

A GOOD STORY DESERVES RETELLING – THE UNFOLDING OF THE AKIVA LEGEND*

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For Rachel

One of the conceptualizations of talmudic literature to which mid-twentieth century scholarship was heir may appear fundamentalistic and simplistic today. The talmudic *sugya* was viewed as a protocol recording debate in the academy.¹ Statements attributed to ancient sages were accepted at face value as the utterances of these sages, with a tendency to accept the interpretation provided in context, unless demonstrated otherwise. Events described were largely accepted as historic fact. Similar tales told about different protagonists were taken as reports of different events whose similarity derived from coincidence or divine providence, or, at most, variant traditions of equal historical value. Identical diction in the mouth of different persons in separate episodes was understood as due to the fact that one hero's statement was known and repeated by another.² The common

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¹ See S. Friedman, "A Critical Study of Yevamot X with a Methodological Introduction" (Hebrew), *Texts and Studies, Analecta Judaica I*, ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky, New York, 1977, p. 314, n. 112.

² See Sh. Abramson, "מפה לפה", "Some Aspects of Talmudic Hebrew", ed. M. Bar-Asher, *Language Studies II-III* (1987), pp. 23-50 [Hebrew], xi.

explanations for divergent attestations were faulty reports of a single original, or a primeval duality of traditions.³

These judgements reflected an attempt to view redactional activity as minimal or non-existent. They hold in common a denial of developmental categories in general and creativity in composition and transmission in particular. The traditional meritorious qualities of לא לא הוסיפו ולא הפליגו מדעתן כלום or אמר דבר שלא שמע מפי רבו מעולם are allowed to eclipse many or most aspects of original literary composition and artistic creativity.⁴ New details, which suddenly appear in later accounts, are taken as preservation of early traditions, thus neutralizing developmental phenomena.

During the second half of the 20th century, attention was directed to the literary⁵ and redactional nature of the anonymous voice in the *sugyot* of the Bavli: not as the voice of a participant but as that of a commentator, with its own set of terminology and abstract halakhic and theological⁶ conceptualization.⁷ These commentators perfected a specialized form of redaction of the *sugya*,⁸ original and creative rather than simply preserving or transmitting.⁹

³ See S. Friedman, "Uncovering Literary Dependencies in the Talmudic Corpus", in ed. S. J. D. Cohen, *The Synoptic Problem in Rabbinic Literature*, Providence 2002.

⁴ See S. Friedman, *Tosefta Atiqta*, Ramat Gan 2002, pp. 94-95 and n. 334.

⁵ See L. Jacobs, *Studies in Talmudic Logic and Methodology*, London 1961, Chapter Seven, "The Literary Analysis of the Talmudic *Sugya*", and his regular reference to "contrived composition" (p. 84); "contrivance" (p. 91); "our thesis that there is a strong element of artificiality and contrivance about the Babylonian Talmud, introduced for literary effect" (p. 99, n.); p. 164.

⁶ Cf. Y. Elman, "Righteousness as its own Reward: An Inquiry into the Theologies of the Stam", *PAAJR*, 59 (1991), pp. 35-67.

⁷ Cf. Leib Moscovitz, *Talmudic Reasoning*, Tübingen 2002, p. 18, and in general.

⁸ See literature cited in R. Kalmin, "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud", ed. S. Katz, *Cambridge History of Judaism*, volume 4 (forthcoming), n. 49. Clarification of the role of this voice in *aggada* is a leitmotif of this paper, in line with the subject of the conference. Furthermore, since the title assigned to the conference clearly makes reference to the seminal work of David Halivni, I have carefully considered his positions in the framework of these clarifications.

⁹ Contrast Halivni, who wishes to place great emphasis upon the commentators as preservers of specific dialectic which he believes already existed alongside the *memrot* of the *amoraim*, but was simply not recorded by them (see *Sources*

We have become familiar with the methods, mentality and style of this component, and can recognize its typical intervention in *aggada* as well as *halakha*,¹⁰ in anonymous discourse as well as within the bounds of attributed statements, or even in the formulation of new *memrot* as part and parcel of the dialectic being created, when context and style may require, or benefit from, the statement of a named *amora* at that point.¹¹

These anonymous authors may have lent their hands to other types of literary creativity as well, such as composition and arrangement.¹² On the other hand, dialectic commentary was their forté, and they may well have left the other functions to specialists in those fields.¹³ Various types of creative literary intervention already marked earlier stages of talmudic literature, and the results of these efforts are also included in the Bavli.¹⁴ There are consequently more options for

and Traditions, Baba Metzia, Jerusalem 2003, pp. 18, 20). This position brings to mind Sherira's apologetic claim that the earlier authorities were aware of certain explanations and clarifications, but refrained from formulating them in order to leave something for the later generations to contribute and gain a sense of creativity (*Iggeret*, ed. B. M. Lewin, Haifa 1920/1, p. 67).

¹⁰ See S. Friedman, "A Critical Study" (above, n. 1), p. 313 and M. Friedmann (Ish Shalom) cited there; D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, Berkeley 1993, p. 203, etc.; J. L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, Baltimore 1999, pp. 212-3, 380, n. 2; idem, "The Thematization of Dialectics in Bavli Aggada", *JJS*, 54 (2003), p. 73; idem, "Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggada", *NYU Conference Volume* (forthcoming).

¹¹ See S. Friedman, *Talmud Arukh, BT Bava Metzi'a VI: Critical Edition with Comprehensive Commentary*, Commentary Volume (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1990, pp. 383, 387; idem, *Five Sugyot*, Jerusalem 2002, pp. 163-64; J. Rovner, "Pseudepigraphic Invention and Diachronic Stratification in the Stammaitic Components of the Bavli: the Case of Sukka 28", *HUCA*, 68 (1997), pp. 11-19.

¹² See Rubenstein, *Stories*, pp. 18-21; "Thematization", pp. 72, 80.

¹³ "[I]f the anonymous editors authored the Talmud's greatest stories, why do the overwhelmingly prosaic, legal preoccupations of these commentators throughout the Talmud reveal them to be the very antithesis of deft storytellers and imaginative artists? The anonymous editors of the Talmud are very unlikely candidates for authorship of the Talmud's brilliantly artistic, dramatically gripping, and ethically and theologically ambiguous narratives" (Kalmin, "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud", note 8 above).

¹⁴ Halivni still has recourse to error or transmissional mishap (one heard in the morning and one heard in the evening) in explaining variant forms (רוב השינויים)

identifying the source of creative composition or transmission than ascribing it to the latest anonymous redactors.¹⁵

Traditional terminology refers to redactive tasks as divided among different experts: המסדר והמפרש. The arranger fixes the component traditions in their place in the Talmud before the dialectic commentators address them.¹⁶ Sherira Gaon's יתוסף תלמודא דארא בתר is receptive to this model.¹⁷ After the components are composed and positioned, the dialectic framework can be added. In contrast, Rashi's model¹⁸ places both functions in the final stage, and in the hands of the same sages:

רב אשי ורבינא סידרו שמועות אמוראין שלפניהם, וקבעו על סדר המסכתות כל אחד ואחד אצל המשנה הראויה והשנויה לה, והקשו קושיות שיש להשיב ופירוקים שראוים לתרץ, הם והאמוראים שעמהם, וקבעו הכל בגמרא.

The creative rewording of tannaitic material in the Bavli, whether *baraitot* paralleling the Tosefta, Sifra, or other collections, may certainly have taken place long before the discursive anonymous commentary was composed, and is not of one cloth with its style and

see Baba Metzia (above, n. 9), p. 23. Regarding the active or creative model, see Friedman, "Uncovering Literary Dependencies" (above, n. 4).

¹⁵ Halivni's terminology may have been a factor in creating the impression that all these functions were carried out by the same individuals. Dubbing the period itself "the period of the Stammaim" may lead one to think that the same "Stammaim" perform all literary functions assignable to that period; associating literary creativity of all types to "Stammaim" may lead one to think that the discursive commentators are the only creative forces operating in the Talmud. Halivni himself attempted to deflect some of these conclusions by having various types of "Stammaim", some of whom already operated during the Amoraic period (cf: *הסתמאים התנאים שלא כמו הסתמאים העורכים פעלו אפוא עוד בתקופת האמוראים... הסתמאים התנאים לא היו מודעים לפעולתם. הם לא הרגישו שהם מרחיבים, Baba Kama*, pp. 9-11, and: *Baba Metzia*, p. 11; my emphasis). However, the mixture of the term "Stammaim" for both periodization and function may be destined to impede clarity.

¹⁶ Cf. A Weiss, *Mehqarim BaTalmud*, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 24-26.

¹⁷ באילין מילי איתוסף תלמודא דארא בתר דארא, דכל דארא קבעין ביה מילי מן ספיקי *Iggeret*, p. 66; cf. p. 68.

¹⁸ Baba Metzia 86a.

thrust.¹⁹ The same observation could apply to recasting of *memrot*, and, as we shall suggest below, aggadic narrative.

Original composition and creative transmission are native to the talmudic corpus from earliest times. One of the pervasive literary devices which we find is transfer of motifs from one context to another,²⁰ and in its extreme form duplication and reapplication of a story from one hero to another, producing two similar stories in sequence.²¹

In bYevamot 121a we find two seafaring tales in which a sage witnesses a disciple's escape from drowning.

יבמות קכא ע"א

תניא א"ר עקיבא
פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בספינה וראיתי ספינה
אחת שמטרפת בים והייתי מצטער על תלמיד חכם
שבה ומנו רבי מאיר
כשעליתי למדינת קפוטקיא בא וישב ודן לפני
בהלכה אמרתי לו בני מי העלך
אמר לי גל טרדני לחברו וחברו לחברו עד
שהקיאני ליבשה

אמרתי באותה שעה כמה גדולים דברי חכמים
שאמרו מים שיש להם סוף אשתו מותרת מים
שאין להם סוף אשתו אסורה

יבמות קכא ע"א

תניא אמר רבן גמליאל
פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בספינה וראיתי ספינה
אחת שנשברה והייתי מצטער על תלמיד חכם
שבה ומנו רבי עקיבא
וכשעליתי ביבשה בא וישב ודן לפני בהלכה
אמרתי לו בני מי העלך
אמר לי דף של ספינה נזדמן לי וכל גל וגל שבא
עלי נענעתי לו ראשי
מכאן אמרו חכמים אם יבואו רשעים על אדם
ינענע לו ראשו

אמרתי באותה שעה כמה גדולים דברי חכמים
שאמרו מים שיש להם סוף מותרת מים שאין להם
סוף אסורה

The assumption that the identical event that transpired between

¹⁹ S. Friedman, "The Baraitot in the Babylonian Talmud and their Parallels in the Tosefta" (Hebrew), *Atara L'Haim*, Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 163-201.

²⁰ Cf. J. Elbaum, "Models of Storytelling and Speech in Stories About the Sages" (Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 3, 1981, pp. 71-77; M. Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1998, p. 143, and Geiger quoted there, n. 134.

²¹ See S. Friedman, "Historical Aggadah in the Babylonian Talmud" (Hebrew), *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume* (offprint 1988), Jerusalem and New York, 1993, p. 128 and n. 38, and literature cited there, p. 143; idem, *Commentary to Gittin*, The Society for the Interpretation of the Talmud (forthcoming), Sugya 23, n. 93.

Rabban Gamliel and R. Akiva repeated itself between R. Akiva and R. Meir challenges our credulity. At least that is how the problem was put by Shelomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir):²²

כל מבין ישר לא יחשוב הדברים כפשוטם, שממש מה שאירע לר"ג עם ר"ע ומה שדברו זה לזה אירע אח"כ לר"ע עם ר"מ ודברו שניהם ג"כ בלשון ההיא, אין זאת רק מעשה אחד ולשון אחת על אנשים שונים.

But when it comes to explaining how the identical narrative is told about two different events, Shir can fall back only to error, confusion, or the infamous nebulosity that is supposed to set in when separate tradents operate.

כל מעיין ואוהב אמת יוכרח להודות כי הן ממספרים שונים, אשר שמעו מעשה אחד בעצמו או הדומה לו על אנשים שונים בשמותם.

Postulating separate tradents for texts that are identical except for the names mentioned may create more problems than it solves. Did not the two tradents have a common source? Shir does not consider the possibility that one of the two texts presents creative alterations. Neither does he attempt to determine which of the two accounts is more original, as should be clear from the source of this passage in the Tosefta,²³ in which R. Akiva alone figures as the sea traveler who sees a disciple, an unnamed disciple, shipwrecked.

אמ' ר' עקיבא כשהייתי בא בים ראיתי ספינה שטבעה בים והייתי מצטער על תלמידי חכמים שבתוכה וכשבאתי למזגת קפוטקיא ראיתו יושב ושואל לפני בהלכה נמתי לו בני היאך עלית מן הים גם לי טרדני גל לחבירו וחבירו לחבירו עד שהגעתי ליבשה אמרתי כמה גדולים דברי חכמים שהיו אומ' מים שיש להן סוף אשתו מותרת מים שאין להן סוף אשתו אסורה.

The Bavli's treatment of this *baraita* is marked by two outstanding features: identifying the anonymous disciple, and duplicating the entire episode and applying it to another sage, namely, from R. Akiva backwards to R. Gamliel. Both features are quite common in the Bavli. The added identification of the disciple is marked as an

²² Erekh Millin, I, Warsaw 1913/4, p. 23.

²³ Yevamot 14, 5 (p. 52).

Aramaic insert by the word ומנו.²⁴ The original *baraita* is slightly rephrased in the Bavli, as it is also in the Yerushalmi and Kohelet Rabba. There is no need to assign this rephrasing to a late redactor. Who is behind the doubling of the whole story may still be an open question, as we shall see presently. This doubling applies an original story to a personality of an earlier generation. Thus the story flows backwards in time, from R. Akiva to Rabban Gamliel.²⁵

The net effect of both procedures is a thematic intertwining that challenges our credulity: Rabban Gamliel witnesses an extraordinary episode in which R. Akiva's scholarly merit brings miraculous salvation, and the same R. Akiva witnesses R. Meir in an identical situation. The chain of scholarly hegemony is thus delineated by the repetition.

ברכות סב ע"א

תניא אמר רבי עקיבא לבית הכסא ולמדתי ממנו שלשה דברים למדתי שאין נפנין מזרח ומערב אלא צפון ודרום ולמדתי שאין נפרעין מעומד אלא מיושב ולמדתי שאין מקנחין בימין אלא בשמאל אמר לו רבי יהודה עד כאן העזת פניך ברבך אמר לו תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך.

ברכות סב ע"א

תניא אמר רבי עקיבא פעם אחת נכנסתי אחר רבי יהושע לבית הכסא ולמדתי ממנו שלשה דברים למדתי שאין נפנין מזרח ומערב אלא צפון ודרום ולמדתי שאין נפרעין מעומד אלא מיושב ולמדתי שאין מקנחין בימין אלא בשמאל אמר ליה בן עזאי עד כאן העזת פניך ברבך אמר ליה תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך.

An additional twin account (Berakhot 62a) refers to R. Akiva and ben Azzai,²⁶ each of whom follows a sage entering the privy to learn

²⁴ On ומנו see N. Brüll, "Mischnalehrer von heidnischer Abkunft" [about Rabbi Akiva], *Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literature*, 2 (1876), pp. 154-6; H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* IV, Leipzig 1908, pp. 456-7 (#32); E. S. Rosenthal, ed. S. Lieberman et al, *Henoch Yalon Jubilee Volume*, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 308-9, n. 58; idem, "For the Talmudic Dictionary – Talmudica Iranica", *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 117, n. 9; D. Rosenthal, "לא איתפרש" לן מאי בעי הכא", *Bar Ilan*, 18-19 (1981), pp. 156-7; Sh. Abramson, ed. S. Friedman, *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, New York and Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 235-5 [on R. Akiva, etc.] = idem, *Rabbi Shmuel b. Chofni, Liber Prooemium Talmudis*, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 109-10.

²⁵ Cf. Elbaum, p. 73, n. 13 (there from R. Eliezer to Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai). Regarding the Kohelet Rabba parallel and the editor's agenda there, see S. Wald, "Hate and Peace in Rabbinic Consciousness: On Bavli Bava Batra 8a" (Hebrew, forthcoming).

²⁶ See R. Rabbinovicz, *Variae Lectiones*, I, Munich 1867, p. 358.

from his behavior even in this situation. Here again we find the doubling of an event, and intertwining of personalities. However, we cannot entertain the possibility that the repetition is the work of the late Babylonian redactor, since the two accounts already exist at the same location in the Yerushalmi Berakhot 9,5; 14c. Thus this editorial intervention precedes the anonymous stratum of the Bavli.

אמר רבי עקיבה נכנסתי אחרי רבי יהושע לראות אף שמעון בן עזאי היה או' כן נכנסתי אחר רבי המעשה אמ' לו מה ראיתא אמר להן ראיתו יושב עקיבה לראות את המעשה אמרו לו מה ראיתא וצידו כלפי מערב ולא פירע עד שישב ולא ישב כו'.
עד ששיפשוף ולא קינח בימין אלא בשמאל.

In the Bavli the language was restyled, and an embellishment was added in the form of a challenge by a younger sage. Neither of these operations requires the unique talents of the discursive commentators, and can be attributed to earlier Babylonian recasters of Palestinian material. The doubling itself, as we have seen, was already part of the early Palestinian tradition.

The above clearly demonstrates that creative editorial reworking is part and parcel of talmudic literature throughout most of its stages. Rather than viewing the earlier stages as verbatim reports and assigning all intervention to the anonymous stratum of the Bavli, one can discern the marks of literary creativity throughout the corpus.

In the following pages, we shall attempt to apply this theory to the aggadic narrative of the Bavli. Its shape and form betray the creative and artistic hand of an active redactor and formulator. His literary artistry need not be assigned to the authors of the late discursive commentary, and indeed the appreciation of its literary quality may be heightened by separating its composer from *that* genre, and concentrating our investigative spotlight upon his own.

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The body of this paper is devoted to the famous accounts of Rabbi Akiva's scholarly beginnings as recorded in the Bavli, Ketubbot 62b and Nedarim 50a.

נדורים נ ע"א

כתובות סב ע"ב

ר"ע רעיא דבן כלבא שבוע הוה חזיתיה ברתיא ר' עקיבא איתקדשת ליה ברתיא (דבר) דכלבא דהוה צניע ומעלי אמרה ליה אי מקדשנא לך אזלת שבוע שמע (בר) כלבא שבוע אדרה הנאה מכל לבי רב אמר לה אין איקדשא ליה בצניעה נכסיה.

ושדרתיה שמע אבוה אפקה מביתיה אדרה הנאה
מנכסיה.

אזלא ואיתנסיבה ליה בסיתוא הוה גנו בי תיבנא
הוה קא מנקיט ליה תיבנא מן מזייה אמר לה אי
הואי לי רמינא ליך ירושלים דדהבא אתא אליהו
אידימי להון כאנשא וקא קרי אבבא אמר להו הבו
לי פורתא דתיבנא דילדת אתתי ולית לי מידעם
לאגונה אמר לה ר' עקיבא לאנתתיה חזי גברא
דאפילו תיבנא לא אית ליה אמרה ליה זיל הוי בי
רב.

אזל תרתי סרי שנין קמי דר' אליעזר ור' יהושע
למישלם תרתי סרי שנין קא אתא לביתיה שמע
מן אחורי ביתיה דקאמר לה חד רשע לדביתהו
שפיר עביד ליך אבוך חדא דלא דמי ליך ועוד
[שבקך] ארמלות חיות כולהון שנין אמרה ליה אי
צאית לדילי ליהוי תרתי סרי שנין אחרנייתא אמר
הואיל ויהבת לי רשותא איהדר לאחורי הדר אזל
הוה תרתי סרי שני אחרנייתא.

אתא בעשרין וארבעה אלפין זוגי תלמידי נפוק
כולי עלמא לאפיה ואף היא קמת למיפק לאפיה
אמר לה ההוא רשיעא ואת להיכא אמרה ליה
(משלי יב) יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו.

אתת לאיתחזויי ליה קא מדחן לה רבנן אמר להון
הניחו לה שלי ושלכם שלה הוא.

שמע (בר) כלבא שבוע אתא ואיתשיל על נידריה
ואשתריי מן נכסיה.²⁷

מן שית מילי איעתר רבי עקיבא מן כלבא שבוע...

אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שנין בבי רב כי אתא אייתי
בהדיה תרי סרי אלפי תלמידי שמעיה לההוא סבא
דקאמר לה עד כמה קא מדברת אלמנות חיים
אמרה ליה אי לדידי ציית יתיב תרי סרי שני
אחריני אמר ברשות קא עבידנא הדר אזיל ויתיב
תרי סרי שני אחריני בבי רב.

כי אתא אייתי בהדיה עשרין וארבעה אלפי
תלמידי שמעיה דביתהו הות קא נפקא לאפיה
אמרו לה שיבבתא שאילי מאני לבוש ואיכסאי
אמרה להו (משלי יב) יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו.

כי מטיא לגביה נפלה על אפה קא מנשקא ליה
לכרעיה הו קא מדחפי לה שמעיה אמר להו
שבקוה שלי ושלכם שלה הוא.

שמע אבוה דאתא גברא רבה למתא אמר איזיל
לגביה אפשר דמפר נדראי אתא לגביה א"ל
אדעתא דגברא רבה מי נדרת א"ל אפילו פרק
אחד ואפי' הלכה אחת אמר ליה אנא הוא נפל על
אפיה ונשקיה על כרעיה ויהיב ליה פלגא ממוניה.
ברתיה דר"ע עבדא ליה לבן עזאי הכי והיינו
דאמרי אינשי רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא כעובדי
אמה כך עובדי ברתא.

²⁷ Compare textual witness.

Ketubbot 62ab²⁸

R. Akiva was a shepherd of Kalba Savua. The latter's daughter, seeing how modest and noble he was, said to him, "Were I to be betrothed to you, would you go away to [study at] an academy?" "Yes", he replied. She was then secretly betrothed to him and sent him away. When her father heard, he drove her from his house and forbade her by a vow to have any benefit from his estate.

[R. Akiva] departed, and spent twelve years at the academy. When he returned home, he brought with him twelve thousand disciples. He heard an old man saying to her, "How long will you lead the life of a living widowhood?" "If he would listen to me", she replied, he would spend [in study] another twelve years". Said [R. Akiva]: "It is then with her consent that I am acting", and he departed again and spent another twelve years at the academy.

Nedarim 50a²⁹

The daughter of Kalba Savua betrothed herself to R. Akiva. When her father heard thereof, he vowed that she was not to benefit from aught of his property.

Then she went and married him. In the winter they slept in the straw storage shed, and he had to pick out the straw from her hair. "If only I could afford it", he said to her, "I would adorn you with a golden Jerusalem". [Later] Elijah came to them in the guise of a mortal, and cried out at the door, "Give me some straw, for my wife is in confinement, and I have nothing for her to lie on". "See", R. Akiva observed to his wife, "there is a man who lacks even straw". [Subsequently] she counselled him, "Go and become a scholar".

So he left her, and spent twelve years [studying] under R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. At the end of twelve years, he was returning home, when from the back of his house he heard a wicked man jeering at his wife, "Your father did well to you. Firstly, because he is your inferior, and secondly, he has abandoned you to living widowhood all these years". She replied, "Yet were he to hear my desires, he would be absent another twelve years". "Seeing that she

²⁸ Adapted from *Kethuboth*, translated by I. W. Slotki, London, The Soncino Press, 1936, with minor changes.

²⁹ Adapted from *Nedarim*, translated by H. Freedman, London, The Soncino Press, 1936, with minor changes.

When he finally returned, he brought with him twenty-four thousand disciples. His wife heard and went out to meet him, when her neighbours said to her, “Borrow some respectable clothes and put them on”, but she replied, “A righteous man knoweth the life of his beast”.

On approaching him she fell upon her face and kissed his feet. His attendants were about to thrust her aside, when [R. Akiva] cried to them, “Leave her alone, mine and yours are hers”.

Her father, on hearing that a great man had come to the town, said, “I shall go to him, perchance he will invalidate my vow”. When he came to him [R. Akiva asked], “Would you have made your vow if you had known that he was a great man?” “[Had he known]”, the other replied, “even one chapter or even one single halachah [I would not have made the vow]”. He said to him, “I am the man”. The other fell upon his face and kissed his feet and also gave him half of his wealth.

The daughter of R. Akiva acted in a similar way towards ben Azzai. This is indeed an illustration of the proverb: “Ewe follows ewe, a daughter’s acts are like those of her mother”.

has thus given me permission”, he said, “I will go back”. So he went back, and was absent for another twelve years,

[at the end of which] he returned with twenty-four thousand disciples. Everyone flocked to welcome him, including her [his wife] too. But that wicked man said to her, “And whither art thou going?” “A righteous man knoweth the life of his beast” she retorted.

So she went to see him, but the disciples wished to repulse her. “Make way for her,” he told them, “for my [learning] and yours are hers”.

When Kalba Savua heard thereof, he came [before R. Akiva] and asked for the remission of his vow, and he annulled it for him.

From six things R. Akiva became rich, from Kalba Savua...

The overall similarity between the two accounts presumably establishes the dependence of one upon the other, and the expansive additions in Nedarim³⁰ point to Ketubbot as the original.³¹ For

³⁰ Especially the “straw” scene. For רמינא = adorn, see S. Paul, “Gleanings from the Biblical and Talmudic Lexica in Light of Akkadian”, *Minhah le-Nahum – Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of his 70th Birthday*, ed. M. Brettler, M. Fishbane, London 1993, pp. 255-6 (“attire”).

example,³² only in Nedarim are R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua mentioned by name as the teachers before whom R. Akiva sat.³³

Thus Nedarim is a *terminus ad quem* for the composition of the story. This would probably suggest that the composition predates the work of the anonymous commentators.

The Ketubbot narrative contains the following major themes: attendance at the house of study is a condition of the betrothal agreement; the vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation; 12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled; the wife's lack of proper garment to wear due to poverty; noble acknowledgement of his wife's merit by R. Akiva: שלי ושלכם שלה הוא.

The vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation serves as the envelope wrapping the story. The epilogue telling us that their daughter acted similarly towards ben Azzai is consistent with the tendency we have seen in doubling the event by extending it to another generation.³⁴

³¹ Nedarim also deletes (see below). As we have delineated the two stories, their size is approximately equal, although Nedarim is slightly longer. Contrast Menorat Hamaor, who quotes the story from Ketubbot, and adds: ובפרק הנודר כתוב מעשה זה יותר בקוצר (R. Isaac Aboab, *Menorat Hamaor*, ed. J. F. Horev, Jerusalem 1961, p. 508).

³² An additional example: the “women neighbors” and “old man” of Ketubbot become “an evil person” in Nedarim (cf. variant readings), intensifying the challenge to R. Akiva's wife. In a late expansive version: הגר אחד בשכוניתה שהיה: חגר אחד במבזה ומביישה בדברים... כיון שראה אותו חגור (Addition to Avot d'Rabbi Natan, p. 163).

³³ The discrepancies between Ketubbot and Nedarim had been explained in the 19th century as due to the uncertainties and lack of specific information on the part of the authors of each account, who ostensibly worked independently, each recounting what he knew about an ancient account of R. Akiva's beginning. See A. D. Dubsevit, *Hammetzaref*, Odessa 1871, p. 170. Nedarim's dependency upon Ketubbot was considered by A. Aderet, *Alei Siah* 4-5 (1977), p. 129.

³⁴ Compare also other such comments that the same event also occurred to x, e.g. Baba Metzia 83b-84a, where the saga of R. Elazar b. R. Shimon is said to have reoccurred with R. Yishmael b. R. Yose. The commentators were in a quandary as to how many of the details were repeated (see Friedman, “Historical Aggadah in the Babylonian Talmud”, p. 128 and n. 39). Regarding the R. Akiva/ben Azzai doublet under discussion here, the commentary “Rashi First Redaction” includes the detail that the betrothal to ben Azzai also took place without the knowledge of the betrothed's father! בדא ליה לבן עוזאי הכי

The main differences in Nedarim are as follows: R. Akiva is not described as a shepherd; an entire paragraph is added describing the couple's poverty, which forces them to sleep during winter in the storage-shed for straw. Removal of the straw from his wife's hair is Akiva's opportunity to mention the magnificent diadem which she deserves: "If I had the where-with-all, I would crown you with a 'Jerusalem- of-Gold.'"³⁵



Tiche-Antioch with mural crown, bronze, second century CE, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California.

נתקדשה לו על מנת שילמוד בלא ידיעת אביה (*Perushei R. Yehudah bar Natan*, ed. J. N. Epstein, Jerusalem 1932/3, p. 34).

³⁵ Regarding the nature of this 'mural crown', and its epigraphic and iconographic evidence, see S. Paul, "Jerusalem, A City of Gold", *IEJ* 17 (1967), pp. 259-63; S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah* 8 (New York, 1973), p. 768; S. Paul, "Jerusalem of Gold – Revisited", *Amihai*, Mazar Festschrift (Jerusalem 2004, forthcoming); H. A. Hoffner, "The 'City of Gold' and the 'City of Silver'", *IEJ* 19 (1969), pp. 178-180 (cited by Paul).

The appendix regarding the daughter and ben Azzai does not appear in Nedarim at all. Rather, the end of the narrative there is devoted to explaining the source of R. Akiva's riches, the explanation being that he received them from Kalba Savua, as spelled out in the following paragraph in Nedarim, which serves as an appendix to the story there.³⁶

The straw episode fulfils the need to describe Rachel's indigence and deprivation. Consequently, there is no need to have the neighboring women complain about her lack of proper clothing, as we find in Ketubbot. Consequently, the dress motif is eliminated, and the objection raised over her participation in greeting the sage is simply: ואת להיכא "Where do you think *you* are going?" The inclusion of the straw story and the omission of the dress motif are thus interdependent.

A further advantage to this reworking is that it enhances Rachel's image, in that picturing her in rags that do not provide sufficient covering is degrading.³⁷ It is now the disparaging "you", and not the lack of dress, that prompts the wife's self-defense, expressed by quoting a verse from Proverbs.

In his book *Carnal Israel*, Daniel Boyarin places central emphasis upon two motifs of this story:

The key to my reading is the name Rachel... The entire story of the romance of Rabbi Akiva and Rachel is generated by one root metaphor: Akiva as the shepherd and Rachel as a ewe. Rachel's declaration that "the righteous [shepherd] knows the soul [desire] of his animal" is, in fact, the key moment in the story.³⁸

³⁶ The "daughter and ben Azzai" account is certainly consistent with the general context in Ketubbot, which is devoted to absentee studying husbands (my thanks to Jeffrey Rubenstein for urging me to address this point). The context in Nedarim touches upon studying under deprivation. The annulment of the vow, the larger context of tractate Nedarim, appears not to have especially interested the Nedarim redactor of this story, who actually shortened the pertinent paragraph.

³⁷ Similarly, her kissing her R. Akiva's feet described in the next line in Ketubbot is removed in Nedarim, where she "appears before him".

³⁸ P. 151.

As is well known, the story does not contain an explicit mention of the name Rachel, which is found in ARN³⁹ only. However, in the epilogue in Ketubbot we do find רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא, or as Boyarin puts it, “her name is only hinted at in the talmudic text”.⁴⁰ The relationship between Ketubbot and ARN on this point was considered by Tal Ilan, who writes: “My guess is that the Aramaic saying in the Babylonian Talmud was understood by the Avot de-Rabbi Nathan as the name of the woman (or a pun on her name)”.⁴¹

Upon close examination we notice that the epilogue in Ketubbot actually quotes *two* juxtaposed proverbs:

והיינו דאמרי אינשי:

1 רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא,

2 כעובדי אמה כך עובדי ברתא.

Indeed, all textual witnesses contain the second proverb, but the first is found only in two primary textual witnesses, the printed editions, and MS Vat. 113.⁴² Moreover, this manuscript does not read רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא as in the editions, but rather (in context) רחילא בת רחילא, “A ewe daughter of a ewe, as the deeds of the mother so the deeds of the daughter”.⁴³

The reading of the printed editions: רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא, כעובדי אימא

³⁹ = Avot d’Rabbi Natan.

⁴⁰ N. 31; correct accordingly Ilan, *Mine*, p. 291, n. 37.

⁴¹ *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, Tübingen 1995, p. 81, n. 81; idem, “The Quest for the Historical Beruriah, Rachel, and Imma Shalom”, *AJSReview* 22 (1997), p. 10; idem, *Mine and Yours are Hers*, Leiden 1997, p. 79, n. 47, pp. 290, 294.

⁴² See also *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings*, Ketubbot II, Jerusalem 1966/7, p. 81 and n. 28.

⁴³ In M. Sokoloff’s *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, Ramat Gan 2002, p. 1068: “ewe daughter of a ewe’ [i.e. Rachel, the wife of R. Akiva, the descendant of Rachel, wife of Jacob”. However, the paraphrase provided here does not fit the context, which is not addressing the wife of R. Akiva as the daughter in question, but *their* daughter relating to her mother. Comparison of Akiva and Rachel with Jacob and Rachel was made by Elbaum (p. 72, n. 7) with reference to a detail in a secondary collection, and by Boyarin (p. 153) with reference to Ketubbot; cf. Ilan, *Mine*, pp. 289-91.

רחילא בת רחילא, כעובדי ברתא does indeed suggest that these are two different proverbs. However, in the manuscript reading רחילא בת רחילא, כעובדי ברתא, the two clauses can conceivably be taken as complementary parts of one proverb: “Ewe daughter of a ewe, like the deeds of the mother so the deeds of the daughter”. Reading the phrases as parts of one unit invites the theory that this is the original proverb, and the first half fell out in the reading of most textual witnesses.

We will argue against this interpretation for the following reasons: (1) Assuming common loss of text in independent textual witnesses is extremely risky, and is predicated upon coincidental accidents, or complex unproven dependencies. Furthermore, the phrase is also missing in secondary textual witnesses, such as Menorat Hamaor and Yalkut Shimoni. (2) We can marshal positive proof that the second half is an independent literary unit, and stands better alone without רחילא בת רחילא. Namely, כעובדי אמה כך עובדי ברתא is a quotation from the Targum to Ez 16 44.

הנה כל המשל עליך ימשל לאמר באמה בפה.

The Targum reads:

הא כל דמתיל עליך ימתול למימר כעובדי אמה בן ברתא.

As such the second half alone is most plausibly the original text. Whoever added רחילא בת רחילא made use of an independent zoological proverb, reminiscent of our botanical “the acorn doesn’t fall far from the tree”. Thus a compound proverb was produced, whose very length and redundancy are a clue to its composite nature, terseness being proverbial for proverbs.

The introduction of רחילא בת רחילא can be assigned to a relatively late stage of the transmission of the text of the Bavli. However, there is still room to study the significance of the insertion, and the question of Rachel being the name of R. Akiva’s wife in the eyes of the glossator.⁴⁴

The sole specific mention of this name in the Talmudic-Midrashic corpus appears in ARNA, p. 29:⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Use of the name in this study is with imaginary quotation marks.

⁴⁵ Compare “Addition b”, p. 163. Secondary sources made greater use of the name. Cf. *Midrash HaGadol*, Shemot, ed. M. Margulies, Jerusalem 1966/7, p.

עתיד רבי עקיבא לחייב את כל העניים בדין, שאם אומרים להם מפני מה לא למדתם [תורה] והם אומרים מפני שעניים היינו, אומרים להם והלא רבי עקיבא עני ביותר ומדולדל היה.

ואם אמר מפני שטפינו מרובין, אומרי' להם והלא עקיבא בנים ובנות היו לו אלא שפירנסם רחל אשתו.

It is true that the final redaction of ARNA took place after the compilation of the Bavli.⁴⁶ Moreover, entire exempla of the sages appear to have been added to ARNA based upon the Bavli.⁴⁷ However, many of these exempla clearly seem to be late additions to the core compilation, and cannot be used to demonstrate the reliance of the body of the work on the Bavli.⁴⁸ The Akiva complex in ARNA ch. vi (pp. 28-29) develops themes known from Palestinian sources



‘And Rachel was Beautiful’ by Abel Pann, Bible cover illustration, Courtesy of Itiel Pann and Mayanot Gallery, 28 King George St., Jerusalem, Copyright. www.mayanotgallery.com

and does not exhibit any indication of borrowing major themes from the Bavli account in Ketubbot or Nedarim. There is no allusion whatsoever to R. Akiva having been a shepherd or his having to labor

69, which introduces the name, apparently deriving it from ARN, in its logical place: כיון שראתה אותו רחל בתו שלבן כלבא שבוע אמרה etc.

⁴⁶ Kister, *Prolegomenon to Avoth de-Rabbi Nathan Solomon Schechter Edition*, Jerusalem 1997, pp. 12-13. Cf. M.B. Lerner, “The External Tractates”, in S. Safrai ed. *The Literature of the Sages I* (Aassen-Maastricht 1987), pp. 377-78. See below, n. 58.

⁴⁷ Kister, *Studies*, p. 208.

⁴⁸ Kister, *ibid.*

in Torah in order to earn his wife in marriage. There it is the wife who is pictured as laboring, in order to sustain their children. Thus the name Rachel in ARNA can hardly derive from the theme of shepherd laboring to earn his wife in marriage, as Jacob for Rachel.⁴⁹

Furthermore, not only is it not found at all in ARNB, but even in ARNA the name is only mentioned in this one sentence which expands on the theme of “many children”. In ARNB the poor are answered simply, *אף ר' עקיבא מטופל היה*, with no mention of the wife. This is expanded in ARNA, which reads⁵⁰ in context:

ואם אמר מפני שטפינו מרובין, אומר' להם והלא עקיבא בנים ובנות היו לו
אלא שפירנסתם רחל אשתו.



'Four Matriarchs' by Abel Pann, Courtesy of Itiel Pann and Mayanot Gallery. Copyright.

In the rest of the passage she is simply called *אשתו*. I can speculate that the name was supplied in ARNA in order to balance the short sentence *מפני שפירנסתם אשתו*. A personal touch is required here, and therefore *רחל אשתו*. Directing the literary spotlight upon the virtue and merit of R. Akiva's wife in raising their children

⁴⁹ See above, n. 43.

⁵⁰ The wording in the following text is based upon manuscripts and other attestations, reflecting readings such as *שפירנסם אשתו*, *שפרנסה אשתו*, *שזנתו* (should be *שפירנסתם אשתו*, *שפרנסה אשתו*, *שזנתו*). The reading *שזנתה* is an error for *שזנתה*, possibly inspired by Berakhot 17a. See L. Finkelstein, *Introduction to the Treatises Abot and Abot of Rabbi Nathan*, New York 1950, p. 188, and especially Kister, *Studies*, p. 49. See also Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers*, p. 82.

requires her to become a *persona* in her own right, and therefore have a name. It could have equally been Sara or Rivka, but if we are already reviewing matriarchs' names, Rachel presents a more personalized wife-figure, in the context of the biblical narrative.

The use of Rachel as the name of R. Akiva's wife in ARNA is thus a late and secondary feature. Similarly the phrase רחילא בת רחילא in Bavli Ketubbot is a late addition which is absent in the early textual witnesses.

It is difficult to establish the chronological relationship of these two embellishments with certainty. If רחילא בת רחילא was simply introduced by the glossator as a proverb he knew resembling כעובדי אמה כן ברתא, it might have helped inspire ARNA had it already come to the attention of its redactor. Conversely, if the glossator added it in Ketubbot anterior to ARNA, he could have been inspired by the late embellishment there.⁵¹ In either case, it was not part of the original artistic compositions under discussion.

Regarding יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו, according to manuscript attestation of R. Nissim's Arabic work חיבור יפה מן הישועה which cites the story from Nedarim, this verse, Proverbs 12:10 is not found in our story, but rather Proverbs 29:7⁵² [יָדַע צְדִיק דִּין דְּלִים]. This is also the verse cited from the Nedarim version in Hagadot HaTalmud and Ein Yaakov.

The early aggadic compilation Yalkut Hamakhiri⁵³ not only reads⁵⁴ יודע צדיק דין דלים but, as a work arranged according to the order of Scripture, quotes the story from Nedarim in the context of Proverbs 29 rather than Proverbs 12,⁵⁵ thus guaranteeing the testimony of this reading. The Shittah Mekubetzet to Nedarim labels נפש בהמתו an error.⁵⁶

Similarly יודע צדיק דין דלים is the reading in the Ran's commentary on Nedarim according to the first edition, which reads: יודע צדיק דין דלים: אמר (ch. 6) זה שנצטערתי בשבילי

⁵¹ Boyarin writes with reference to Ketubbot: "This remark makes explicit for the first time the pun on the name of 'Rachel' meaning 'ewe'" (p. 154).

⁵² See R. Nissim Gaon *Libelli Quinque*, ed. Sh. Abramson, Jerusalem 1965, p. 464, n. 13.

⁵³ See Zunz-Albeck, *HaDerashot BeYisrael*, Jerusalem 1954, p. 415 n. 95.

⁵⁴ 82b-83a.

⁵⁵ Where it appears in Yalkut Shimoni (par. 948), citing from Ketubbot.

⁵⁶ יודע צדיק [דין] דלים. ואית דגרסי נפש בהמתו וטעות הוא

להם הרבה צער נצטערה עמי בתורה.

It is possible that the redactor-compiler of the Nedarim account substituted יודע צדיק דין דלים for יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו. The troubling aspect of this reconstruction is that יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו would fit better in Nedarim, and דין דלים could be best explained in Ketubbot! Nedarim: יודע צדיק נפש ואת להיכא “Where do you think *you* are going?” Answer: יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו. Ketubbot: שאילי מאני לבוש ואיכסאי “Borrow clothing and cover yourself”. Answer: יודע צדיק דין דלים. Thus we cannot exclude the possibility that Nedarim, an indirect textual witness to the Ketubbot passage which it reworks, and thus perhaps the earliest witness, testifies to the reading דין דלים, which fits admirably in Ketubbot. According to this possibility, the verse that dispels the concern of the neighbors that paupers in rags⁵⁷ should not approach R. Akiva is יודע צדיק דין דלים. After all, do the neighboring women know that Rachel is יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו? Only the insiders know this, Akiva and Rachel, the storyteller, the listeners, and the tradent who thought that it would be best to spell it out in the language.

Hinting at the name Rachel, and the verse יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו, revealing as these features may be, do not appear to be part of the original Bavli composition, but rather extracted from it by later tradents or glossators, so adding a further stage to the unfolding narrative.⁵⁸

We therefore maintain our conclusion that the major themes of the Ketubbot exemplum are: the vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation; 12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled; lack of proper garment to wear due to poverty; tender acknowledgement of his wife’s merit.

As we mentioned above, two of the major differences in Nedarim are the omission of the shepherd motif, and the addition of the “straw” scene.

The shepherd theme would seem to be a sub-category of the motif

⁵⁷ יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו is already specified and translated downward as היתה לובשת סמרטוטין in the late “Addition” to ARN, p. 163, which also cites Proverbs 12, 10.

⁵⁸ Embellishing continued in the versions or paraphrases found in the late compilations. E.g., the introduction of R. Akiva’s mother (*The Exempla of the Rabbis*, ed. M. Gaster, London 1924, p. 106; Addition to ARN, p. 163) and even Rachel’s mother (*Exempla*, l. 27. There are further embellishments in both passages, which bear close comparison to each other).

“a pauper inherits the property of the wealthy nobleman for whom he worked”. The identical picture is found in a proverb mentioned several times in the talmudic-midrashic corpus: במתלא אמ' הנדי תלא מרא זיינייה קלבאי רעיא תלא קולתיה.⁵⁹ The traditional translation renders: “Where the master hangs up his armor, the base shepherd hangs up his pitcher”. I have argued elsewhere⁶⁰ that the shepherd was not at all base, and the translation should be: ‘In the place where the master of the manor would hang his cloak, the shepherd hung his crook’. This apothegm epitomizes a parable yet to be recovered, but a hypothetical reconstruction would see the master’s widow married to the modest and upright shepherd. A variation of this theme introduces the exemplum in Ketubbot.⁶¹

Nedarim shortens the beginning of the story and omits the shepherd motif entirely. In its place it adds the long “straw” scene, which portrays the poverty in a more romantic setting, and it is at the end of this scene that the wife is prompted to say “Go and study in the schoolhouse”.⁶² This substitutes for the same effect produced by the shepherd paragraph in Ketubbot. The woman’s finding the shepherd “good and kind” is the tender moment necessary to prompt the proposal, “If I betroth myself to you will you go to the study house?” The story requires either one or the other, but not both. The version in Nedarim attempts to improve upon Ketubbot. Rather than simply being attracted by the shepherd’s moral quality, the wife’s determination to raise him through education is inspired by her impoverished husband’s noble devotion and tender treatment toward her. The lover’s hand extended to remove a straw from the hair is a

⁵⁹ Vayiqra Rabba 4 (p. 75) and parallels.

⁶⁰ “The Talmudic Proverb in Its Cultural Setting”, *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal*, 2 (2003), <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/>.

⁶¹ And is further expanded in the Addition to ARN, p. 163: אמרו בן מ' שנה היה ורועה של בן כלבא שבוע היה. ראתהו בתו שהיה צנוע מכל רועי של בית אביה אמרה ראוי זה שיהא מורה הוראה בישר, ותיקרא תורה על שמו. הלכה ונתקדשה לו בצניעה. כיון שגדלה באו עליה כל גדולים ועשירים ולא היתה מתקדשת להם. אמר לה אביה מפני מה אי את מתקדשת. עמד אביה אימן כל גדולי הדור. אמ' לה התנשאי לכל מי שתרצה. אמרה לו מתקדשת אני לעקיבא רועך. כיון שאמרה כך הוציאה מביתו והורידה (=והדירה) הנאה מנכסיו The ‘humble and virtuous sheperd’ is of course a topos of hoary antiquity. Cf. “Lipit-Ishtar, the wise shepherd [...] I, Lipit-Ishtar, the humble shepherd of Nippur” (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton 1974, p. 159).

⁶² הוי = “study”. See below, Appendix.

subtle physical expression, the more powerful through its tenderness and restraint. It is enhanced by the verbal expression sustaining her spirit: others do not even have straw.⁶³

The efficiency and tightness of talmudic narrative style work against the inclusion of both themes. Repeating the shepherd motif would create an unnecessary redundancy. Bialik-Ravnitzky combined both episodes in order to get a more romantic effect than delivered by either story separately.⁶⁴

From the narrator's prospective, the primary reason for composing the episode about sleeping in the straw storage shed and his picking straw out of her hair must certainly have been creating an opportunity to mention the famed Jerusalem-of-Gold, which Akiva gave his wife, according to tradition. In ARNB⁶⁵ we read:

אמרו לא מת עד שיישן על מטות של זהב ועד שעשה כתר של זהב לאשתו ועד
שעשה קורדיקוס של זהב לאשתו. אמרו לו בניו הרי הבריות משחקות עלינו.
אמר להם איני שומע לכם אף היא נצטערה עמי בתלמוד תורה.

⁶³ In either case, it is she who is attracted to him, contrary to the rule assigned for rabbinic literature in M. L. Satlow, "One Who Loves His Wife Like Himself: Love in Rabbinic Marriage", *JJS*, 49 (1998), p. 72.

⁶⁴ *Sefer HaAgadah*, Tel Aviv 1947/8, p. 179 (for artistic reworkings of the story, see L. Finkelstein, *Akiba, Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, Cleveland, 1936, pp. 22-3, and especially A. Steinsaltz, "Rachel and Rabbi Akiva", *The Strife of the Spirit*, London 1988, pp. 150-165). Boyarin also combines both themes into one story, citing "Nedarim 50a" but opening the quotation "Rabbi Akiva was the shepherd of Kalba Savua" (p. 137), which is Ketubbot. "At this point in the text of the Babylonian Talmud [Ketubbot 62b. SF], the story of Rabbi Akiva and his romance with Rachel is produced... Akiva as the shepherd [Ketubbot]... The love of Rabbi Akiva for her is marked... in very powerful ways, in the poignant wish of the poor shepherd to give his bride a very expensive gift [Nedarim]", pp. 150, 151, 153-4. This leads to the combination of the shepherd (Ketubbot) and the straw (Nedarim) motifs in the analysis: "Rabbi Akiva's relationship with his wife is figured in several ways as the relationship of a shepherd to a beloved ewe-lamb; the very site of their erotic idyll is a barn" (p. 151). In talmudic idiom the straw barn is clearly distinguished from the cattle barn, see mSotah 8, 2 and parallels. Boyarin's combining of the two accounts is also noted in A. Cohen, *Rereading the Talmud*, Atlanta Georgia 1998, pp. 118-9 (thanks to Rabbi Barry Wimpfheimer for this reference).

⁶⁵ Ch. 12, p. 30.

This short account in the Yerushalmi contains the motifs of the couple's poverty expressed by the selling of braids of hair, and when better times came the ultimate recognition of the wife's merit through the gift of the exquisite זהב ירושלים של זהב diadem!

The motif of ridicule on the part of the neighbors in ARN⁷³ is now specified as the jealousy on the part of Rabban Gamliel's wife, and the undefined economic hardship in ARN ("נצטערה עמי") is romanticized in the Yerushalmi as "selling the braids of her hair". These two considerations argue for the primacy of the ARN account vis-à-vis the Yerushalmi.

En passant, I wish to note that the motif "selling hair to support her husband" can be traced to the Testament of Job, where Job's wife sold her hair to Satan in order to save her husband from starvation:

"...Now then if you have no money at hand [says Satan to Job's wife], offer me the hair of your head and take three loaves of bread. Perhaps you will be able to live for three more days." Then she said to herself, "What good is the hair of my head compared to my hungry husband?" And so, showing disdain for her hair, she said to him, "Go ahead, take it." Then he took scissors, sheared off the hair of her head, and gave her three loaves, while all were looking on.⁷⁴

This full presentation of the "hair" sacrifice may increase our appreciation of the laconic style of the Yerushalmi, where the selling of the braids supplies the measure for measure theme explaining the

מעשה בר' עקיבה שעשה לאשתו עיר של זהב חמתיה איתתיה דרבן גמליאל וקניית בה אתת ואמרת קומי בעלה אמר לה הכין הויית עבדת לי כמה דהוות עבדה ליה דהוות מזבנה מקליעתא פרוסטוקטולין. For the underlined, the Arukh read פרוסטוקטולין (vi, p. 437, q.v.), and it is so alphabetized there under *pe*. S. Lieberman suggested that the root reading may have been כרוסוקסטולין = χρυσοκαστέλλον 'turret of gold', *apud* S. Paul, "Jerusalem, A City of Gold", (above, n. 36), pp. 262, and see: S. Lieberman. *HaYerushalmi Kiphshuto*, Jerusalem 1934, p. 102.

⁷³ The parallelism was already noted by Kister (*Studies*, *ibid.*): שים לב ששם מקנאת אשה, ואלו באדר"ן דברי התרעומת נובעים מן הבנים או התלמידים, הסוברים, כנראה, שלא נאה שאשתו של חכם גדול תלך בהידור רב מדי; תפיסה אחרת של דמות האשה.

⁷⁴ The Testament of Job, 23 (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, I, New York 1983, pp. 848-9; Kahana, p. 527); cf. elaboration 24 and 25. The similarity was noted by Ginzberg, *Legends*, V, p. 387, n. 29; cf. Ilan, *Mine*, p. 156-7. Job's own hair was also cropped (Job 1, 20).

gift of the diadem headdress,⁷⁵ a magnificent ornament placed on the head of the wife, whose braids were donated to forward her husband's education. In the Bavli Nedarim passage measure for measure is conveyed by the description of removal of straw from her hair, with the explicit and immediate comment, "If I could, I would give you the Jerusalem diadem".⁷⁶

The Ketubbot account made use of the basic traditional themes regarding Rabbi Akiva's beginnings, without mention of the golden diadem, which belongs to the latter years of Rabbi Akiva's life. However, the redactor-compiler in Nedarim inserted his new paragraph in order to include an explicit prefiguration of this fabulous item. The resulting style is a literary anomaly, with the theme remaining incomplete in its context, since it is never stated in Nedarim that he ultimately gave her the diadem.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the compiler

⁷⁵ Later collections sought to remove the harshness of this act by substituting a scarf for the hair ("Maasiot" in Lunzano, quoted by Lieberman, above, n. 72).

⁷⁶ Certainly the diadem motif is independent and anterior to the motif of removing straw from the hair during poverty. More than being "different traditions", the various accounts betray a thematic and chronological development. Kister (*Studies*, p. 216, n. 487) has written: אבל יש להעיר לגבי סופו הטוב של הסיפור בנו"ב (עמ' 30), לפיו ר' עקיבא 'ישן על מיטות של זהב' ו'עשה כתר של זהב לאשתו' מידה כנגד מידה העניות המתוארת בנדריים נ ע"א כשינה על גבי תבן, הדבק בשערות אשתו (ואף מרמז שם על שכרה ב'ירושלים של זהב'). אלא שבאדר"ן מתוארת העניות בצורה אחרת, וכבר נתקפה טעמה של המסורת. In the previous sentence there is a citation of Elbaum's position that 12,000 disciples in ARN is dependent upon 12 years in Nedarim, which is questioned by Kister. He then suggests that an example of such a dependence is the "crown" of ARN, being dependent in a "measure for measure" relationship upon the "straw in the hair" of Nedarim, while ARN itself uses other descriptions of the poverty, and as a consequence the crown tradition of ARN falls flat, being separated from its measure for measure inspiration. This is then qualified: אבל מסתבר שאף בבבלי נדרים נ ע"א הורכבו מסורות בדיוק באותה צורה: שם נצטרף הסיפור על העוני (שסופו הצפוי ר' עקיבא העשיר) עם הסיפור בכתובות (שסופו ר' עקיבא החכם הגדול). נמצא שהמקורות מלמדים זה על זה. Nedarim is itself a composite and the phenomenon of overlapping traditions is not unique to Nedarim. He further adds: ליסוד הקדום של מידה כנגד מידה בעניין 'עיר של זהב' שעשה ר' עקיבא לאשתו - השווה בנוסף לבבלי הנ"ל גם למסורת השונה במקבילה etc., *quo vid.* For our part, we entertain the progression ARNB > Yerushalmi > Bavli as consistent both with the overall literary relationships of these documents, and with the thematic development discernable in the passages under study. See above, near note 73.

⁷⁷ Further indicating that Nedarim is a secondary rendition. The eventual gift

was attracted to this impressive traditional detail about the famous couple, and used his literary alchemy to spin gold into straw, with its concomitant romantic effect, enjoyed by all generations since.

Before we proceed with the root themes of the Akiva saga, let us touch upon the doubled 12-year absence. Indeed, the Yerushalmi⁷⁸ does record a similar period of study by R. Akiva at the feet of R. Eliezer before the latter recognized him. There it is 13 years⁷⁹ instead of 12.

שֶׁלֶשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה עָשָׂה רַבִּי עֲקִיבָה נִכְנָס אֶצְל רַבִּי לִיעֶזֶר וְלֹא הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ בּוֹ, וְזוֹ הִיא תְּחִילַת תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ הָרִאשׁוֹנָה לְפָנָי רַבִּי לִיעֶזֶר. אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הֲלֹא זֶה הָעַם אֲשֶׁר מֵאֲסֹת בּוֹ, צֵא נָא עִתָּה וְהִלַּחֵם בּוֹ.⁸⁰

However, for the theme in the form we have it in the Bavli we must turn to the account of R. Hanania ben Hakhinai.

Vayiqra Rabba⁸¹ and parallels⁸² tell of Hanania b. Hakhinai who remained in R. Akiva's academy in Bne Brak for 13 years without communicating with his wife in any form. She finally devised a way of bringing him back, but when he returned she died from shock. The tale is too tragic to remain in this form. Fortunately we are talking about literary composition, and almost any calamity can be rectified. The wronged wife can be brought back to life at the end of the story. That's easy, even if it had to wait for a later redactor to tack it on:⁸³ *ואית דאמרין הזרת*. However, for literary purposes, being returned to life is insufficient to remove the residual disappointment regarding Hanania b. Hakhinai's morally flawed conduct. Another means of correcting this is retelling the entire story and repairing the

would have been included had the diadem been part of the original and natural composition.

⁷⁸ Pesahim 6 3, 33b.

⁷⁹ Cf. ARNA 6.

⁸⁰ When R. Akiva raised his first challenge to R. Eliezer's teaching after 13 years, R. Yehoshua rebuked R. Eliezer for ignoring the disciples, citing Judges 9 38.

⁸¹ Parasha 21 (pp. 484-6).

⁸² Including bKetubbot 62b, our current location.

⁸³ See J. Fraenkel, *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem 1981, p. 52, n. 29, p. 55 and n. 45; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, p. 158, n. 39.

problematic element.⁸⁴ Therefore R. Akiva, Hanania's *teacher*, is also pictured as one who left his wife while studying for a similar period of years. But what a difference! It was she who sent him. Not only did she completely accept his absence and encourage him, but when she had the chance of having him back she says, "If he would only listen to me he would go for another 12 years!"⁸⁵ Quite a sacrifice on her part in order to correct the misconduct of her husband's disciple.⁸⁶

Although Palestinian sources record Rachel's devoted support of R. Akiva's labor in Torah, it is never in the context of a 12 year absence, which was added in the Bavli⁸⁷ in order to rehabilitate the tarnished character of another sage. Character rehabilitation would appear to be one of the motives for the retelling of other talmudic stories. The account of R. Yohanan's rage which resulted in the tragic death of Resh Laqish is retold about Rav Kahana, with a happier ending.⁸⁸

The large number of R. Akiva's disciples and the specific numbers 12,000 and its multiples are also themes mentioned in the older literature, and in many passages specifically in the context of R. Akiva's two separate periods of raising disciples. Here we quote Bereshit Rabba 61:⁸⁹

⁸⁴ The Talmud itself puts a similar sentiment in the mouth of R. Hama b. Bisa (bKet. 62b הכינאי בן חזקוני). Cf. Rubenstein, "Criteria" (above, n. 10).

⁸⁵ Regarding the motif of "wife sending husband back for more study", see E. Bin Gorion, *The Paths of Legend, An Introduction to Folktales* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1970, p. 61.

⁸⁶ The tarnished image of R. Hanania is also polished in the parallel in the Bavli; cf. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, p. 158. On differences between the account in the Midrashim and that in the Bavli, see further O. Meir, *Tura*, 3 (1994) pp. 74-83. We would prefer putting the emphasis in interpreting these differences upon the literary rehabilitation of R. Hanania's character (as Boyarin did) rather than upon the way his wife is portrayed (Meir).

⁸⁷ Cf. also in the other Bavli episodes in proximity: פסקו ליה תרתי סרי שנין למיזל: רבי חמא בר ביסא אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שני (Ketubbot 62b); בזל יתיב תרתי סרי שני (ibid.).

⁸⁸ The Rav Kahana narrative (bBQ 117a) can be shown to be dependent upon the Resh Laqish episode (bBM 84a), in that it incorporates details from each of the two adjacent aggadic cycles in BM, R. Elazar b. R. Shimon and R. Yohanan/Resh Laqish (see S. Friedman, "The Further Adventures of Rav Kahana – Between Babylonia and Palestine", in P. Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, 3, Tübingen 2002).

⁸⁹ P. 660. See Minhat Yehudah there. See also ARNB ch. 12 (p. 29) and other

ר' עקיבה א' אם העמדתה תלמידים בנערותך העמד תלמידים בזקנותך, שאין אתה יודע אי זה מהם הקב"ה מכתב עליך הזה או זה, ואם שניהם כאחד טובים. שנים עשר אלף (זוגות) תלמידים היו לו לר' עקיבה מגבת ועד אנטיפטריס, וכולהון מתו בפרק אחד, למה שהיתה עיניהם צרה אילו באילו. ובסוף העמיד שבעה, ר' מאיר ור' יהודה ר' יוסי ור' שמעון ור' אלעזר בן שמוע ור' יוחנן הסנדלר ור' אליעזר בן יעקב, ואית דאמ' ר' יהודה ור' נחמיה ור' מאיר ור' יוסי ור' שמעון בן יוחי ור' חנניה בן חכינאי ור' יוחנן הסנדלר. אמר להם בני הראשונים לא מתו אלא שהיתה עיניהם צרה בתורה אילו באילו, אלא תנו דעתכם שלא תעשו כמעשיהם. עמדו ומלאו כל ארץ ישראל תורה.

These traditions were the basis for the Ketubbot narrative in describing a dual 12-year absence, during each of which R. Akiva raised 12,000 disciples or a multiple thereof.⁹⁰ It was quite probable that the number 12,000 exerted its influence in adjusting the traditional number of years of study from 13⁹¹ down to 12.⁹²

Now let us turn to R. Akiva's son Yehoshua, who was also most fortunate in having a wife devoted to his study of Torah. She would

parallels. To bYev 62b see variant readings, p. 398, nn. 59-61.

⁹⁰ Elbaum (p. 73, n. 14) contemplates the opposite relationship, namely, the other sources are dependent upon the Bavli accounts in Ketubbot and Nedarim: המספר הנקוב משתלב יפה במסופר על תקופת לימודיו של ר"ע בנדרים ובכתובות... ועל-פי המצוי שם אולי ניתן להבין מה טעם תפסו המקורות בלשון: "י"ב אלף זוגות" However, this is more than improbable in light of the fact that the Bavli account is an extended narrative weaving a multiplicity of motifs (cf. "Historical Aggadah" [above, n. 21], p. 139 and n. 106; "The Further Adventures" [above, n. 89] n. 54), and the fact that this number of Rabbi Akiva's disciples is already found in various Palestinian sources. Furthermore, the Palestinian motifs of the number of disciples and their death have independent sources in other Palestinian passages, and were later transferred to R. Akiva's disciples, as has been demonstrated by Aaron Amit, "The Death of Rabbi Akiva's Disciples: A Literary History" (forthcoming). M. Kister (*Studies*, p. 216, n. 487) already questioned Elbaum's suggestion: תלמודים של ר' עקיבא, שהוא, לדעתו, תולדת המסורת על לימודיו של ר' עקיבא י"ב שנה ועוד אלבויים מביא כדוגמה שם את המספר י"ב אלף זוגות (בבלי נדרים נ"א), אבל זה ספק (מספרים אלה רגילים למדי בהקשרים שונים).

⁹¹ Yerushalmi and ARNA for R. Akiva and Midrashim for Hanania b. Hakhinai.

⁹² J. S. Zuri (*Rabbi Akiva*, Jerusalem 1923/4 [Hebrew], p. 4) took "twelve" as simply a general talmudic round number. Nedarim codex Vatican 110 reads תליסר... להוי תליסר.

stand all night holding the lamp while he read; it was also her task to roll the scroll from beginning to end and back to the beginning, both poignantly portrayed in Midrash Tehillim:⁹³

דבר אחר, מצא אשה מצא טוב (קהלת יח כב). אבל אשה רעה מרה ממנה. מעשה בבנו של ר' עקיבא שנשא אשה, מה עשה כיון שנכנסה עמו לחדר היה עומד כל הלילה וקורא בתורה ושונה בהגדות, אמר לה סבי לון בוצינא ומנהרין לי, סבת ליה בוצינא ואנהרה ליה כל לילה, והות קיימא קמיה ומנהרא, והוה פתיחא ספרא וגלייה ליה מן רישא לסיפא ומן סיפא לרישא, וכל ליליה איתקיימא ומנהרא ליה עד דאתא צפרא, בצפרא קרב ר' עקיבא לגביה, אמר ליה מצא או מוצא, אמר ליה מצא, הוי מצא אשה מצא טוב.

The subject of Yehoshua's study was Scripture and *aggadot*.⁹⁴ *Aggadot* were probably selected for this story because they were the first part of the Oral Torah allegedly written in books, thus requiring a lamp. Were Yehoshua to have studied these by day and *mishnayot* by night the story could not be told.⁹⁵ However, a realistic explanation is

⁹³ 59, 3 (p. 302).

⁹⁴ Re MSS attestation, see n. 23 there.

⁹⁵ A propos, it would appear that the practice of studying Mishna from written books rather than oral recitation can be ascertained in the reworking of the Akiva traditions performed by ARNA upon ARNB (cf. above, n. 46)!

אבות דרבי נתן, נוסח ב, פרק יב, עמ' 30 **אבות דרבי נתן, נוסח א, פרק ו, עמ' 29**

<p>אמרו לו שכינוי עקיבא (איבדתו עשן) עמדו עליו שכניו ואמרו לו עקיבא אבדתנו בעשן [איבדתנו בעשן] מכור חבילתך וקה בה שמן. מכור אותן לנו וטול שמן בדמיהן ושנה לאור הנר. אמר להם איני שומע לכם [שני] דברים טובים יש לי בה אחת שאני מתחמם כנגדה ואחת שאני משתמש לאורה.</p>	<p>אמר להם הרבה ספוקים אני מסתפק בהן אחד שאני שונה בהן ואחד שאני מתחמם כנגדן ואחד שאני ישן בהם.</p>
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This passage is not included by J. N. Epstein in his list of proposed proofs of writing Oral Law (*Introduction to the Mishnaic Text [=Mavo Lenusah HaMishnah]*, Jerusalem 2000³, p. 700. He does include there ARNA 25 (p. 41a)). Although that passage is certainly inconclusive (see S. Schlesinger, "On the Writing Down of the Oral Torah in the Time of the Talmud", *Sinai* 117 [5756/1995], p. 49) the repeated occurrence of š.n.h. there in contrast to the Shir HaShirim parallel cited there bears a second look in light of the passage cited here. Our proposal regarding ch. 12 is made with full awareness of the caution which must be exercised in marshaling evidence of written books for the Oral Law. We find in yKilaim 9 3 32b = yKetubbot 12 3 35a (cf. Bereshit

not lacking – after studying *halakha* by day, Scripture and *aggadot* provide less demanding subjects by night.

It would seem that the principle of רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא is applied here to the daughter-in-law of Rachel and Akiva. However, this point requires clarification. Exactly how the motif of “wife devoted to her husband’s Torah study” was transferred between R. Akiva and his son Yehoshua now becomes the focus of our attention, and indeed the linchpin of our thesis. The key passage is Tosefta Ketubbot 4 7 (p. 67), which recounts the betrothal agreement negotiated between Yehoshua and his wife:

נושא אדם אשה על מנת שלא לזון על מנת שלא לפרנס, ולא עוד אלא שפוסק עמה שתהא זנתו ומפרנסתו ומלמדתו תורה. מעשה ביהושע בנו של ר' עקיבא שנשא אשה ופסק עמה על מנת שתהא זנתו ומפרנסתו ומלמדתו תורה. היו שני בצרות, עמדו וחלקו. התחילה קובלת עליו לחכמים, וכשבא לבית דין אמ' להם "היא נאמנת עלי יתר מכל אדם". אמרה להם, "ודיי כך התנה עמי". אמרו לה חכמים, "אין כלום אחר הקיצה".

R. Akiva’s son Yehoshua was a scholar or a sage in his own right. The contract which he executed with his wife upon their marriage became a halakhic paradigm. One may betroth with the explicit condition that not only is *he* exempt from supporting *her*, but she undertakes to

Rabba 33): בההיא שעתא אשגריית עיניי בכל ספר תילים אגדה. H. L. Strack cites this passage as his first testimony for the writing down of aggadic material in Palestine: “Hiyya (an uncle of Rab’s) reads in the bathhouse a haggadic work on the Psalms” (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, New York/Philadelphia 1959, p. 13). Sokoloff also renders: “at that moment I passed my eyes over the whole book of *Aggada* on Psalms” (*A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, Ramat Gan 1990, p. 538; B. Lifshitz, “Aggadah and its Place in the History of the Oral Law”, *Shenaton Ha-Mishpat Ha-Ivri* 22 [2001-04], p. 268). However, ספר תילים אגדה certainly means the aggada of the book of Psalms (cf. ySukkah 3 10 54a = yMegilla 1 9 72a בעשרה לשונות של שבה). Had R. Hiyya been reading a book, he would have been observed doing this, and the excuse would fall flat. אשגרת עיניי indicates “casting one’s thoughts”; cf. yShabbat 7 2, 9b where the same phrase is used for mentally searching the entire Pentateuch for the orthographic forms of the word מלאכה (cf. Pne Moshe and bMegilla 18b; M. Assis, הגהות ופירושים בירושלמי שבת, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48 [1977], pp. ט-ה). On the question of oral tradition in written form, see S. Naeh, “The Structure and Division of *Torat Kohanim* (A): Scrolls”, *Tarbiz* 66 (1997), pp. 505-512.

support him so that he is free to study Torah.⁹⁶

Yehoshua's case is the precedent for such a law. His bride accepted this condition willingly and with devotion. However, they did not, or at least she did not, sufficiently anticipate the eventuality of hard times, the dry years, years of drought, during which the fulfillment of the bargain became too difficult for her. As part of the ensuing dispute the remaining property was divided between the two. "Take your half and support yourself. I simply cannot". "No", he said, "a bargain is a bargain. I'm doing my part. You do yours". In response she appealed to the sages, and when the matter came to court, Yehoshua said, "I accept all her statements as truth without any hesitation. She is more trustworthy to me than any person on earth". The plaintiff spoke up. "Indeed", she said, "we did make such an agreement upon betrothal". "Well then" said the judges, "there can be no retracting once a binding contract has been executed".⁹⁷

Most of the major themes of the Akiva exemplum are already here in the Yehoshua case. The study of Torah is a condition of the betrothal agreement. The bride was afflicted by poverty and hardship.⁹⁸ The tender appreciation for the wife is explicitly voiced by the husband: "She is more trustworthy to me than any person on earth". However, in this primary source reality intrudes. Even the best understandings between husband and wife can sometimes end up in court. Still, the real life story is stirring. Is this not the stuff that exempla are made of?

At this point the *Aggada* takes over. Midrash Tehillim gives

⁹⁶ Tal Ilan correctly gives preference to the interpretation that financial support and not actual instruction is meant, both in the general and specific case (*Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, p. 194 and n. 33; this position is reversed in her *Mine*, pp. 168-9 and n. 24).

⁹⁷ קיצא is קצצה used in various legal contexts for a binding agreement. It figures in the laws of acquisition בקצצה קונים חזרו להיות (yKid 1 5 60c and parallel). See also Z. Falk, *IVRA* 17 (1966), p. 173. The word *kinyan* also came to mean an irrevocable agreement, and is substituted for קיצא in the Yerushalmi parallel of this *baraita* in our Yerushalmi text: אין אהר קניין כלום as in bBB 152b. As to the text of the Yerushalmi, see S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Ketubbot, p. 245.

⁹⁸ During the years of drought. The simple meaning of the original agreement certainly seems to be that she would labor to support him. Contrast Zuri: "He married a rich woman who supported him" (p. 5); A. Büchler: "He married the daughter of a wealthy landowner", *Studies in the Period of the Mishna and the Talmud* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1967, pp. 116, 135.

aggadic expression to the assistance in study extended to Yehoshua by his devoted wife, picturing her holding the lamp and winding the scroll. However, the stature and fame of R. Akiva are an overwhelming force which attracts this inspiring account and draws it from son to father: מעשי בנים סימן לאבות.

R. Akiva's unnamed wife sold the braids of her hair and gave him the money so that he could labor in the study of Torah. The cash transfer made possible by self sacrifice corresponds to the event reported about Yehoshua. However, a romantic element is added – she sold the braids of her hair. Romanticizing is an integral aspect of the retelling process.

Yehoshua's wife undertook to feed him and support him. על מנת שתהא זנתתו ומפרנסתו. In ARNA this theme is applied to R. Akiva's wife supporting and maintaining their children, the various textual witnesses⁹⁹ reflecting the same terminology: מפני שפירנסם רחל אשתו; מפני שזנתתו רחל אשתו.

The ultimate application of the story of Yehoshua and his wife, although not recorded in the intervening parallels, appears in the Bavli, as the events flow backwards from son to father, and the legal precedent is converted into an exemplum. The study of Torah as a condition specified at betrothal connects these sources directly. It also serves as an indication of the primacy of Ketubbot over Nedarim, where the exhortation by the bride in favor of study is transferred from betrothal to the scene in the straw storage shed.

“12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled” is borrowed in the Bavli from other contexts regarding R. Akiva.¹⁰⁰ The vow of disinheritance and the establishing of Kalba Savua as the bride's father is an embellishment in the framework of the Bavli, duplicating themes from the legend about the beginnings of R. Eliezer. In those stories the vow of disinheritance figures in the explicit context of other siblings, and the name Kalba Savua is also mentioned.¹⁰¹ The other themes,

⁹⁹ See above, n. 51.

¹⁰⁰ See above.

¹⁰¹ Bereshit Rabbah 41 (42), p. 398 (and parallels [ARNA, 6, p.31; ARNB, 13, p. 32]): לאחר ימים עלה אביו לנדותו מנכסיו ומצאו יושב ודורש וגדולי מדינה יושבין לפניו, בן: ציצית הכסת וניקודימון בן גוריון ובן כלבה שבוע... אמר לו אביו לא עליתי בני אלא לנדותך מנכסיי, עכשיו הרי כל נכסיי נתונים לך במתנה. This interpretation was also suggested by Tal Ilan (*Mine*, p. 213); cf. J. Neusner, *Judaism and Story*, Chicago 1992, p. 118. A different opinion is expressed by J. Fraenkel (*Iyyunim*, p. 113, n. 14),

however, namely, the study of Torah as a condition of the betrothal agreement; the wife's affliction of poverty; and the husband's acknowledgement of his wife's merit, are all motifs taken over from the details of the original legal tradition concerning Yehoshua and his wife.

Yehoshua

The study of Torah is a condition of the betrothal agreement.

The bride was afflicted by poverty and hardship.

Tender appreciation for the wife explicitly voiced by the husband.

Akiva

Attendance at the house of study is a condition of the betrothal agreement.

The vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation.

12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled.

Lack of proper garment to wear due to poverty.

Acknowledgement of his wife's merit.

The closest approximation to the original literary kernel¹⁰² of the Akiva legend is in ARNB, in short unconnected pericopae.¹⁰³ Akiva is

who wishes to consider an independent older source containing the vow of disinheritance by R. Akiva's father-in-law: בעיקר ההלק האחרון ייתכן שסיפור האב, הוא ממקורו סיפור שני שהיה בתחילה עצמאי ושולב בתוך סיפור הבת שבו, הוא ממקורו סיפור שני שהיה בתחילה עצמאי ושולב בתוך סיפור הבת

¹⁰² See "Historical Aggadah" (above, n. 21), p. 122, on the necessity to identify a "literary kernel" before searching for a "historical kernel". Positive determination that data originates in the embellishments of expansive fiction can be more exact than rigorous skepticism alone. Boyarin already rejected search in the Bavli account of R. Akiva for a historical kernel: "...it is impossible, of course, to read the story either as a representation of actual historical-biographical reality, or a literary version of a 'kernel' of biographical truth" (*Carnal Israel*, pp. 137-38). In any case, he still flirts with the idea: "The historical reading is problematic, that is, beyond the bare facts that there was an Akiva, that he was married, and that apparently he and his wife suffered great poverty while he studied Torah. This much of the story seems so frequently told as to be established historically, though given the nature of rumor, one may even wonder at this" (n. 9). [This represents methodological tightening of an earlier version: "... that there was an Akiva, that his wife was named Rachel (although given the emblematic value of her name in the story, maybe even this is fictive), and that apparently they suffered great poverty while he studied Torah. This much of the story seems so frequently told as to be established historically" ("Internal Opposition in Talmudic Literature: The Case of the Married Monk", *Representations*, 36 (1991), p. 108, n. 9)].

¹⁰³ Elbaum (p. 73) compares the ARNB account to a "mosaic". On lack of

unlearned and poor, but determined to conquer the study of Torah, and eventually raises 12,000 pairs of disciples. Ultimately he is rewarded with great riches, and bestows magnificent gifts upon his wife. He justifies this extravagance with the recollection of the suffering she underwent during his studies.¹⁰⁴ In ARNA her role moves from passive suffering to active contribution; she supports the children. In the Yerushalmi her contribution is made directly to Akiva, and romanticized: cutting off her braids and giving him the money for his study of Torah.

Only in the Bavli are all these themes and more woven into a continuous narrative, as they are further developed and romanticized. Most creatively, their son Yehoshua's betrothal bargain is taken over by the parents. Akiva's boorishness now has him cast as a shepherd. The disinheritance theme is borrowed from R. Eliezer's appearance before Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, and connected to one of the personalities who was sitting in the audience: Kalba Savua. The 12,000 disciples are combined with the 13>12 years of study. This period was cast as one of separation from his wife, an absence which was retroactively imposed upon R. Akiva so that he could correct Hanania b. Hakhinai's wrongdoing, and his wife could redouble her devotion and sacrifice to new extremes.

This full exemplum then falls into the hands of a talmudic author working within the framework of Nedarim, who cannot resist retelling it, perhaps in order to add the other fabulous tradition about R. Akiva, even though it does not fall within the chronological range of this story. The Yerushalmi had already identified the head ornament with the Mishnah's "city of gold", glossed as ירושלים של זהב. The brilliant prefiguration of the golden diadem in the straw scene also allows the storyteller to shift Ketubbot's betrothal pact (*la* Yehoshua) to a more tender and stirring scene. Delaying the exhortation to study to a time after the betrothal and anticipating the Jerusalem-of-Gold in the early years of the marriage bring both themes together in the storage shed, as the couple exchange their mutual vows of love.

To the degree that the similarity between Akiva and his son Yehoshua regarding their betrothal stipulations eluded scholars who addressed the story of Akiva and Rachel, the reason could have been

connection in ARN in general, see Kister, *Studies*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁴ I cannot agree with Tal Ilan's assertion that "its lavishness contradicts the poverty theme" (*Mine*, note 42 above, p. 108).

their basic historical approach. Furthermore, had they juxtaposed the passages and contemplated the resemblance they might have taken it as a chance coincidence, or a historical event, where the second generation followed the first, and consequently not germane in understanding the talmudic record about the father.¹⁰⁵ The Bavli's Akiva narratives in Ketubbot and Nedarim were largely taken as embellishments upon a basic factual tradition or preexisting literary core story of more or less the same scope regarding Akiva the shepherd, thus dulling appreciation of the composer's creative artistry.¹⁰⁶

The alternative presented here is receptivity to the radical reworking of motifs inherent to original narrative composition, especially, but not exclusively, in the Bavli. The reuse of motifs is not limited to embellishing earlier traditions about the protagonist. Rather, the literary historian must consider use of themes adjacent to the hero, such as the Yehoshua tradition, or those external to him, such as motifs transferred from other sages. The Akiva legend in the Bavli was composed by a skilled literary artist, woven from brief and isolated components into a polished and seamless creation.

Full appreciation of aggadic narrative and its artistry cannot be captured as a still, focusing upon the end product in splendid isolation, but requires investigating the overall kinetic unfolding of all its stages.

¹⁰⁵ Zuri (p. 5) mentioned Yehoshua's betrothal stipulation without any hint of relating it to the betrothal condition proposed to R. Akiva in Ketubbot. Ilan seems to project a historical background ("Perhaps in R. Aqiba's family it is more reasonable to suppose that his son's wife supported her husband" (*Jewish Women*, p. 194, n. 33; in this context she also refers to Elbaum's point of applied literary motifs [Elbaum, above, n. 20, p. 71, n. 2]). Ilan's goal in *Mine and Yours* is retrieving history (as stated in the subtitle) rather than literature. In consonance with this she writes: "The most crucial procedure is to discard all material in the stories of Rabbi Aqiva's wife that is clearly a-historical" (p. 292).

¹⁰⁶ Sh. Valler (*Women and Womanhood in the Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, Tel Aviv, p. 77) writes regarding Ketubbot and Nedarim: על-פי ההבדלים: המצוינים לעיל קרוב להניח, שהסיפור הגרעיני על ר' עקיבא כלל פרטים אלה: א. בתו של בן כלבא שבוע התאהבה בו בהיותו עני, נישאה לו, עוררה את כעס אביה והודרה מנכסיה; ב. ר' עקיבא התחיל ללמוד בגיל מבוגר ונעדר מביתו תקופה ממושכת; ג. ר' עקיבא הגיע למעלה גבוהה בתורה והיו לו תלמידים רבים; ד. האהבה בין ר' עקיבא לבין אישתו לא כבתה, למרות הניתוק Compare Dubsevit (above, note 33). הממושך ביניהם

The composer of the Babylonian narrative under investigation wishes to use the Akiva traditions as the vehicle for portraying his resolution of the conflicting loyalties of marriage and a life of study. He can forge a corrective for the insensitivity of ultra-Torah devotion which marred the past, but cannot resolve the conflict without demanding the ultimate sacrifice from the Torah-wife. The mechanics and problematics of this solution are raised from the mundane to the sublime by consecrating the couple's arrangement with romanticized love.

Appendix : הוי = "Study" (n. 63)

Scholarly attention has long been directed to uses of הוי such as והוינא and ורביא בה, הוי בה ר"פ, הויות דאביי ורביא and others. In Seder Tannaim we Amoraim¹⁰⁷ we find: וכל הויא קושיא כגון "והוינן בה" ו"הוי בה" ר' פלוני.¹⁰⁸ These and related phrases in the Bavli and Yerushalmi have been assigned a range of related meanings, such as "deduce", "examine", "raise a difficulty", "solve", "conclude".¹⁰⁹ In this context, mention

¹⁰⁷ Ed. K. Kahan, Frankfurt a. M. 1935, p. 31; *Sefer Kriat*, Jerusalem 1964/5, p. 321.

¹⁰⁸ Regarding הויא (see Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, p. 373), mention should be made of Syriac ܘܘܢܘܚܘܢ, 'demonstration', 'proof' (cf. Rosenthal, *Towards the Redaction* [below, n. 109], p. 260).

¹⁰⁹ See L. Ginzberg, "Beiträge zur Lexikographie des Aramäischen", ed. S. Krauss, *Festschrift Adolf Schwartz zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag*, Berlin 1917, p. 347; E. S. Rosenthal, *Towards the Redaction of TB Tractate Pesah Rishon*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University 1959, pp. 259-61 and notes; Y. Sussmann, *Babylonian Sugiyot to the Orders Zera'im and Tohorot*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University 1969, pp. 169-70 n. 17; and copious citation of literature in both; D. Boyarin, "Towards the Talmudic Lexicon III", ed. M. A. Friedman, M. Gil, *Te'uda*, 4 (1986), pp. 125-6; M. Asis, *Studies in Memory of the Rishon Le-Zion R. Yitzhak Nissim*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem 5755, pp. נב-נא; L. Moscovitz, "Lishanei Aharinei in the Talmud Yerushalmi", *Sidra* 8 (1992), p. 72; idem, "Double Readings in the Yerushalmi – Conflations and Glosses", *Tarbiz* 66 (1997), p. 196. In connection with Rosenthal's position that the root is הוי Boyarin remarks: באו מתקני הלשון... והחזירו את החי"ת - 'מהוי' - על-כל-פנים, לא השאירו 'מהוי'... ואם-כן סרה התמיהה שבקטעי הגניזה לבבלי כבר מצאנו לרוב את הנוסח המתוקן מהוי (p. 125, p. 126, n. 44). If the intention here is to claim that the orthographic form מהוי for מהוי does not occur, this is not the case. See E. S.

has also been made¹¹⁰ of passages in the Yerushalmi such as:

אמר ר' סידור, יהודה בר' עבד(ין) הווי במכשירין שיתא ירחין. בסופא
אתא חד תלמיד מן דר' סימאי ושאל ליה ולא אגיביה. אמ' ניכר הוא זה שלא
עבר על פיתחה שלתורה.¹¹¹

In the same context:

ר' יוחנן ור' שמעון בן לקיש עבדין הוויי בהדא פירקא תלת שנין ופלוג.
אפקון מיניה ארבעין חסר אחת תולדות על כל הדא וחדא. הן דאשכחון
מיסמוך סמכין. הן¹¹² דלא אשכחון מיסמוך [עבדוניה] משום מכה בפטיש. בנוי
דר' חייא רובא עבדן הוויי בהדין פירקא שיתא ירחין. אפקון מיניה שית
מילין על כל הדא וחדא. בנוי דר' חייא רובא הוויי¹¹³ בשיטת אבוהון, דתני ר'
חייא הקוצר הבוצר המוסק הגודד התולש האורה כולהן משום קוצר.

From these passages in yShabbat it would appear that הוי also bears a related but less specified meaning,¹¹⁴ closer to “study”.

In his *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*¹¹⁵ M. Sokoloff cites one of the above-cited passages s.v. עבד, under its 12th meaning: “to spend time”, and thus translates: “PN’s sons spent six months (studying) that chapter”.¹¹⁶ This presentation indicates the analysis that

Rosenthal, ed. Sh. Shaked, *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem 1982, “For the Talmudic Dictionary – *Talmudica Iranica*” (Hebrew), p. 113, n. 39 (also indicating *af’el*); Y. Kara, *Babylonian Aramaic in the Yemenite Manuscripts of the Talmud*, Jerusalem 1983, p. 60, number 18; Saul Lieberman Institute Henkind Data Base (CD ROM), search: מהוי; ומהוי.

¹¹⁰ Cf. B. Ratner, *Ahavat Zion Virushalayim*, Ma’asrot, Vilna 1906/7, pp. 105-6; Rosenthal.

¹¹¹ Shabbat 7 2, 9b.

¹¹² הא...מן. Cf. Meleket Shlomo; eds: הן...הן.

¹¹³ Rosenthal (p. 260) editorially adds עבדון (with question mark) before הווי. The words from בנוי to הוויי are lacking in the citation in Meleket Shlomo 7,2 and are apparently an accidental doubling from above. Without them translate “...they extracted from it six things for each one, consistent with their father’s approach”, as R. Hiyya associated six categories with “reap”. There is no need to repeat the phrase in question.

¹¹⁴ According to the specified meaning the sages are seen as occupied in “demonstratio, argumentum” (Rosenthal, pp. 259-60).

¹¹⁵ = *DJPA*.

¹¹⁶ P. 392.

עבד meaning “to spend time” is the main verb in this sentence,¹¹⁷ the word¹¹⁸ הוּו is an auxiliary verb, and the (correct) meaning “studying” is not expressed, but supplied from context.

Such an understanding is corroborated by Sokoloff’s transcription of the text: בני דר' חייא רובא עבד<י>ן הוּו { } בהדין פירקא שיתא ירחין. The angle brackets indicate an “editorial addition”, and converting עבד into a plural form is indeed warranted (compare the preceding passage, which we have quoted above).¹¹⁹ The curled brackets (“editorial deletion”) convert הוּוּי into the auxiliary verb הוּו. This, however, is not at all warranted. We have seen that the form עבדין הוּוּי also occurs above.

In our opinion, עבד is the auxiliary verb,¹²⁰ and הוּוּי is the main verb, with the meaning “recite”,¹²¹ “study”. Thus translate: “PN’s sons were studying that chapter for six months”, a broader and more general meaning of הוּוּי than usually assigned in the past.

In our bNedarim passage we read:

אמרה ליה זיל הוּי בי רב. אזל הוּה תרתי סרי שנין קמי דר' אליעזר ור' יהושע... הדר אזל הוּה תרתי סרי שני אחרנייתא.

The second occurrence of the verb here (הוּה) is missing in the editions, but preserved in the versions.¹²² Context requires: “Go and study in the schoolhouse. He went and studied 12 years before R. Eliezer and R.

¹¹⁷ This is also the interpretation represented in the parenthetical comment in *Additamenta ad Librum Aruch Completum*, Vienna 1937, p. 157.

¹¹⁸ See below.

¹¹⁹ Meleket Shlomo copied here עבדון. The past tense is indeed superior according to the analysis we shall adopt, and was editorially emended as such in all occurrences in our passage by Rosenthal (p. 260).

¹²⁰ Cf. C. Levias, *A Grammar of Galilean Aramaic*, intro. M. Sokoloff, New York 1986, p. 199. Compare yNed 11 1 42c: יהוד' איש הוצא עביד טמיר במערתא etc. תלתא יומין מיקו' על הדין טעמ' etc.

¹²¹ Sukkah 1 5 52a כהנא ואסא עלון והוון קומי רב כהדא דשמואל (not cited in Sokoloff, *DJPA*).

¹²² See *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings*, Nedarim II, Jerusalem 1990/1, p. 38 and n. 20 (add: Yalkut Shimoni). The omission in the editions leaves an incomplete sentence: אזל תרתי סרי שנין קמי דרבי אליעזר ודר' יהושע (and indeed the word הוּה is supplied by R. Yoel Sirkis [Bah], probably from Yalkut Shimoni).

Yehoshua... he went again and studied another 12 years”.¹²³ Thus הוה = study. This interpretation is further supported by the parallelism with Ketubbot:

נדרימ

כתובות

אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שנין בבי רב אזל הוה תרתי סרי שנין קמי דר' אליעזר ור' יהושע

In his *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, Sokoloff lists as meaning I, 5 of the verb הוי: “to stay, last, pass”. Here, the final meaning of the verb without prepositions, the Nedarim passage is cited, and translated: “Go stay in the *be rav*. He went (and) stayed for two years in the presence of PN₁ and PN₂ [i.e. he learned from them]”.¹²⁴ Once more, the brackets supply the simple meaning of the passage: learned, studied.¹²⁵ In our opinion, the Aramaic dialect of Nedarim preserves here a usage of הוי corresponding to the more established usage in the Yerushalmi cited above.

We consequently conclude that הוי בי רב contains a further instance of הוי = “study”, and should be added to the other usages of הוי discussed in the past.

¹²³ The Soncino translation reads: “‘Go, and become a scholar.’ So he left her, and spent twelve years [studying] under R. Eliezer and R. Joshua... so he went back and was absent for another twelve years” (*The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein, London 1936, p. 136). This approach represents three different *ad hoc* solutions.

¹²⁴ P. 371. The talmud text is cited there as follows: זיל הוי בבי@רב אזל הוה תרתין. שנין קמי ר' אליע' ור' יהוש' (The “@” sign is explained on p. 54). The citation is from MS Munich 95. The author’s system using a select manuscript per tractate is explained on pp. 18, 24 (and see p. 57). In this case the practice of using the text of the “best manuscript” without further comment is misleading, in that “two years” is clearly an error, as can be seen from the Munich manuscript itself in context: אמר' ליה זיל הוי בבי רב. אזל הוה תרתין שנין קמי ר' אליע' ור' יהוש'. למישלם תרתין סרי שנין קם ואת' לבית'.

¹²⁵ From context rather than lexical submeaning of הוה. Consequently this occurrence was not connected with meaning II,6 or with הוואה or הויא (p. 373).