵלֵךְ וַיְבַטֵּל הַגְּזֵרוֹת

A short time later **they recognized that** Rabbi Reuven ben Isterobeli **was a Jew**, and they realized that he had fooled them to the advantage of the Jewish people. They therefore arose and **reinstated** all of their decrees. The Sages then **said: Who will go and nullify** these decrees?

יֵלֵךְ רַבִּי שִׁמּוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָי אֲשֶׁר מְלֻמָּד בְּנִסִּים וְאַחֲרָיו מִי יֵלֵךְ רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בַּר רַבִּי יוֹסֵי

Let Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai go to Rome, as he is accustomed to experiencing miracles. And who shall go after him, i.e., with him? Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yosei.

אָמַר לָהֶם רַבִּי יוֹסֵי וְאֵילוּ הָיָה אָבָא הַלְּפָתָא קַיִים וְכוּלִין אַתֶּם לֹמְרִין לֹּו תֵּן בְּנֵךְ לְהַרְיָגָה אָמַר לָהֶם ר' שִׁמְעוֹן אֵילוּ הָיָה יוֹסֵי אָבָא קַיִים וְכוּלִין אַתֶּם לֹמְרִין לֹּו תֵּן בְּנֵךְ לְהַרְיָגָה

When Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Elazar's father, heard this suggestion, he said to the Sages: But if Abba Halafta, my father, were alive, would you be able to say to him: Give your son to be killed? If so, how can you ask me to send my son to Rome, where he is likely to be killed?

Rabbi Shimon said to the Sages: If Yoḥai, my father, were alive, would you be able to say to him: Give your son to be killed? Nevertheless, I am prepared to risk my life and go to Rome, and if so, Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yosei should accompany me.

אָמַר לָהֶוּ רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אָנָּא אֲזַלִּין דְּלָמָא עָנִישׁ לֵיהּ רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן דְּקָא מְסַתְּפִינָא קַבִּיל עָלֵיהּ דְּלָא לֵיעָנְשִׁיהּ אֶפִּילוּ הָכִי עָנְשִׂיהּ

Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yosei said to the Sages: If so, I will go in place of my son. I do not want him to go with Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai, as this is what I fear: My son Elazar is young and quick to answer, and I am concerned lest Rabbi Shimon, who is hot-tempered, will become angry with him and punish him. Rabbi Shimon accepted upon himself that he would not punish Rabbi Elazar. The Gemara notes that even so, Rabbi Shimon did punish him while they were on their journey.

בְּשִׁהְיוּ מְהַלְכִין בְּדֶרֶךְ נִשְׂאָלָה נִשְׂאָלָה זֹו בְּפָנֵיהֶם מִנֵּין לָדָם הַשָּׂרִץ שֶׁהוּא טָמֵא עִקָּם פִּיו רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בַּר רַבִּי יוֹסֵי וְאָמַר וְזֹה לָכֶם הַטָּמֵא אָמַר לֵיהּ רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן מִעֲקִימַת שְׂפָתֶיהָ אַתָּה נִיכָר שֶׁתְּלַמִּיד חָכָם אַתָּה אֵל יַחֲזוֹר הֲבֵן אֶצְלָא אָבִיו

Why did Rabbi Shimon end up punishing Rabbi Elazar?

When they were walking on the road, this following question was asked before them: From where is it derived with regard to blood of a creeping animal that it is impure?

Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yosei twisted his mouth to whisper and said: It is derived from the verse: "And these are they that are impure for you among the creeping animals" (Leviticus 11:29). Although Rabbi Elazar tried to whisper so that Rabbi Shimon would not hear, Rabbi Shimon said

to him: From the twisting of your mouth and your answer it is clear that you are a Torah scholar. Nevertheless, it is prohibited for a student to issue a ruling of halakha in the presence of his teacher. Therefore, I curse you that the son will not return from this journey to his father.

יָצָא לְקִרְאָתוֹ בֶּן תַּמְלִיּוֹן רְצוּנְכֶם אָבוֹא עִמָּכֶם בְּכָה רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן וְאָמַר מֵה שִׁפְחָהּ שֶׁל בֵּית אָבִי נִזְדַּמְּן לָהּ מִלְאָךְ שֶׁלֹּשׁ פְּעָמִים וְאֲנִי לֹא פָעַם אַחַת יָבֵא הַגֵּס מְכַל מְקוֹם

## Rashi

בן תמליון - שד שקורין נוטיו"ן:

## Tosafos

יצא לקראתו בן תמליון - אותו הוא הוא  
שקורין למטוך בלע"ז וכמו תינוק קטן הוא  
ורגיל בין הנשים להתלוצץ בהן:

The Gemara continues the story:

As they were journeying, a demon named ben Temalyon emerged to greet them. He said to them: Do you wish that I will join you and come with you in order to help nullify this decree?

When he saw that a demon was coming to help save the Jewish people, Rabbi Shimon cried and said: What, even for a maidservant of my father's home, Hagar the Egyptian, who was Abraham's handmaid, an angel was made available to appear to her three times to help her. Each of the three mentions of "and the angel of the Lord said unto her" (Genesis 16:9–11) in the story of Hagar is understood as a reference to a different angel. But I apparently do not deserve assistance from an angel even one time, but only help from a demon. In any case, let the miracle come and save the Jewish people, even if only through a demon.

קָדִים הוּא עַל בְּבִרְתִּיָּה דְקִיסָר כִּי מָטָא הֵתָם אָמַר בֶּן תַּמְלִיּוֹן צָא בֶּן תַּמְלִיּוֹן צָא וְכִינּוּן דְקָרוּ לִיה נָפֵק אֲזַל אָמַר לְהוֹן וְשִׂאֵלוּ כָּל מַה דְאִית לְכוּן לְמִישָׂאֵל וְעִיִּילִינְהוּ לְגַנְזִיָּה לְשִׁקוּל כָּל דְבָעוּ אֲשַׁכְּחוּ הָהוּא אִיגְרָא שְׁקִלוּהָ וְקָרְעוּהָ

The demon ben Temalyon went before them and ascended into the emperor's daughter and possessed her.

When Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai arrived there, the emperor's palace, he said: Ben Temalyon, emerge! Ben Temalyon, emerge! And once Rabbi Shimon called to him, ben Temalyon emerged and left the emperor's daughter, and she was cured. When the emperor saw that Rabbi Shimon had cured his daughter, he said to them: Ask from me any reward that you want to ask. And he took them up to his treasury to take whatever they wanted. They found that letter there that contained

the decrees against the Jewish people, and they took it and tore it up, and thereby nullified the decrees.

והגינו דאמר רבי אלעזר בר רבי יוסי אני ראיתייה בעיר רומי ויהו עליה כמה טיפי דמים

The Gemara adds: And this is the background for that which Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yosei said (Yoma 57a): I saw the Curtain of the Sanctuary in the city of Rome, and on the Curtain were several drops of blood from the bull and the goat of Yom Kippur. When the emperor took them into his treasury Rabbi Elazar saw the Temple vessels that the Romans had captured when they conquered Jerusalem, including the Curtain.

The Gemara (Me'ilah 17a) recounts the following story: Once, the Roman Empire decreed that the Jews in Israel would no longer be permitted to keep Shabbat or circumcise their children. Rabbi Reuven ben Istrobeli then took a forelock haircut (a popular haircut among the Romans at the time) and went to sit among the highest echelons of the Roman government. He asked them, "If one has an enemy, is it better for one's enemy to be rich or poor?" They replied, "It is certainly better for him to be poor!" He told them, "If so, it would be better for the Jews not to work on Shabbat." They agreed and abolished the decree against keeping Shabbat.

Rabbi Reuven asked, "If one has an enemy, is it better for the enemy to be healthy and strong or weak?" They answered, "It is certainly better for him to be weak!" He told them, "If so, let the Jews circumcise their newborn boys on the eighth day and they will be weak." They agreed and abolished the decree against circumcising their children.

Sometime later, they became aware that he was actually a Jew and the Romans reinstated all of their decrees. The Sages of Israel wondered who should go to annul these decrees and finally they decided, "Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai should go as he is accustomed to experiencing miracles!" Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yose accompanied Rabbi Shimon.

On their way, a certain demon by the name of Ben Temalyon approached them. The demon asked Rabbi Shimon, "Would you like me to go with you?" Rabbi Shimon cried and said, "Our forefather's maidservant (i.e. Hagar, maidservant of Avraham Avinu) merited that an angel should

come to her three times and I did not merit this even once, as I am only approached by a demon! In any event, let the miracle come, even if only through a demon.” The demon then accompanied the sages. Rabbi Shimon then asked the demon, “What should we do?” The demon replied, “I will enter the Caesar’s daughter to fall ill and you will then be able to nullify the decree.”

Ben Temalyon quickly caused the Caesar’s daughter to become insane. When Rabbi Shimon arrived, he told the Caesar, “I can heal your daughter.” He entered the room and whispered in her ear, “Ben Temalyon, get out! Ben Temalyon, get out!” The demon exited the girl’s body and she was immediately healed. The Caesar said, “Now, request whatever you wish. Enter my vaults and take anything you want.” They then entered the Caesar’s vaults and found the scroll upon which the decrees against the Jewish nation were written. They took it, tore it up, and thus annulled these decrees from upon the Jewish nation.

The lesson we derive from this story is that we can never know where salvation will arrive from. When the State of Israel was established approximately seventy years ago and the heads of the government were not Torah-observant people (and some were actually quite distant from leading a Torah-lifestyle), Maran Rabbeinu Ovadia Yosef zt”l exclaimed, “In any event, let the miracle come. To Rabbi Shimon, Hashem sent Ben Temalyon, and to us, Hashem sent Ben Gurion!”<sup>7</sup>

**Marcus Jastrow, Louis Ginzberg** write:<sup>8</sup>

When the Jewish sages, with Simon b. Yoḥai at their head, went to Rome to obtain the revocation of certain edicts hostile to the Jews, the demon Ben Temalion appeared before them and offered his services. He proposed to enter into the body of a princess of the imperial house, and not to leave her until Simon b. Yoḥai was asked to cure her; for in her madness she would call for him. On Simon b. Yoḥai's whispering the name "Ben Temalion" into the ear of the princess, he would leave her, and as a sign of his departure all the glass in the palace would break. At first the sages did not wish to make use of his services; but as they could think of no other means of obtaining favor for their request, they could not dispense with his help.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://halachayomit.co.il/en/default.aspx?HalachaID=5003>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2889-ben-temalion>



Everything then took place as Ben Temalion had predicted. As a reward for the princess' cure, Simon b. Yoḥai received permission to take whatever he wished from the imperial treasure-house. He found the anti-Jewish edicts there, and, taking them, tore them up (Me'ilah 17b).

In the Talmud this legend occurs only in shortened form; but a more elaborate version is given in the "Halakot Gedolot," ed. Hildesheimer, pp. 603, 604; in the apocalyptic Midrash, "Tefillat R. Simon b. Yoḥai"; in Jellinek, "B. H." iv. 117, 118; and in a MS. printed in ib. vi. 128, 129.

Rashi also, in his commentary on the passage in Me'ilah, cites a Haggadah which gives the legend in a form essentially varying from the one in the Talmud. R. Gershon, in his commentary on the passage, and the so-called Rashi, in Ḥabib's "'En Ya'aqob" on the passage, give an Aramaic version, which is probably the older form of the legend.

In more than one respect this legend is of great interest for comparative folk-lore, occurring, as it does, also in the Christian legends of the saints and in Buddhist tradition. It is related of the apostle Bartholomew that he went to India and there freed the daughter of the king from a devil which possessed her. Instead of accepting a reward, he caused a devil to enter an idol and then bade it leave the statue. Thereupon this statue and all others in the temple were broken.<sup>9</sup>

The kinship of this with the Jewish legend cannot be denied. Yet it is highly improbable that the names of the demon Ben Temalion and Bartholomew are the same, the saint in the one story becoming the demon in the other. Such a metamorphosis, indeed, is not impossible; but, in this event, the demon would be expected to be hostile and not friendly to the Jews; and the fact that other etymologies suggested for the name "Ben Temalion" are hardly acceptable, provides no argument in favor of its identity with "Bartholomew."

The Buddhist legend, which is probably the source of the Jewish and Christian legends, is as follows: A demon, desiring to please a man, promises to enter into a princess and not to leave her until bidden to do so by certain words spoken by the man. This happens; the man obtains the princess as his wife and receives one-half of the king's realm.<sup>10</sup>

The French Jews considered Ben Temalion a kind of "lutin" (goblin or brownie), who in French folk-lore is friendly and helpful to man, but teases him. The Tosafists (on Me'ilah l.c.) remark that Ben Temalion has the appearance of a child and is wont to have his sport with women. Whether this was the original representation of Ben Temalion is very questionable.

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- Israel Lévi, *ib.* viii. 200-202, x. 60-73;
- Lebrecht, in *Geiger's Jüd. Zeit.* xi. 273-278 (he holds that Ben Temalion was originally the name of a Senator friendly to the Jews);
- Schorr, in *He-Ḥaluz*, viii. 123

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<sup>9</sup> Fabricius, "Codex Apocryphus N. T." i. 674 et seq.; Tischendorf, "Acta Apostol. Apocrypha," 246 et seq.; Migne, "Dictionnaire des Apocryphes," ii. 153-157

<sup>10</sup> "Panchatantra," ed. Benfey, i. 520; ed. Lancereau, p. 20

## “Do Not Go Out Alone at Night”

**Sara Ronis** writes:<sup>11</sup>

My project focuses on the modes of controlling, avoiding, and appropriating demons in the Babylonian Talmud, with particular attention to rabbinic legal discourse. Though scholars have largely overlooked demons as a source of information about rabbinic law, cross-cultural interaction, and theology, this dissertation has asked how the inclusion of rabbinic demonology enriches our picture of rabbinic discourse and thought in Late Antique Sasanian Babylonia.

I analyze rabbinic legal passages relating to demons within their larger textual, redactional, and cultural – Zoroastrian, Christian, and ancient Near Eastern – contexts, in order to uncover and highlight the discursive choices made by Babylonian rabbis in their legislation regarding demons, and in their constructions of the demonic.

In my examination of demonic discourse in the Babylonian Talmud, I make three central claims. First, the rabbis neutralized the threat of demons by subjugating the demonic to rabbinic halakhah. Second, the rabbis treat demons in the same way that they treat other topics recognized by later readers as normative. I demonstrate that, in fact, demons were an important part of normative rabbinic law for the Babylonian sages of the Talmud. Third, rabbinic discourse about demons is part of a much larger cultural matrix of demonic discourse in Sasanian Babylonia, in which ancient Mesopotamian beliefs about demons existed side-by-side with contemporaneous Zoroastrian, Manichean, and Syriac Christian demonic discourses. I argue that the rabbis constructed demons as subjects of rabbinic law in ways that adopt, adapt, and reject particular cultural options available to them. When rabbinic demonic discourse is fully contextualized, it becomes clear that it aligns in *content* with ancient Mesopotamian discourse about demons, but in *form* with contemporaneous Zoroastrian legal discourse about demons.

This act of cultural bricolage results in the creation of a uniquely rabbinic perspective. In order to make these claims, this dissertation is organized in concentric circles beginning with rabbinic law, and expanding outward to include rabbinic narratives, material evidence, and Ancient Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Zoroastrian, Armenian, and Syriac Christian parallels and approaches.

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<sup>11</sup> “Do Not Go Out Alone at Night”: Law and Demonic Discourse in the Babylonian Talmud. Ph.D. Dissertation. Yale University, 2015.

The first chapter reviews previous scholarship on demons in ancient Judaism and religious studies more broadly and lays out the theoretical model for my study of those ancient texts which deal with demons. My work draws on the Foucauldian theory of discourse, advances in the study of religion and magic within both religious studies and social anthropology, the French field of ethnopsychiatry, and the renewed interest in situating the Babylonian rabbis within their Iranian cultural context, in order to take seriously the ways that the rabbis talk about demons, and the ways demons function in real and embodied ways in their literature.

The second chapter examines one extended passage in the Babylonian Talmud (b. *Pesaḥim* 109b-112a) using source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism, in order to create a basic model of Babylonian rabbinic demonic discourse. I argue that the Babylonian rabbis neutralize demons by turning them into subjects, informants, and teachers of rabbinic law, thus subjugating them to the legal system. When demons are subjugated to rabbinic law, the very nature of what it means to be a demon changes: as demons become neutral, rather than necessarily malevolent beings, they do not harm the rabbis and their followers. Instead, the demons themselves have become followers of the rabbis.

The third chapter highlights those areas where the Babylonian rabbis differed from the Jewish traditions they inherited, by comparing demonic discourse in the law and narratives of the Babylonian Talmud with those of Second Temple literature and Palestinian rabbinic literature. I show that the Palestinian rabbis continued earlier Second Temple period (third century BCE through first century CE) models of demonology that focus on narratives of demonic origins. By contrast, while the Babylonian rabbis retained many of the narrative themes found in Second Temple Literature, they also chose a new approach and dealt with demons through halakhic (legal) discourse. I argue that the Babylonian rabbis recognized that their approach to the demonic was different from that their Palestinian confreres – as did the Palestinian rabbis – and this difference became an important part of each community’s self-differentiation from the other.

The fourth chapter contextualizes Babylonian rabbinic demonic discourse within early Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Zoroastrian, Armenian, and Syriac Christian literatures, as well as the Babylonian incantation bowls. Though the demonology of the Babylonian Talmud has often been dismissed as Persian superstition, I suggest that, in fact, it was neither Persian nor superstition. I show that Babylonian rabbinic demonic discourse aligns in content with earlier Sumerian and Akkadian understandings of the demonic and adopts only the form of legal discourse from the contemporaneous Zoroastrian elite.

My purpose is not to argue that there was direct borrowing or influence, but rather to situate rabbinic demonology within the wider cultural network of Sasanian Babylonia in order to highlight the particular discursive moves of the Babylonian rabbis. The alignment of the content of rabbinic discourse of demons with earlier Mesopotamian understandings of the demonic, against contemporaneous Zoroastrian and Christian demonic discourse is thus an important data point as scholars continue to determine the relationship, and interrelationships, of Babylonian rabbinic and Sasanian texts and ideas.

In my conclusion I argue that rabbinic discourse related to demons functioned to situate the rabbis as a religious and intellectual elite distinct from and empowered over non-rabbinic Jews of Babylonia. Using the form of legal discourse, the rabbis aligned themselves with elite Zoroastrians. Yet paradoxically, while this discourse contributed to the construction of a rabbinic elite, its disinterest in engaging with Mandaean and Manichaean demonological traditions meant that non-rabbinic Jews would continue to turn to multiple non-rabbinic sources of authority to deal with those demons ignored by the rabbis.

The bowls in particular attest to a widespread belief in a range of demons that crossed religious boundaries; the refusal of religious literary elites to recognize and interact with these more widespread beliefs meant that believers continued to turn to different ritual specialists for apotropaic and exorcistic rites. Thus, non-rabbinic Jewish eclecticism is, to some extent, a product of the rabbinic self-perception as a particular, insular, type of elite.

My conclusion further extends the study of rabbinic demonology to discussions of monotheism in the ancient world, arguing that for the rabbis, monotheism was a messy construct which allowed for autonomous intermediary beings, while the integration of demons in monotheism also allowed the rabbis to differentiate themselves from their dualistic and Trinitarian neighbors.

My conclusion also makes explicit my work's contribution to the refinement of broader theories of demons, magic, and religion, by situating demonological concerns within the realm of normative religion and not that of non-normative magic. Exploring those areas of religious tradition that have been dismissed as non-normative or folkloristic allows us to uncover values, relationships, and strategies previously unknown not only in the field of Jewish Studies but also in the history of ideas and the study of theology in Late Antiquity.

In this dissertation, then, a sustained examination of a single *sugya* in b. *Pesahim* is expanded outwards and contextualized so as to shed light on rabbinic demonology as a whole, rabbinic legal

discourse, inherited interpretive traditions, the shared cultural networks of Sasanian Babylonia, and theological competition in the Late Antique world.

## **Rabbinic Traditions about Rome in the Babylonian Talmud**

*L'usage des traditions rabbiniques à propos de Rome dans le Talmud de Babylone*

**Ron Naiweld** writes:<sup>12</sup>

### **The Symbolic Existence of Rome and the Babylonian Talmud**

1 There are many ways in which an Empire exists – as a political entity organizing various aspects of the life of its habitants; as an economic power, producing and distributing riches and controlling the division of labor; as a global actor, negotiating with foreign political entities, trying to conserve its interests while constantly redefining them. All of these “imperial forms of existence” are more or less easy to discern; they are traceable, since they produce objective evidence. This, however, is hardly true in the case of the form of existence that will be dealt with in this article. For, besides being or having an economic, political, and military power, an empire also constitutes a symbolic one; in other words, it exists in the minds of the people, whether they live inside it, or in countries and regions where its influence can be felt. The symbolic power of an empire is certainly supported by its economy and military force but, at the same time, it contributes to their success; it determines the range and the depth of its influence and plays a crucial role in the relationship that the empire entertains with its internal and external others, whether they are individuals, cities, provinces, or neighboring empires.

- 1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, transl. Gino Raymond and Matthe (...)

2 By using the term “symbolic power” I am indebted mainly to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who articulated this idea in the context of modern state and society.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we can define it as the capacity of the group holding this power to impose its will on others without using physical force. The subjects who obey the will of the symbolically powerful empire will do so because they have internalized the values and the worldview of the empire, and therefore believe in the necessity of their domination.

- 2 This, to a certain extent, is the project of Clifford Ando’s 2000 book, in which theories of Haberm (...)

3 The symbolic power of an empire is much more difficult to grasp than its more visible powers, since it has a very strong subjective dimension that may change from one person to the other, even when both of them entertain the same “objective” relationship with the empire in question. In this paper I will not attempt, of course, to offer an account of the symbolic power of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> What I will try to do instead is to show how this symbolic power was perceived outside

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<sup>12</sup> <https://journals.openedition.org/rhr/8557?lang=en>

the Roman Empire, by a group of people whose religious, ideological, and cultural relationships with the empire were multilayered and extremely complex. The group in question consisted of some Babylonian Jews who were active in Babylonia between the third and the seventh centuries, and who integrated stories and anecdotes about Rome into their teachings. These, in turn, were compiled in various places in the Talmud of Babylonia that was redacted between the sixth and eighth centuries in the Sasanian Empire.

- 3 P. Bourdieu, *Language*, p. 170.

4But before entering the crux of the discussion, I must answer the following question – how can one speak of a symbolic power *outside* the realm of the actual, recognized political power of the entity in question: the Roman Empire? Indeed, when Bourdieu articulates the concept of “symbolic power” he refers to its appearance inside the political or social system in which it operates. A symbolic power cannot oppress someone who is outside its sphere of influence. This assumption is so obvious that Bourdieu does not even bother to state it. The political entity that exercises symbolic power does so by what Bourdieu calls “symbolic instruments”: ideologies, symbolic objects and forms, and finally means of communication that will allow the articulation and the propagation of the imperial perception of the world. But in order to function, a symbolic power *has to be recognized* by those affected by it. Thus, according to Bourdieu, the “symbolic power does not reside in ‘symbolic system’ in the form of an ‘illocutionary force’ but [...] it is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it”.<sup>3</sup>

5Can we talk then about the Babylonian Jews who redacted the Babylonian Talmud as “those who submit” to the symbolic power of the Roman Empire? The basic assumption of the present article is that the answer to this question is positive, but that it requires us to rethink the relationship between the two categories that Bourdieu defines too rigidly – those who exercise the symbolic power and those who submit to it. The analysis proposed here will allow us not only to nuance the relationship between the two categories, but also to propose that, at least in the case examined here, an actual political power takes on a symbolic life of its own, which has the potential to be manipulated in unpredictable ways. As we will see, the image of Rome created in the second and third centuries by Palestinian rabbis had an enormous influence on the nascent rabbinic movement in Babylonia. The Babylonian rabbis used it in order to define not only themselves, but also the amorphous and politically and geographically dispersed entity that was Israel. The acceptance of the Babylonian Talmud as the defining religious corpus of the Jewish people guaranteed that even after the fall of Rome, its symbolic power would continue to design the experience of the Jews.

### Rome in Babylonia?

- 4 Richard Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (...)

6The redactors of the Babylonian Talmud, as well as the rabbis who were active in Babylonia before them, considered themselves to be members of a religious, intellectual, and ideological movement that was born in Roman Palestine. They organized their curriculum according to the Mishnah – a text redacted in Palestine at the beginning of the third century. Their teachings were based in large part on texts and traditions that came from Palestine before and after the redaction

of the Mishnah. As Richard Kalmin has shown, the Babylonian rabbis received Jewish Palestinian traditions that originated outside rabbinic circles,<sup>4</sup> but their main source was rabbinic compilations and compositions produced in Palestine between the second and fourth centuries CE. In other words, the basis of rabbinic activity in Babylonia consisted of a group of texts that were redacted in a Roman environment and contained many explicit and implicit references to Roman practices, ideas, and values. These texts transmitted an image of Rome that the Babylonian rabbis used and reshaped in ways that will be examined in this article. But before that, we must first better understand one essential quality of the Palestinian rabbinic image of Rome.

- **5** Seth Schwartz, “‘Rabbinic Culture’ and Roman Culture,” *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman* (...)
- **6** Of course, one should not consider that the Palestinian relation to Rome was the same throughout la (...)

<sup>7</sup>The presumption of this article, every part of which can admittedly be debated, is that Palestinian rabbis used Roman ideas, values, and practices in order to define their own identity. By distinguishing themselves from the Roman other, they could conceive of their “rabbinic” selves. Seth Schwartz has argued that the Palestinian rabbinic opposition to Rome was profound and virulent, not so much on a political level as on a cultural and ideological one.<sup>5</sup> The Palestinian rabbis thought of Rome as the wicked kingdom that in its very existence and by its cruel and mighty power denied the full realization of their project. In fact, the rabbis inherited the old conception of Rome as the great enemy of the Jews and fashioned it in order to promote their own version of Judaism. Thus, one of the messages coded in the Palestinian rabbinic traditions about Rome is that since Rome is the enemy of Judaism, and since the Judaism that provokes Rome’s animosity is rabbinic Judaism, then the latter is the legitimate and normative form of Judaism.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The ideological potential of this message is clear, and it is out of the scope of this article to ask what contribution it made to the long and complex process of the “rabbinization” of Palestinian Judaism. What is important for us to keep in mind is that the Palestinian rabbis thought of themselves as living in the land of the enemy, but on a very important symbolic level this land was still their own: Rome was the land of exile, but at the same time it was home. This double dimension of the empire, a place that is both home and exile, is what made the Palestinian image of Rome so complex, intense, and rich.

- **7** This point touches the general problem concerning the relationship of Babylonian rabbis to the land (...)
- **8** The view of Babylonia as home is already found in the Tosefta, probably redacted in Palestine in th (...)
- **9** In fact, during the Geonic period, when the stakes of the conflict between the Palestinian and Baby (...)

<sup>9</sup>When the Palestinian rabbinic traditions arrived in Babylonia, in the third and fourth century CE, they brought with them this highly charged image of Rome. What they did not bring, however,

was the context in which the rabbinic opposition to Rome was originally articulated and developed. To put it simply, for the Babylonian rabbis, Rome was not home. Thus, when they studied and reworked the Palestinian traditions, they were free to develop the idea of Rome as the land of exile, without being very troubled by the fact that the land of Israel was situated inside it. Their homeland was Babylonia, and the very fact that they engaged in rabbinic activity in the land of *their* fathers, showed that they considered that the full realization of the rabbinic identity could take place outside of Eretz Israel, in the paradigmatic place of the *galut* – Babylonia.<sup>7</sup> Although they were aware of the fact that on some level they lived in exile, still, for them, Babylonia was home,<sup>8</sup> and Rome came to represent where the exile was.<sup>9</sup>

- **10** The following statement of Rabbi Hiya, a second-century Palestinian Sage of Babylonian origin, seem (...)
- **11** As years went by, Palestinian Rome got more and more distant chronologically, but also geographical (...)
- **12** For a brilliant analysis of some case studies of Babylonian manipulation of Palestinian sources, se (...)

<sup>10</sup>Thus, the rabbinic image of Rome stood in Babylonia for something quite different than in Palestine; it became a conceptual *lieu de mémoire*, a new paradigmatic place of the *galut*, where Judaism was compromised and put in danger.<sup>10</sup> Like their Palestinian counterparts, the Babylonian rabbis viewed Rome as the greatest enemy of Judaism, but it was an abstract enemy and not an actual one; for them Rome was mainly the *image* of a political and ideological power. In other words, it did not represent an actual power, with which they had to deal on a daily basis; its symbolic value was not intertwined with political, social, economic, and religious factors that had a real impact on their everyday life. Thanks to the fact that the actual Rome was elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> the Babylonian image of it was free to become the unquestionable and eternal *Other* of rabbinic Judaism,<sup>12</sup> a mirror image of “Israel”.

### ***Status Quaestionis* – The Representation of Rome in the Bavli**

- **13** According to Neusner’s documentary approach, a rabbinic text can only reflect the historical reality (...)

<sup>11</sup>No study has been dedicated so far to the question of the representation of Rome in the Babylonian Talmud. Two important books deal with the image of Rome and Persia in rabbinic literature in general: Samuel Krauss’s Hebrew book from 1947, *Persia and Rome in the Talmud and the Midrashim* (Jerusalem, Bialik Institute), and Jacob Neusner’s *Persia and Rome in Classical Judaism*, from 2008. Both books can be regarded as compilations of rabbinic sources with some analysis. Krauss divided his book into thematic sections in which he organized pericopes, stories, laws, and traditions from the entire range of classic rabbinic literature, with very little attention to the date or provenance of the teaching in question. Neusner, loyal to his “documentary” approach, divided the texts according to the supposed date of redaction of the compilation in which they occur.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to Krauss, Neusner is aware of the historicity of the



sources, and he articulates a historical development in which the main turning point is in the fourth century with the Christianization of the Roman Empire. It is as of this moment, according to him, that rabbinic redactors refer to Rome mainly as a Christian entity that is a theological rival and not a political one.

<sup>12</sup>Neusner's picture is too schematic and simple. Just like Krauss, he does not distinguish between Palestinian and Babylonian texts. He relies solely on the chronological factor, without giving any attention to the geographical one. Thus, he includes Palestinian exegetical compilations in the same section as the Bavli since he assumes that all these texts were redacted during the same period (500 to 600 CE). However, the bare fact that the Talmud of Babylonia was redacted outside the Roman Empire makes the geographical factor extremely important.

- <sup>14</sup> See the recent book: Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context*, P (...)
- <sup>15</sup> See R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*; Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, Chicago, Chicago Univ (...)

<sup>13</sup>The discussion proposed here is also connected to what can be qualified as a growing tension inside contemporary Talmudic studies. On one pole of this tension stands a group of scholars, Yaakov Elman being probably their most engaged defender, who emphasize the Zoroastrian context of the Talmud of Babylon, claiming that its redactors are heavily influenced by their Sasanian religious and political environment, and that in order to fully understand the environment of the Bavli, the Persian one must be taken into consideration.<sup>14</sup> In many ways this position can be understood as a reaction to the more traditional view, held more or less implicitly by many past and present scholars according to whom the Babylonian Talmud is a rabbinic text, and by rabbinic they mean a product of a Jewish Palestinian ideological/religious movement. These scholars have assumed that when rabbinic discourse arrived in Babylonia, it preserved its intrinsic rabbinic and Palestinian traits and continued to develop according to its own logic without being heavily influenced, if at all, by its Persian environment. In recent years, and not without connection to the growing interest in the Zoroastrian context of the Babylonian Talmud, new scholarship has been trying to defend this traditional position. Thus, Daniel Boyarin considers the rabbinic class in Babylonia as Hellenistic, when he points out, for instance, the affinities between the Babylonian Talmud and platonic dialogues. Richard Kalmin speaks of a rabbinic class whose main influence was literary and not circumstantial. Thus, he claims that Palestinian rabbinic and non-rabbinic materials that arrived in Babylonia in the course of the fourth century influenced the development of rabbinic discourse much more than the actual historical context.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>The present article does not intend to take part in this polemic. It may, however, shed some light on it by examining the use of the Palestinian traditions by the Babylonian rabbis, and the ways in which a Palestinian image, that of Rome in our case, was imported and manipulated in the Babylonian context.

## **Eternal Rome and the Scholasticization of Rabbinic Discourse**

- **16** According to the New York manuscript – R Shila (a Palestinian rabbi contemporary to R. Simlai).
- **17** J. L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 215-242.
- **18** *Ibid.*

15One of the best examples of the different attitude of Babylonian rabbinic discourse towards Rome with regard to Palestinian rabbinic sources is the eschatological *aggadah* from the beginning of the *Avodah Zarah* tractate. The *aggadah*, in Hebrew, is attributed to Palestinian sages either from the end of the third century (R. Hanina ben Papa) or the first half of the same century (R. Simlai<sup>16</sup>). However, the Hebrew narrative is interrupted many times with interrogations, explanations, and discussions – most of them in Aramaic. J. Rubenstein, who analyzed this text,<sup>17</sup> sees here a classic case of an intervention of the later redactors of the text, the *stamaim*, who were active circa the eighth century.<sup>18</sup>

- **19** Translation based on the Paris manuscript.

16The Hebrew text begins by telling how in the “future to come,” God “will bring the book of the Torah and set it in his lap and say: ‘Everyone who busied himself with this may come and take his reward.’<sup>19</sup>” The story goes on to tell how several kingdoms presented themselves before God in response to his call. The first one is Rome, who enters “right away”. The Aramaic gloss breaks that narrative here in order to ask why the Romans were the first to enter. The answer it provides is falsely simple – “because they are the most important”.

17In fact, what the Babylonian gloss does is to reverse the meaning of the original story. Read without the Aramaic interpolation, the story depicts Rome as a pretentious and insolent kingdom, who hurries to answer God’s call. Indeed, the mere suggestion that the Romans can be considered as people who “busied themselves with the Torah” should make the readers or listeners of the original story laugh. But for the Babylonian redactors, this critique disappears; they give a very straightforward explanation to the fact that Rome entered first – it is the most important kingdom. Moreover, in the parable they use in order to prove that the most important one enters first, they compare Rome to a king. In short, the power of Rome is taken by them much more seriously, and without a hint of irony.

18What this Babylonian passage shows us is how the rabbis in Babylonia ignored, consciously or not, the emotional impact that such declarations about the greatness of Rome could have had on their Palestinian colleagues. Rome, as I would like to claim, represents in Babylonian rabbinic literature a discursive object rather than a real one. This, of course, did not happen overnight, and when the Palestinian traditions about Rome first arrived in Babylonia it was still difficult to disconnect them from the historical background from which they had emerged.

19Some passages from the Bavli attest to the process through which Palestinian-Roman traditions were discharged from their immediate emotional impact:

A. Rabbi Yehoshoua ben Levi in the name of Rabbi [Yehuda the patriarch] said: Rome will fall into the hands of Persia, as it is said: “Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord, that He has taken against Edom, and His purposes that He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman. The young of the flock will be dragged away, their habitation will fall upon them” (Jer. 49:20).

- **20** This is how I translate כִּי סָלִיק רַב, assuming that the word “Rav” refers to Ben Ulla, and that the t (...)
- **21** Tiras is the youngest of Japheth’s sons, according to the list in Genesis 10:2.

B. Rabbah ben ‘Ullah objected: What indicates that ‘the young of the flock’ refers to Persia? [Presumably] the following verse: “The ram which you saw with two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia” (Dan. 8:20). But this may refer to Greece, for it is written: “And the rough goat is the king of Greece” (Dan. 8:21).

When the master left,<sup>20</sup> Habiba b. Surmaki reported this [exchange] before a certain master. The latter said: One who cannot interpret Scripture objects Rabbi?

What, indeed, does “the young of the flock” mean? The youngest of his brethren, for R. Joseph learnt that Tiras is Persia.<sup>21</sup>

C. Rabbah ben Bar Hana said: R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Yehudah b. Ila’i: Rome will fall into the hands of Persia. That may be concluded *a fortiori* : The first Temple was built by the sons of Shem and destroyed by the Chaldeans [and then] the Chaldeans fell into the hands of the Persians. How much more should this be so with the second Temple, built by the Persians and destroyed by the Romans, that the Romans should fall into the hands of the Persians.

D. Rav said: Persia will fall into the hands of Rome. R. Kahana and R. Assi asked him: [Shall] the builders fall into the hands of the destroyers? He said to them: Yes, it is the decree of the King. Others say: He said to them: They also destroy synagogues.

E. It has also been taught: Persia will fall into the hands of Rome, first because they destroyed the synagogues, and then because it is the King’s decree that the builders fall into the hands of the destroyers.

- **22 b.** Yoma 10a. For bibliography see R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 232, note 11 and notes hereafter.

F. Rav also said: The son of David will not come until the wicked kingdom has spread over the whole world for nine months, as it is said: “Therefore He will give them up, until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; and the rest of his brothers shall return with the children of Israel” (Mic. 5:2).<sup>22</sup>

- **23** See Isaiah Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A social and Cultural History*, Jerusal (...)
- **24** Richard Kalmin, who argues against the assumption that the rabbis perceived the third century in Ba (...)

20 Most historical readings of this passage concerned themselves with the changing attitude of the rabbinic class towards Persia during the third century.<sup>23</sup> These readings rely on the common assumption in Talmudic scholarship that one can detect a rupture in the rabbinic and Jewish attitudes towards Persia during the tormented transition period from the Parthian to Sasanian rule in the first half of the third century, and the persecutions of Kerdir towards the end of that century. They assume therefore that while parts **A** to **C** (“Rome will fall into the hands of Persia”) reflect Jewish antagonism towards Rome in Palestine, parts **D** to **E** (“Persia will fall...”) are the expression of the distress of Jews in Babylonia during the third century.<sup>24</sup> However, the picture seems to be more complicated than that. In fact, this passage is a compilation of several traditions, not organized according to their chronological order, which reflect the evolution of the rabbinic relation to Rome in *both* Palestine and Babylonia.

- **25** This, in fact, may be regarded as a Palestinian rabbinic *topos* that some scholars date back to the (...)
- **26** See I. Ben Shalom, “Rabbi Judah B. Illai’s Attitude towards Rome,” *Zion* 49/1 (1984), p. 9-24 (in He (...))

21 The passage suggests that a Palestinian rabbinic tradition, according to which Persia will conquer Rome,<sup>25</sup> existed already in the middle of the second century – Yehudah ben Ilai’s period of activity (part **B**).<sup>26</sup> The latter knew the horrors of the Bar Kokhba war, and his hope for the decline of Rome is thus more than understandable and does not need to be justified. Indeed, he did not bother to corroborate it with exegesis, since his interlocutors, in post-war Palestine, knew exactly what he was speaking of and probably identified with his message.

22 Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch (part **A**), who was active at the beginning of the third century, could not or did not wish to ignore or repudiate the old tradition that predicted the annihilation of Rome by the Persians. But at the same time he could not fully adhere to it on a political level. The beginning of the third century is considered to be a “golden era” for the post-70 relations of Jews and Romans in Palestine, and the Patriarch himself was close to the Roman government. Therefore he transformed Yehudah ben Ilai’s original saying into a rabbinic exegesis.

23 Part **B** shows that in the second half of the fourth century, a Babylonian rabbi, Rabbah ben Ulla, revised the teaching attributed to Rabbi. He proposed a better interpretation that questioned the validity of the rabbi’s affirmation, and suggested that Greece, and not Persia, would conquer Rome. Rabbah ben Ulla’s objection was clever, and it is even possible that Habiba, reporting it to “a certain master,” did so out of enthusiasm – he wanted to share with him a good argument. The rabbi reacted, however, in a rather violent way and described ben Ulla as a pretentious scholar who knew nothing about interpreting Scripture.

- **27** The term “Greece” is used sometimes to refer to the Parthian Empire in the Bavli.
- **28** See for example A. Oppenheimer, “Links,” p. 128, which speaks about certain hegemony of the Palesti (...)

24Now, we cannot know what real political entities Rabbah ben Ulla had in mind when he spoke about Greece<sup>27</sup> and Rome, but if I had to take a guess I would say none. It seems simply that when teaching or revising the rabbi's statement, he came up with a rather clever objection based on a possible scriptural interpretation. The harsh reaction of the master who hears his teaching may indeed be attributed to the fact that ben Ulla dared to question a *midrash* of the great Rabbi Yehuda, but I think that it is possible to detect here more than a simple criticism of ben Ulla's disrespect to his superior. What the rabbi condemns is ben Ulla's indifference with regard to the Palestinian aspiration to end Roman rule, an aspiration that must have been felt in the fourth century, by Palestinian rabbis but also by some of their Babylonian counterparts, who considered themselves to be members of the same movement, sharing the same destiny, hopes, and aspirations.<sup>28</sup> When ben Ulla interprets Rabbi's teaching in a purely scholastic way, without paying attention to its emotional significance, he dissociates himself from his Palestinian colleagues; his scholastic approach to Rabbi's teaching shows that he ignores its true meaning – more than a simple *midrash* it is the expression of a political hope (the fall of Rome) that for some of his colleagues is still alive.

- **29** The literature is abundant. See for example I. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia*, p. 39-43.
- **30** Several scholars have dealt specifically with the reference to Persia as destroying synagogues. Mos (...)

25Parts D-F postulate an opposite view to the one expressed in parts A and C. This view is attributed to Rav, one of the founders of the rabbinic movement in Babylonia, who was active during the first half of the third century – in other words, a period of transition between the Parthian and Sasanian empires that caused trouble and turmoil among Babylonian Jews.<sup>29</sup> If the attribution of this statement to him is correct, we can thus perfectly understand its background, especially if we remember that Rav, who was a student of Rabbi in Galilee, knew the relatively good condition of Jews in Palestine at the beginning of the third century.<sup>30</sup>

- **31** Part E shows that this tradition also existed anonymously; but it would be safe to claim that it wa (...)
- **32** Both Kalmin and Rosenthal consider that the second argument (they destroy synagogues) is a late int (...)
- **33** See I. Gafni, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 116.

26Rav's statement is not supported by Scripture but by two arguments:<sup>31</sup> 1. It is the decree of God ("the King") and 2. The Persians destroy synagogues just like the Romans destroyed the Temple.<sup>32</sup> The first argument is prophetic while the other expresses anger towards Persian rule for its awful deeds – these are compared to the destruction of the Temple!<sup>33</sup> In other words, both arguments are the expression of the frustration of some Babylonian Jews vis-à-vis Persia, and their genuine preference to be under Roman rule, which they consider as a lesser evil.

27The passage ends with an eschatological account (part F), which is impressively mild. No global war is mentioned, no mass destruction is predicted, only an expansion of the "wicked kingdom"

in the entire world “for nine months”. Now, it is always dangerous to connect two separate teachings in the Bavli, but in this case one must at least raise the possibility that the redactors of this passage allude to a tradition brought by a *sugiya* of tractate Megila:

- **34 b.** Megillah 6a-b.

What is meant by the verse “Do not grant, God, the desires of the wicked, do not draw out their bit, so that they exalt themselves, *selah*” (Ps 140:9)? Jacob said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, do not grant to Esau the wicked the desire of his heart, do not draw out his bit. This refers to *Germamia* of Edom, for without them, they [the Romans] would destroy the entire world...**34**

28The picture portrayed by this description is that of a powerful empire that is always *on the verge* of becoming a world empire, but is blocked by another power that counterbalances it. It will be interesting to compare this tradition to what is probably its Palestinian pendant, from *Genesis Rabbah*. The Babylonian version, contrary to the Palestinian one, is followed by a teaching of Hama ben Hanina according to which “there are three hundred crowned heads in Germamia of Edom and three hundred and sixty-five chiefs in Rome, and every day one goes forth towards the other and one of them is killed, and they have trouble appointing a king”. In other words, the war between the German tribes and the Romans cannot come to an end because on the one hand the Germans are almost as powerful as the Romans – only sixty-five warlords short; and on the other hand, they cannot appoint a king because they are too busy fighting Rome. Thus, if we read Rav’s conclusion in part F in the light of the teaching from tractate Megila, we have to conclude that Rome will never be able to spread over the entire world.

- **35** The Vilna version is “the wicked kingdom of Rome” but in all the manuscripts we read “the wicked ki (...)”

29In fact, one can read Rav’s statement as saying: it does not really matter which kingdom will rule the entire world, Persia or Rome, as long as it does so for nine months.**35** I am not sure that this was Rav’s original intention, if it was indeed he who pronounced this teaching in the first place, but it was probably the intention of the redactors of the entire passage of Yoma, somewhere between the sixth and the eighth centuries. The redactors considered that both statements (Rome will vanquish Persia; Persia will vanquish Rome) are worth conserving, even though they contradict each other.

30We see therefore that by the time of the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, Palestinian as well as Babylonian traditions about Rome and Persia were disconnected from their historical and emotional background and were read mainly in a scholastic way. This statement is true especially with regard to Rome, which was geographically and historically distant. From a real empire it became a discursive one. Our analysis allows us therefore to articulate a process of “scholasticization” that characterizes rabbinic discourse in general and its use of the image of Rome in particular. The main steps of this process are listed here:

1. During and after the Bar Kokhba revolt, the hope that Rome would be conquered by Persia (its most important imperial enemy at the time) was expressed and sustained by a simple syllogism. It was the product of a “natural”

reaction to Rome as it was perceived and experienced by some Palestinian rabbis. It was derived from the *Zeitgeist* and was straightaway understandable, and therefore there was no need to corroborate the argument with a scriptural text proof.

2. At the beginning of the third century, during a period of relative calm and prosperity for the Jews in Palestine, the aforementioned tradition went through the exegetical filter of Rabbi. From the fruit of a living experience, the hope expressed in the original teaching of Yehuda ben Ilai became a product of interpreted Scripture, a scholastic object that could be debated without referring to the reality it originally represented.
3. This process continued in Babylonia, with Rabbah ben Ulla, whose approach was purely hermeneutical – indeed, he raised the possibility that Rome would be vanquished by Greece, an empire that no longer existed! However, this attitude was not accepted by all rabbis, since some of them apparently still felt engaged with the actual situation of Palestinian Jews in general and rabbis in particular.
4. Sometime between the sixth and the eighth centuries, when the Bavli's passage took shape, the hermeneutical approach seems to have prevailed. Rome, but also Persia, were considered as two literary objects, two symbolic empires, whose connection to the real empires plays no role in the redaction process.

### **Elevating Rome to the Stage of the Utmost Adversary**

31The previous section pointed out some differences in the attitudes of the two rabbinic centers (the Palestinian and the Babylonian) with regard to Rome. Mainly, we identified in the Babylonian Talmud a process in which the image of Rome is detached from its original context and becomes a discursive element. However, even as such Rome is not completely neutral and cannot be freely manipulated. It keeps some specific characters and functions it is supposed to fulfill. In the present section I would like to show that the role of Rome in Babylonian rabbinic discourse is articulated inside a paradigmatic framework, rather than a historical or an eschatological one. The Bavli's Rome is still considered as the greatest adversary of Judaism, but this rivalry is understood to be structural and to a certain extent eternal. It does not end with an ultimate victory for Israel.

32Remember that the redactors of the eschatological *aggadah* from the beginning of Avodah Zarah discussed above, who refer to Rome as “the most important kingdom,” do not explain its importance as a result of its role in a divine historical or eschatological plan. Actually, they do not explain it at all but take it as a fact. Even when Rome is given an eschatological role, as in the passage from Yoma 10a read above, it seems to be a *result* of its greatness and not the reason for it. Rome's greatness becomes then one of the basic characteristics of the literary image of the Roman Empire in Babylonian rabbinic discourse. It does not need to be explained or justified.

33What I would like to show in the following is that the Bavli uses this given greatness of Rome in order to place it as one of the two main elements in a bipolar system. The other element is, of course, Israel. The greatness of Rome reflects that of Israel. It will be very helpful to read in this

context another Babylonian reworking of a Palestinian tradition. We can see in it how the Babylonian redactors downplay the eschatological dimension of a Rome tradition in favor of a more structural, paradigmatic one. I will first give the Palestinian tradition, from the tractate Avodah Zarah of the Palestinian Talmud:

- **36** של טיט. Jastrow reads here שלעטוט.

A. R. Levi said: on the day Salomon married into [the family/dynasty of] Pharaoh Necho the king of Egypt, [the angel] Michael descended and planted a reed in the sea, it gathered sediment<sup>36</sup> around it and a great forest was created and this is the great city of Rome.

- **37** Hut is used here to translate צריף, but see below note 44.

B. On the day Jeroboam set up two golden calves, Remus and Romulus came and constructed two huts<sup>37</sup> in Rome.

- **38** y. AZ 1.2, 39c. See also *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1.

C. On the day Elijah disappeared, a king was crowned in Rome.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup>The structure of the text is easily discernible. It contains three parts, each one representing a crucial historical stage. The development of the kingdom of Rome is explained as a reaction to events that occurred in Israel. The rhythm of the text – each part is shorter than the previous one – provokes an alarming sensation: each misfortune of Israel is paralleled by an increase of Rome’s power. This is particularly salient in part B, whose redactors seem to place great emphasis on this inverse parallelism. They do so by a recurrent use of the number two – two calves, two brothers, two huts – all in all three times, four if we include the fact that it is the second stage of the process depicted by the text. Finally, part C, which connects the disappearance of Elijah to the crowning of the first Roman king, gives to the text an eschatological tone: when Elijah comes back, the crowning of the Roman king (and of Rome itself) will be reversed.

- **39** See Alyssa M. Gray, *Talmud in Exile: The Influence of Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah on the Formation of B (...)*

<sup>35</sup>It is important to note the context in which this passage is brought up in the Yerushalmi – an elaboration of Mishnah AZ 1:3 that lists several pagan holidays. Our passage specifically interprets the holiday of *Kratesis* as the celebration of the day in which Rome began its rule (תפשה בו מלכות). However, when the Babylonian Talmud gives its version of this teaching, it does not do so in the context of the discussion on the “national holiday” of Rome,<sup>39</sup> but in a rather long discussion about impieties practiced by the ancient kings of Israel.

- **40** The first part is found also in most witness of Bavli Sanhedrin 21b.
- **41** b. Shabbat 56b. In a tradition that is conserved in the Babylonian Tractate Megillah, and is attrib (...)



Rav Yehuda says [in the name of] Shmuel: When Salomon married Pharaoh's daughter, Gabriel descended and planted a reed in the sea, and it gathered a reef around it, on which the great city of Rome was built.<sup>40</sup>

In a Baraitha it was taught: On the day Jeroboam brought the two golden calves, one into Bethel and the other into Dan, a hut was built, and this developed into Greek Italy.<sup>41</sup>

- **42** §52. See Finkelstein, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup>The relationship between the Babylonian and the Palestinian traditions is not clear. It is possible that both developed independently from a similar source, or that one is an adaptation of the other. In the latter case I would not exclude the historical priority of the Babylonian version – first, it is attributed to Shmuel, who was active before R. Levi; second, there is a close parallel of this version in some manuscripts of the tannaitic compilation *Sifre on Deuteronomy*;<sup>42</sup> and third, when compared to the Yerushalmi, the redaction of the Bavli's parallel seems to be much looser.

- **43** Jeroboam is depicted here as someone whose fault was similar to that of the Greeks and the Romans – (...)

<sup>37</sup>The first part that links Salomon's marriage to the "geological" creation of Rome is almost identical to the first part of the Yerushalmi's version. As for the second part, the reference to the two brothers disappears, and instead we find a rather curious mention of the places in which Jeroboam has set the calves – Beth El and Dan. This detail corresponds to the biblical account, but it is not clear why the redactor chose to add it here; the mere mention of the two calves would be enough.<sup>43</sup> The Bavli's version does not include the third part about Elijah. This makes an eschatological reading of the text rather difficult.

- **44** In fact, the word can also be read as "tzarif" (with a *kamatz* under the ז), that is – *alum* (see dic (...))

<sup>38</sup>I would like to propose that the Babylonian redactors considered that Jeroboam's sin had created the geometrical condition that allowed the construction of Rome, or at least that they told this story while trying to develop a spatial imagery instead of a chronological, historical one. In fact, a hut, צריף, can have a large basis and a narrow roof.<sup>44</sup> The two mentioned cities can be regarded as the Palestinian base of the (Roman) hut: it is the line that stretches between Dan, on the north of Galilee, and Beth El, near Jerusalem. In the Palestinian version, the underlined parallelism between Jeroboam's sin and the foundation of Rome is used in order to designate a causal link between the two events, namely, the idea that Jeroboam's vile deeds had a crucial effect on the process that led to the destruction of the Temple, and in that sense they participated in that process. But in the Bavli, this link operates on a structural rather than a causal, historical level.

- **45** *b. Pesahim 42b; b. Megillah 6a*. There's a difference between the two traditions, as one speaks about (...)
- **46** It is important to note that this exegesis of "I am filled, she is ruined" is not found in Palestin (...)

39The following teaching from the Bavli may shed light on this last point. It consists in an exegesis of Ezekiel 26:2 (“Son of man, because Tyre has said of Jerusalem: Aha, she has broken the doors of the nations, she has turned to me, I am filled, she is ruined”), and more precisely of its last two words, “אמלאה הרבה” (“I am filled, she is ruined”). It appears on two occasions in the Bavli,<sup>45</sup> both times explaining the two Hebrew words as referring to Israel on the one hand and to Rome on the other – once one is “filled” the other one must be ruined, and vice versa. In any case, they cannot prosper (be “filled”) at the same time.<sup>46</sup> The relationship between Israel and Rome is understood in terms of a zero-sum game. The demise of one entails the flourishing of the other, and *vice versa*, *ad infinitum*.

- **47** Translation in J. Neusner, *Persia and Rome in Classical Judaism*, p. 8.
- **48** It is worthwhile to emphasize this point since this text may be the first testimony of the rabbinic (...)

40It will be interesting to compare the exegesis of “I am filled, she is ruined” to some Palestinian traditions, like the story of the four sages who traveled to Rome from *Sifre Deuteronomy* 43. In that story, three of the sages cry when they witness how peaceful Rome is, and compare it to the desolate state of Jerusalem. The fourth sage, R. Aqiba, laughs. When his friends ask him to explain his reaction, he replies: “If this is how [God] has rewarded those who anger him, all the more so [will He reward] those who do his will”.<sup>47</sup> Comparing this story to the Bavli’s traditions reveals how the discourse about Rome evolved inside rabbinic discourse, between the Palestinian *Sifre* and the Babylonian Talmud. In both cases we find a comparison between Rome and Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> But the comparison in the *Sifre*’s story is much more “heuristic” than programmatic. The sages who compare the tranquility of Rome to the ruined Jerusalem are reacting to what they see. Even Aqiba’s saying is derived from common sense, and the master does not feel the need to support it by Scripture. In fact, Aqiba’s statement, which is the conclusion of the passage, is a comforting, eschatological message in which Rome is the sign of Israel’s redemption and retribution.

41Thus, in spite of the fact that both the Babylonian and the Palestinian rabbinic traditions compare Rome to Jerusalem, the difference between them is remarkable. Only in the Bavli’s tradition is the comparison articulated as an unending zero-sum game, which is supported by Scripture. In other words, only the Bavli assigns to the two cities a complementary role on a global level, without placing the redemption of the one or the demise of the other as the culminating point of the process.

- **49 b.** Pesahim 87b-88a.
- **50** The text speaks about *min* (heretic) but from the context it is clear that the person is Roman.
- **51** According to two mss (Munich 6, JTS, Columbia) it was Rabbi Yehuda the Prince.
- **52** The same manuscripts that read Rabbi Yehuda instead of Rabbi Hanina.

- **53** The shorter version (of Vilna and the other manuscripts) is actually more elegant once understood, (...)

42The role that the Bavli attributes to Rome has its own history, and the following passage allows us to trace its development inside Babylonian rabbinic circles. The text in question figures in the Babylonian tractate Pesahim as a part of a compilation of stories and exegeses, whose main objective is to prove and reinforce the priority of Babylonia over Palestine.<sup>49</sup> One of the first texts in this compilation, in Aramaic, tells the story of a Roman<sup>50</sup> who came to the Palestinian rabbinic master, R. Hanina.<sup>51</sup> The Roman provokes the rabbi by saying: “We are better than you”. As a proof he quotes the verse from 1 Kings 11:16 that tells how Yoav, the chief commander of David’s army, stayed in Edom for six months in the course of which he killed all the male Edomites. “But we,” says the Roman, “have had you among us for several years already, and we have not acted towards you in the same manner”. The master asks the Roman whether he would care to be answered by a student, and the one chosen is Rabbi Hoshaya. Now, Hoshaya’s answer, as it is recorded in the Vilna edition of the Talmud and many manuscripts, goes as follows: “It is because you do not know what to do [with Israel]: you kill them all – they are not among you, those who are among you, you will be called an amputated kingdom”. The Aramaic formulation is somewhat odd, and some other versions are clearer. Thus, in three manuscripts – Munich 6, JTS, and Columbia<sup>52</sup> – the answer goes as follows: “It is because you do not know what you will do: you kill them all – you will not rule over them! You kill those over whom you rule – you will be called an amputated kingdom”.<sup>53</sup> In all the versions the Roman admits that this is exactly the problem of the Romans vis-à-vis the Jews and perhaps in general: “By the wing of Rome, with this we come down and with this we get up”.

- **54** Here most manuscripts read קטייעה instead of קטייעתא in the Pesahim story. See also Ketubot 10b and N (...)
- **55** If we were to place the two traditions, from Pesahim and from AZ, on a chronological line, it is po (...)

43The picture emerging from the answer given to the Roman is that of a world divided in two – one part is ruled by Rome and the other is not. Jews live in both parts. The Romans could kill or drive out all the Jews from their Empire, but then they would be an “amputated kingdom”. What Hoshayah says in fact is that without Israel, Rome will be crippled. This is a very daring statement – the master never wants to acknowledge his dependency on the slave. It shows the rabbinic (Babylonian) conception of the relationship between Rome and the Jews – the latter are a necessary component of the former; they contribute to its wholeness. This story resonates with another tradition from the Babylonian Talmud in which this idea is articulated even more explicitly. In tractate Avodah Zarah 10b, we are told the story of a Roman official with the highly symbolic name – קטייעה בר שלום (amputation son of peace). When the emperor proposes to eradicate the people of Israel, this official objects by raising two arguments: First, he asks why a verse in Zechariah (2:10) promises to spread Israel “as the four winds of heaven” and not “to the four winds”. His answer: “Just as the world cannot exist without four winds, it cannot exist without Israel”. Once again, Israel is depicted as an essential component of the world, and of the Roman Empire in particular. The second objection is the same statement found in the Pesahim text – “you will be called an amputated kingdom”.<sup>54</sup> The absence of Israel will have a visible and physical

effect on Rome, which will be regarded as crippled. These two stories describe thus a world system in which Rome and Israel are mutual players, each one being dependent on the other.<sup>55</sup>

## Equal Brothers

- **56** J. Neusner, *Persia and Rome in Classical Judaism*, p. 17-73. See also his *Judaism in the Matrix of C (...)*
- **57** y. Ta'anit 4.8, 68d; I. Yuval, *Two nations*, p. 25. Already Louis Ginzberg has claimed that the desi (...)

44In spite of the fact that the picture of Rome and Israel as mutually dependent does not appear in Palestinian sources, its roots can be traced back to an early Palestinian tradition that compares Rome to the biblical figure of Edom/Esau, and thus assumes a brotherhood between the two nations. In fact, the date of the emergence of this idea is still under debate among scholars. Thus, Neusner claims that it is only after the Christianization of the Empire that rabbinic sources took the two nations in Rebecca's womb, Jacob and Esau, to be Israel and Rome.<sup>56</sup> But other scholars claim that the equation Esau-Rome was made well before the fourth century. In that respect, it is interesting to note that even Israel Yuval, one of the most important advocates of the "rabbinic Judaism is born out of Christianity" thesis, claims that the identification of Esau with Rome dates to the first half of the second century CE. According to Yuval, Rabbi Aqiva was probably the first one to make the analogy between Edom and Rome when he interpreted Numbers 24:17 (דרך כוכב מיעקב) as a prophecy about Bar Kokhba and the following verse, about Edom, as a metaphor for the city of Rome.<sup>57</sup> Be that as it may, it is very probable that for the redactors of the Bavli this identification was a ready-made convention received from Palestine.

- **58** See the discussion in Katell Berthelot's article in this volume.

45Whereas some work has been done on the history of the identification of Rome with Esau, very little attention has been paid to the reasons for this rather peculiar and in any case not obvious discursive tactic. I think that the best way to understand the emergence of the Israel-Rome brotherhood idea is to regard it as a myth. If Yuval and others are right, this myth emerges in the second century CE, during or after the Bar Kokhba revolt – in other words, in an extremely tense moment in the history of the Israel-Rome relationship. A myth, and a powerful one, was needed in order to contain the explosive range of contradictory emotions, interests, experiences, and motivations that life under Roman rule in Palestine involved. No simple idea or rational theory would work. Thus, the Jacob and Esau story was chosen for various reasons to be the infrastructure of a myth that would serve the rabbis from then on to talk about and to reflect upon their relationship with Rome.<sup>58</sup>

- **59** Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, p. 134.
- **60** The name before Dodanim/Rodanim in both Genesis and Chronicles is Kittim, interpreted as "Italia" i (...)

- **61** One source is worth mentioning – in *b. Pesahim* 118b, Rome itself uses the argument of its brotherhood (...)

46The myth arrived in Babylonia during the third or the fourth century, but the political and social context that engendered and sustained it stayed in Palestine. Obviously, the domination of Rome over Palestinian Jews was felt less in Babylonia than in Palestine, and the relationship between the two brothers/nations is therefore described as a relationship between two equals at least on some level. In any case, it is difficult to find in the Bavli the bitter attitude of some Palestinian sources that criticize the hypocrisy of Rome. We will not find in the Talmud of Babylonia a statement like that of *Sifre Deuteronomy* on Deut 32:27: “when Israel is in distress the Nations of the world distance themselves from them and act as if they never knew them... but when Israel prospers the Nations of the world flatter them and act as if they were brothers”. As was shown by Adiel Schremer, the nation in question is none other than Rome.<sup>59</sup> Another, probably later, example of this Palestinian rabbinic bitterness towards Rome is found in *Genesis Rabbah* 37, in an exegesis on Genesis 10:4 – “And the sons of Yavan were Alisha and Tarshis, Kitim and Dodanim”. The same genealogical list appears in 1 Chronicles 1:11, but instead of Dodanim, a word that means “cousins,” the text reads Rodanim – “tyrants”. The exegete, R. Hanan, explains this difference as follows: “When Israel goes up, they come and say to them – we are your cousins. But when Israel goes down, they come and tyrannize it”. That “they” refers to the Romans is clear from the context.<sup>60</sup> This bitter irony does not find its way to the Babylonian sources. The brotherhood of the two nations is taken for granted and is used only rarely in order to express negative feelings towards Rome.<sup>61</sup> It is used instead to compare the two, in a more or less explicit way.

47We have already seen that the Babylonian redactors conceived of Israel as a crucial component of the Empire, essential to its existence. The following Babylonian exegesis on Genesis 25:23 (“And God said to her: two nations are in your womb...”) provides a picture of two equal brothers with the power of one reflected by the other:

- **62** Most manuscripts read גאִים, but the exegesis is on the word “nations” in the biblical text (גוִים), (...)

“And God said to her: Two nations are in your womb” (Gen 25:23). Do not read “nations” (גוִים) but rather “lords” (גאִים/גויים<sup>62</sup>). And Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav – these are Antoninus and Rabbi, whose table never lacked radish, lettuce or cucumber, either in summer or winter!

- **63** See note 22.

48This “couple” – Rabbi and Antoninus – figures into many rabbinic sources, from Palestine as well as from Babylonia. In the Bavli, the couple is charged with a symbolic load that makes the two characters the representatives of their respective groups. The teaching here describes them as equals, at least on an economic level – the Jewish leader is as rich as the Roman one. This is a rare example of a materialistic understanding of the equality principle. The rabbis know of course that the greatness of Rome cannot be compared to that of Jewish cities in Palestine. An interesting and subtle example of this awareness is in the *sugya* from the Babylonian Tractate Megila. It is a saying attributed to the Palestinian sage ‘Ulla<sup>63</sup>:

- **64** Some manuscripts mention only one category (those who reside but were not born there, or those who (...))
- **65** Some manuscripts – “in which one of them”.
- **66 b.** Megillah 6b.

Greek’s Italy is the great city of Rome, which covers an area of three hundred parsangs by three hundred. It has three hundred sixty-five markets, corresponding to the number of days of the sun [year]. And the smallest among them is that of the poultry sellers, which is sixteen *mil* by sixteen. The king dines every day in one of them. Everyone who resides in the city, even if he was not born there, takes a reward from the king’s house. And everyone who was born there, even though he does not reside there, takes a reward from the king’s house.<sup>64</sup> There are three thousand baths in it, and five hundred windows<sup>65</sup> from which arises smoke outside the wall. One side of it is [bounded] by the sea, one side by hills and mountains, one side by a barrier of iron, and one side by pebbly ground and swamp.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>49</sup>The historical kernel beyond this description is less important for our discussion here. The most stunning characteristic of this passage is its lack of negative attitude, either in its content, or in the context in which it is brought into the Talmudic discussion. In fact, we can even speak of pure admiration. The city of Rome is praised not only on geographical grounds, but also on political ones. Its king participates in the active life of the city – each day he eats in a different market. Its residents get economic benefits from the city treasure, even though they were not born there. It is well protected but also well designed – the smoke of the fire used to heat the water is evacuated outside the city.

<sup>50</sup>To go back to the question of the comparison between Israel and Rome, it is interesting to note that this admiring account arrives several passages after a description of some Palestinian Jewish cities that bear some resemblance to the description of Rome. Thus, Tiberias is mentioned as a city that is bounded by the sea. The size of the “trail of milk and honey” around the city of Sepphoris according to Reish Lakish is “sixteen *mil* by sixteen *mil*,” the same as the size of the smallest market in Rome. These parallels cannot lead us to any firm conclusion, but it seems that, at least for the redactors of the text, special care was taken to harmonize the different traditions in the *sugiya*, whether they concerned Rome or Jewish cities. Their objective, so it seems, was to develop and substantiate a language that would allow them to speak about Rome and Israel using the same set of signifiers.

- **67 b.** Megillah 6a.
- **68** It is possible that the manuscript variants retain traces of the evolution from a linear conception (...)

<sup>51</sup>The redactors are taking a further step, much more explicit, in their effort to develop a common language to speak about Rome and Israel when they bring two exegeses on Zech. 9:7 (“And I will take away his blood out of his mouth and his detestable things from between his teeth, and he also shall be remnant for our God, and he shall be as a chief in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite”). The

names of Palestinian cities or regions – Judah, Ekron – are understood by the exegete as “theaters and circuses in Edom in which one day the chief of Judah will publicly teach the Torah”.<sup>67</sup> Once again we find here what might have been a Palestinian rabbinic tradition, in which prophetic discourse about the salvation of Israel was read as an apocalyptic account of the victory of the Jews over Rome. But in the context of the discussion in the Bavli it is mainly used to emphasize the possibility of speaking about Rome in biblical and Jewish terms. What is at stake is less the redemption of Israel at the end of times, but rather the description of the two entities – Rome as a mirror image of Israel. Indeed, the first part of this Talmudic discussion ends with the *midrash* cited above, according to which Rome and Israel cannot prosper at the same time – when one succeeds the other is devastated.<sup>68</sup> From the way this exegesis is articulated, it is clear that we are not dealing here with a linear historical process, but rather with a circular one – one is up, the other is down, and so forth. That is why talking about one is, essentially, talking about the other.

## Conclusion

- <sup>69</sup> R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 19-36.

<sup>52</sup>As I mentioned earlier, the rabbinic movement in Palestine presented Rome as its main adversary not only because it was true, but also due to the rhetorical benefits that such a claim must have brought. Presenting the rabbis as the adversaries of the Romans contributed to the symbolic status of the rabbis and of rabbinic Judaism. It is against this background that we should understand the use of rabbinic traditions about Rome in Palestine. The rabbis of the Bavli imported the Palestinian idea according to which Rome is the fiercest enemy of (rabbinic) Judaism, and like them used it in order to promote their Jewish and rabbinic values. Richard Kalmin made a very convincing case for this thesis when he showed that in the Bavli’s accounts of Roman persecutions, one of the most important prohibitions issued by the Romans concerned Torah study. However, in the Palestinian accounts of the same or other persecutions, no such prohibition appears.<sup>69</sup> Evidently, Torah study was a very important practice and of value in rabbinic circles in Palestine as well, but it seems that only in Babylonia it became distinctive for rabbis, an identity mark of the rabbinic movement and the type of Jewishness they articulated. In other words, rabbis in Sasanian Babylonia used a historically charged image of Rome in order to promote what they considered to be a genuine and crucial element of Jewish existence. They acknowledged the symbolic value of Rome conferred upon it in Palestinian sources, and at the same time they enhanced and transformed it to promote their own version of rabbinic Judaism.

<sup>53</sup>The purpose of this article was to expose the infrastructure that allowed the Babylonian rabbis to use Rome in such a way. We have seen not only that Babylonian rabbis inherited the Palestinian image of Rome, but that along with this image they inherited its discursive role as a fierce adversary against whom rabbinic Judaism defined itself. I hope to have shown that Rome of the Babylonian Talmud is an entity that is both concrete and abstract. It is concrete in the sense that its Palestinian origin is recognized by the rabbis and utilized by them for its high symbolic value. It is abstract because most of the time when the Babylonian rabbis speak about Rome they do not refer to an actual kingdom, but rather to an image that they find in the sources and to which they attribute a discursive role. There is therefore a certain duality inside the Babylonian Rome. On the one hand it is used as an empty mirror, drawn in order to construct the identity of Israel. On the other hand, since it is a literary object whose origin is in Palestine, it must be consistent with other

Palestinian elements known to the rabbis. Even though it is a literary object, the Babylonian rabbis still wish to present it as a real one.

54The reason for which the Babylonian rabbis wished to define Rome as a real rather than mythical enemy is precisely because they were using Rome as a tool by which they could construct the identity of Israel. Just as Israel is an entity that is both abstract and real, so must its twin sister, Rome, be as well. Thus, the duality between the realistic and abstract dimensions of the Bavli's image of Rome is a reflection of the same duality in its image of Israel. This is cleverly demonstrated by the following story, from the Babylonian tractate Avodah Zarah:

- **70** An account of his conversion is found in *b. Gittin* 56b, in which he is described as the son of Titu (...)
- **71** Vilna, the Pesaro Print and a fragment (Cambridge – Westminster College G.F. Talmudica II 266-269) (...)

Onkelos the son of Kalonymus became a proselyte.<sup>70</sup>

The Emperor sent a contingent<sup>71</sup> after him.

He [Onkelos] enticed them by [citing] scriptural verses.

They became proselytes.

The Emperor sent another contingent after him. He told them: do not say anything to him!

When they held him and left, he said to them: Let me tell you just an ordinary thing: the torchlighter carries the light in front of the *afifior*, the *afifior* in front of the leader [*dukas*], the leader in front of the governor [*hegmona*], the governor in front of the chief officer; but does the chief officer carry the light in front of the people?

They replied: No.

He said: The Holy One, blessed be He, carries the light before Israel, as it is written: “And the Lord went before them [...in a pillar of fire to give them light] (Ex 13:21).

They became proselytes.

- **72** Ms. Paris: “which was fixed on the door-frame”.

Again [the Emperor] sent another contingent. He said to them: do not converse with him!

When they took hold of him and went away, he saw the *mezuzah*<sup>72</sup> and he placed his hand on it.

He said to them: What is this?

They replied: You tell us then.

He said: According to universal custom, the mortal king dwells within, and his servants keep guard on him from without; but [in the case of] the Holy One, blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within while He keeps guard on them from without. As it is said: The “Lord shall guard thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and for evermore” (Ps 121:8).

They became proselytes.

He sent for him no more.



- **73** In the Palestinian Talmud (y. Peah 1:1) there is a story about Rav in which he gave a *mezuzah* as a (...)

55 What strikes me the most in this story is that it lacks any indication of place. We do not know where Onkelos resides, where the contingents come from, where the Emperor waits in vain for them to return. The text does not mention even one place or architectural entity (room, store, courtyard, etc.). Only the *mezuzah*, a small inexpensive object, is mentioned. Rome, where the emperor is, and Israel, where Onkelos is supposed to be, are depicted as two abstract entities that are separated by the *mezuzah*, an object that symbolizes God's protection.<sup>73</sup>

56 Israel, as it is presented here, is an "empire" bounded and protected by no other king than God. His protection, of course, cannot be compared to the one offered by an emperor in flesh and blood. Everyone can enter "Israel," as this story so clearly shows, when it describes the conversion of the Emperor's envoys in only one word. It is a spiritual assembly, an abstract ecclesia.

57 The geographical and architectural emptiness of the story gives the impression that only the two entities – Rome and Israel – exist in the world: one can choose to join either the kingdom that is led by the mortal king, or the one that is protected by God. This conclusion is perhaps the target of the *jeu de miroir* between Rome and Israel that I have tried to examine in this article. In other words, Rome became a crucial element in the discourse of Babylonian rabbinic circles precisely because it contributed to articulating their identity. That is why it was important for the redactors of the Bavli to always leave ambiguous the possibility of Rome's total triumph or total demise. A careful system that prevents Rome from spreading all over the world is necessary, since without it, Rome would be everywhere. It would no longer be an Other.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, transl. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 163-170.

<sup>2</sup> This, to a certain extent, is the project of Clifford Ando's 2000 book, in which theories of Habermas and Bourdieu are employed in order to explain the ways by which the empire installed consensus, legitimacy, and loyalty in its provinces: Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Language*, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. See also Yaakov Elman, "Rava and Palestinian Systems of Midrash Halakha," *Center and Diaspora: The Land of Israel and the Diaspora in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Period*, ed. Isaiah M. Gafni, Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar, 2004, p. 217-242 (in Hebrew). On the general question of the relationship between the rabbinic centers in Babylonia and Palestine during the Talmudic period, see from the same volume: Aharon Oppenheimer, "Links between the Land of Israel and Babylonia during the Transition from the Tannaitic to the Amoraic Period," *Center and Diaspora*, p. 125-140.

<sup>5</sup> Seth Schwartz, "'Rabbinic Culture' and Roman Culture," *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, ed. Martin Goodman and Philippe Alexander, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 283-299. See also Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans. The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

6 Of course, one should not consider that the Palestinian relation to Rome was the same throughout late antiquity. As we shall see, it is probable that during the beginning of the third century the animosity towards Rome became less visceral.

7 This point touches the general problem concerning the relationship of Babylonian rabbis to the land of Israel. See Jeffrey Rubenstein, "Addressing the Attributes of the Land of Israel: An Analysis of Bavli Ketubot 110b–112a," *Center and Diaspora*, p. 159-188 (in Hebrew); Isaiah M. Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series 21), 1997, p. 96-117.

8 The view of Babylonia as home is already found in the Tosefta, probably redacted in Palestine in the third century, in a statement attributed to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai: "Why has the majority of Israel been exiled in Babylonia? Because the house of Abraham their father was from there. It is like a woman who has upset her husband; where does he send her? To the house of her father" (Tos. BQ 7:2). In *b. Pesahim* 87b, the same saying is attributed to the third-century Palestinian sage – R. Yohanan).

9 In fact, during the Geonic period, when the stakes of the conflict between the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic centers became more important than ever, the fact that Palestinian Judaism suffered from Roman persecutions was used in order to attack the validity of Palestinian Halakha. This is one of the arguments in the combative letter of the Babylonian Pirkoi ben Baboi in which he lays claim to the supremacy of the Babylonian Halakha. See Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, p. 96.

10 The following statement of Rabbi Hiya, a second-century Palestinian Sage of Babylonian origin, seems relevant in this context: "God knows that Israel cannot bear the decrees of the Romans, therefore He sent them to Babylonia" (*b. Pesahim* 87b; *Gittin* 17a).

11 As years went by, Palestinian Rome got more and more distant chronologically, but also geographically (fewer rabbis traveled from one rabbinic center to the other). We will see in the following that, indeed, the later the source, the more abstract its image of Rome.

12 For a brilliant analysis of some case studies of Babylonian manipulation of Palestinian sources, see Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition and Culture*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1999; *id.*, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2003. For a case more relevant to our discussion, in which the Babylonian redactors use the Palestinian tradition about Rome in order to articulate their political vision, see Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, "Plato and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai's Cave (B. Shabbat 33B-34A): The Talmudic Inversion of Plato's Politics of Philosophy," *AJS Review* 31/2 (2007), p. 277-296. As for the specific question dealt with in this article, on the techniques and methods used by the redactors of the Bavli when they incorporated Palestinian traditions about Rome, see Paul Mandel, "'Tales of the Destruction of the Temple': Between the Land of Israel and Babylonia," *Center and Diaspora: The Land of Israel and the Diaspora in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Period*, ed. Isaiah M. Gafni, Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar, 2004, p. 141-158 (in Hebrew). Mandel's analysis of some destruction stories shows that in many cases the Babylonian rabbis used these traditions in order to shed light on problematic attitudes and behaviors in their own circles.

13 According to Neusner's documentary approach, a rabbinic text can only reflect the historical reality of the time of its redaction.

14 See the recent book: Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

15 See R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*; Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2009.

16 According to the New York manuscript – R. Shila (a Palestinian rabbi contemporary to R. Simlai).

17 J. L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 215-242.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Translation based on the Paris manuscript.

20 This is how I translate כִּי סְלִיק רַב, assuming that the word “Rav” refers to Ben Ulla, and that the text depicts a scene in the study house. Some translators and commentators (e.g., the Soncino translation) take the word “Rav” as the title of Habiba.

21 Tiras is the youngest of Japheth’s sons, according to the list in Genesis 10:2.

22 b. Yoma 10a. For bibliography see R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 232, note 11 and notes hereafter.

23 See Isaiah Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A social and Cultural History*, Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar, 1990, p. 116 (in Hebrew). See also note 60 below.

24 Richard Kalmin, who argues against the assumption that the rabbis perceived the third century in Babylonia as a watershed in the Persian-Jewish relationship, reads the last parts as merely hermeneutic. In other words, according to Kalmin, Rav’s statement is not a reaction to the reality of the Babylonian Jewry of his day, but rather the fruit of a purely scholastic activity. See Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, pp. 122-129. The reading proposed here combines in fact both the historical approach of Isaiah Gafni and others, and the literary approach promoted by Kalmin, by referring to the *historicity* of the literary objects (“Rome,” “Persia,” “Scripture”).

25 This, in fact, may be regarded as a Palestinian rabbinic *topos* that some scholars date back to the Temple period. See Isaiah Gafni, *The Jews in Babylonia and their Institution in the Talmudic Period*, Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar, 1975, p. 10 (in Hebrew).

26 See I. Ben Shalom, “Rabbi Judah B. Illai’s Attitude towards Rome,” *Zion* 49/1 (1984), p. 9-24 (in Hebrew), p. 17, note 40.

27 The term “Greece” is used sometimes to refer to the Parthian Empire in the Bavli.

28 See for example A. Oppenheimer, “Links,” p. 128, which speaks about certain hegemony of the Palestinian rabbinic movement over that of Babylonia towards the end of the third century.

29 The literature is abundant. See for example I. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia*, p. 39-43.

30 Several scholars have dealt specifically with the reference to Persia as destroying synagogues. Moshe Beer (“The Political Background of Rav’s Activity in Babylonia,” *Zion* 50 (1985), p. 155-172 (in Hebrew)) thinks that it reflects events that occurred during Rav’s lifetime, while Eliezer S. Rosenthal (“For the Talmudic Dictionary – Talmudica Iranica,” *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked, Jerusalem, Yad Ben Zvi, 1982, 38-134, p. 63-64 (in Hebrew)) connects it to the persecutions under Kerdir, dating it thus to the end of the third century. See also R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 127-128.

31 Part E shows that this tradition also existed anonymously; but it would be safe to claim that it was also formulated in the period of turmoil during the third century. Richard Kalmin (*Jewish Babylonia*, p. 232, note 6) draws attention to a passage of Aphrahat that “interprets the second beast in Daniel 7 as a reference to the kingdom of Media and Persia, and the fourth beast as a reference to the kingdom of the sons of Esau, i.e., to the Greek and Romans. Yet the ram, now symbolizing Shapur, fights the fourth beast, which is the Roman Empire. According to Aphrahat, the Roman Empire, which is Christian, will not be defeated until the coming of Christ”.

32 Both Kalmin and Rosenthal consider that the second argument (they destroy synagogues) is a late interpolation.

33 See I. Gafni, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 116.

34 *b.* Megillah 6a-b.

35 The Vilna version is “the wicked kingdom of Rome” but in all the manuscripts we read “the wicked kingdom” without specification.

36 שלעטוט. Jastrow reads here של טיט.

37 Hut is used here to translate צריף, but see below note 44.

38 *y.* AZ 1.2, 39c. See also *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1.

39 See Alyssa M. Gray, *Talmud in Exile: The Influence of Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah on the Formation of Bavli Avodah Zarah*, Providence, Brown University Press, 2005, p. 124-125.

40 The first part is found also in most witness of Bavli Sanhedrin 21b.

41 *b.* Shabbat 56b. In a tradition that is conserved in the Babylonian Tractate Megillah, and is attributed to ‘Ulla, a Palestinian sage from the end of the third century who traveled a lot between Palestine and Babylonia, it is said that Greek Italy is “a great city of Rome”. See below.

42 §52. See Finkelstein, p. 119.

43 Jeroboam is depicted here as someone whose fault was similar to that of the Greeks and the Romans – both prevented Israel from worshipping God in the Temple of Jerusalem and incited them to worship idols. This explains why Jeroboam’s action is considered to be what set in motion the construction of Greek Italy. It does not, however, explain why the redactor mentioned the two cities.

44 In fact, the word can also be read as “*tzarif*” (with a *kamatz* under the צ), that is – *alum* (see dictionary Ben Yehuda, v. 11, p. 5686). It is found in several places in the Bavli. It is possible that the redactors of the Yerushalmi’s version played on the semantic link between this meaning and the “sediment” (טיט, according to Jastrow’s reading) of the first part.

45 *b.* Pesahim 42b; *b.* Megillah 6a. There’s a difference between the two traditions, as one speaks about the wine and the other about the cities. But in the two cases, the “wine” (Edomite) and the city (Caesarea) are metonyms of Rome, as is clear from the context.

46 It is important to note that this exegesis of “I am filled, she is ruined” is not found in Palestinian sources from the Talmudic period.

47 Translation in J. Neusner, *Persia and Rome in Classical Judaism*, p. 8.

48 It is worthwhile to emphasize this point since this text may be the first testimony of the rabbinic representation of the “couple,” Rome and Jerusalem. The Mishnah and the Tosefta, for example, do not compare Rome to Israel or to Jerusalem.

49 *b.* Pesahim 87b-88a.

50 The text speaks about *min* (heretic) but from the context it is clear that the person is Roman.

51 According to two mss (Munich 6, JTS, Columbia) it was Rabbi Yehuda the Prince.

52 The same manuscripts that read Rabbi Yehuda instead of Rabbi Hanina.

53 The shorter version (of Vilna and the other manuscripts) is actually more elegant once understood, but this elegance comes with a cost.

54 Here most manuscripts read קטיעתא instead of קטיעתא in the Pesahim story. See also Ketubot 10b and Nidah 64b for the Hebrew expression דור קטוע (amputated generation).

55 If we were to place the two traditions, from Pesahim and from AZ, on a chronological line, it is possible that the AZ story is a later tradition than the Pesahim one. This is suggested by the fact that the AZ text seems to quote the saying from Pesahim – you will be called an amputated kingdom – as it is. It does not change it to the first person plural even though it is attributed to a Roman. If this tradition is indeed later, it might indicate a development in Babylonian rabbinic attitude towards Rome that becomes bolder with time: in the AZ text, it is a Roman and not a Jew who admits that Rome is dependent on Israel; according to the later Bavli's text, the Romans themselves accept this bold rabbinic conception. This development can be easily explained. As time passed, the historical reality in which the Palestinian rabbinic traditions about Rome were produced grew more distant. Thus, the idea of the two entities, Israel and Rome, as mutually dependent could be expressed much more bluntly.

56 J. Neusner, *Persia and Rome in Classical Judaism*, p. 17-73. See also his *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1996, p. 76, cited in Schremer, *Brothers*, p. 227, n. 61. Unfortunately, Neusner's argument in support of his claim is not thoroughly developed, but one cannot ignore that even if the identification of Edom with Rome is from the second century, it is only in the compilations from the fifth century onwards that its presence is by no means contestable. Of course, that can be easily explained by the fact that we do not have an exegetical compilation dedicated to the book of Genesis, where the story of Esau and Jacob is told. It is only in the fifth century that such a compilation is redacted – *Genesis Rabbah* (in Palestine), and indeed, in it we find the greatest number of traditions linking Rome to Esau/Edom. It is possible that at least some of the traditions recorded in *Genesis Rabbah* precede the date of redaction of the compilation.

57 y. Ta'anit 4.8, 68d; I. Yuval, *Two nations*, p. 25. Already Louis Ginzberg has claimed that the designation of Rome by the biblical names Esau and Edom is very old (*id.*, *The Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1968, vol. 5, p. 272, n. 19) even though he argues that the "appellation of Edom for Rome is rarely found in tannaitic sources" (quoted in A. Schremer, *ibid*). See also M. Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem contre Rome*, 463.

58 See the discussion in Katell Berthelot's article in this volume.

59 Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, p. 134.

60 The name before Dodanim/Rodanim in both Genesis and Chronicles is Kittim, interpreted as "Italia" in the previous sentence of the exegesis, and in general a known nickname of the Romans already in the texts of Qumran. It seems in fact that the exegete reads the last word of the verse (Dodanim/Rodanim) not as the name of another nation but rather as an adjective of Kittim.

61 One source is worth mentioning – in *b. Pesahim* 118b, Rome itself uses the argument of its brotherhood with Israel in order to convince God to let it give a present to the Messiah.

62 Most manuscripts read גוים, but the exegesis is on the word "nations" in the biblical text (גוים), written without the ך the Masoretic text.

63 See note 22.

64 Some manuscripts mention only one category (those who reside but were not born there, or those who were born but do not reside here).

65 Some manuscripts – “in which one of them”.

66 *b. Megillah* 6b.

67 *b. Megillah* 6a.

68 It is possible that the manuscript variants retain traces of the evolution from a linear conception of the relationship between Rome and Israel to a circular one. Some manuscripts (Göttingen, Munich 95, Vatican 134) read only “If one is filled the other is ruined” in what may express a linear conception. But other manuscripts (London, Munich 140, NY Columbia, Oxford) raise the possibility that the link between prosperity and ruin is bidirectional.

69 R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, p. 19-36.

70 An account of his conversion is found in *b. Gittin* 56b, in which he is described as the son of Titus’ sister.

71 Vilna, the Pesaro Print and a fragment (Cambridge – Westminster College G.F. Talmudica II 266-269) add “of Romans” as a specification to the first two “contingents”. Ms. JTS does it only for the first one. Mss Munich 95, Paris 1337 do not mention it at all.

72 Ms. Paris: “which was fixed on the door-frame”.

73 In the Palestinian Talmud (*y. Peah* 1:1) there is a story about Rav in which he gave a *mezuzah* as a present to a Persian king. The latter was offended by how cheap the present was. Rav explained to him that in reality it was the best present that he could get, since contrary to a precious stone that must be protected by the one who owns it, the *mezuzah* protects its owner even while he is asleep.