

Women-Related Images as
Metaphorical Source Domain in
Tannaitic Corpora

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Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich bei der Abfassung der vorliegenden Arbeit alle Regelungen guter wissenschaftlicher Standards eingehalten habe. Weiter erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig verfasst habe und keine Hilfe Dritter in Anspruch genommen habe.

Abstract

This dissertation is on gendered metaphorical language in tannaitic sources. It focuses on images that have women as source domains for matters which are relevant to the rabbinic project, like the Divine, the rabbinic movement itself, the Oral Torah, mitsvot and the calendar. It argues that these metaphors are used to make a claim – about rabbinic identity, values, innovations or peculiar ideas. These are situated within and relate to the frame of Late Antiquity discourses, such as Roman imperial rhetoric and the debates with competing Jewish and non-Jewish groups, that also make use of gendered metaphors. However, the rabbinic usage is particular and modulated on the rabbinic system of law, life, ritual and religion. Through methodologies from conceptual metaphor theory, gender studies and literary analysis, this study maintains and discusses the importance of the female gender in this cognitive mapping. Women's experiences are connected to rabbinic ideas about religion as embodied practice and law, the role of Israel and the risks it is exposed to, its relationship with the Divine, the importance of externalization and ritual in piety. Figurative language and gender in metaphors are not just a rhetorical move, but a cognitive process that constructs meaning and adherence to a certain way of life and ideology. Female imagery is used for thinking about communal identity, whereby the woman-image is the subject of the figurative construction. Source domains that refer directly to the experience of the audience achieve the cultivation of intimacy, whereby metaphors rely on the audience's reception and capability to understand the implied reference. The images collected in this dissertation often show a conscious attempt to create an odd image, through the unsettling of conventional metaphorical associative structures and gendered expectations. This points to an attempt to construct a rabbinic own sense of self and a peculiar role. This analysis tracks down how these metaphors interact with the legal reasoning they are embedded into, and how they are used to construct rabbinic law. They stand at the core of tannaitic approaches to gender and rabbinic ways of law, whereby figurative language allows experimental, unexplored and less conventional ways in the construction of meaning. This dissertation offers tools for the discussion and study of gendered metaphors in tannaitic and rabbinic texts.

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After my first conference presentation at an FCBT workshop in Berlin in 2014, Esther Fisher of the Gender Studies Department at Bar Ilan University brought to my attention how the metaphorical material I had presented about the images of “a young and old woman” in the *‘orlah* laws was particularly original. She encouraged me to pursue a further investigation. It ended up in my first article “Trees as Male and Female: A Biblical Metaphor and its Rabbinic Elaboration” (*lectio difficilior* 1/2015). I am very thankful to my advisor, Tal Ilan, who at the time discussed with me how in the FCBT-volumes there were several excursuses on gendered metaphors, but no systematic analysis on this topic. Based on the promising finding in the *‘orlah* article she thus suggested in 2016 to focus my PhD on gendered metaphors in the rabbinic production. Without her inspiration and work on women’s studies in Jewish Antiquity, this project would not have materialized. I then decided to channel this dissertation to the specific direction of an analysis of female source domains in tannaitic corpora (as for the reasons of this choice, see the Introduction).

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I have decided to publish this PhD in the form of a series of articles, and I am happy that section 1.1., after the careful reading of Alyssa M. Gray and Daniel Schumann, is already part of the Tosefta workshop’s first volume, and that section 4.2. is a contribution in the volume “Rabbinic Education in Context” edited by Elisabetta Abate. I thank Michal Rosenberg for proofreading the English of this document.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. The realm of the Divine in female terms	11
1.1. G-d as wise woman building Her household, the Creation (TSan)	11
1.2. G-d as pregnant woman (SifDeut)	24
1.3. G-d, the Temple's laver and the ark as breastfeeding (MTYom, TSot, SifNum)	30
1.4. G-d as mother, Israel as daughter and the Temple as mother's house (MdRY, MdRSbY)	44
2. Prophecy and women-related images	51
2.1. Moses, the most important prophet, as a woman shepherd (SifNum)	51
2.2. Moses the mother and Aaron the daughter – female transmission: the prophet and the priest (Sifra)	55
2.3. Moses as a woman defending herself (SifNum, SifDeut, MekhDv)	58
3. Israel the people and its priestly role as a woman's role	69
3.1. <i>Bat melakhim/melekh</i> – Israel the daughter and her singularity (MdRY, MdRSbY, SifDeut)	69
3.2. Israel as mother of G-d (Sifra)	73
3.3. Israel's claim as women's claim (TBQ)	75
3.4. Women's jewels and mitsvot (SifDeut)	80
4. Rabbinic leadership and Torah study through female images	84
4.1. Rabbis as old, wise mother (MTBer)	84
4.2. Torah learning as child bearing and risk-taking (TAh, TPar)	92
4.3. The Torah learner as a woman of strength and Torah as household	99
4.4. Torah as Queen Esther and ruling woman (TBer)	100
4.5. <i>'Amen yetomah</i> and a female orphan (TMeg)	105
4.6. <i>'Em la-miqra'</i> – rabbinic reading of the Torah (Sifra)	107
5. The Land of Israel: rain and agriculture as heaven-earth communication channels with a woman's voice	112
5.1. <i>Qtanah</i> and <i>neti'ah</i> : Covenantal promise and intergenerational continuity in laws on trees (TOrl)	112
5.2. Rain's metaphors reconsidered as complementary: rain, clouds, heaven, and sky as woman (TTaan)	114
6. Time is a woman's body – thinking rabbinic calendar and temporality	116
6.1. Shabbat as woman (TBer)	116
6.2. <i>Leil 'ibur, hodesh ha-'ibur</i> “the month of pregnancy” and moon as woman (MTRH, MTArak)	118
6.3. <i>Parashat ha-'ibur</i> “the time of pregnancy” (MBer)	122
6.4. Pregnant year (<i>shanah me'uberet</i> and <i>'ibur ha-shanah</i>) (MTSan)	125
6.5. Sacrifice: halakhic form and legal time as pregnancy (MPes, MSheq, MZev)	129
7. The making of sacred items through women's images	132
7.1. The rabbinic Shabbat map and the Shabbat changing boundary as pregnancy (MTEr, MNed)	132
7.2. Shofar as a crying woman (MTRS, TSot)	136
7.3. 'Etrog as identerian symbol, corporeal integrity and its 'breasts nipple' (MSuk)	137
Conclusions	140
Bibliography	147

Women-related images as metaphorical source domain in tannaitic corpora

CECILIA HAENDLER

Introduction

This PhD project deals with gendered metaphorical language that is found in the tannaitic corpora. It focuses on metaphors and figurative language that employ women or female aspects as *source domain* (i.e., the idea from which the metaphorical image is drawn) and have as *target domain* (the object described by the metaphor) topics that are particularly significant for the rabbinic enterprise and rabbinic culture, such as ‘theological’ and exegetical themes or ritual and legal aspects of reality. The textual material considered comprises the earliest stratum of the rabbinic production, that is, Mishnah, Tosefta and Midrashei Halakhah, which were compiled and redacted in the historical context of Roman Palestine from the first until the end of the third century C.E., incorporating a precedent and contemporary oral body of knowledge.

Theoretical approaches to metaphors have pointed to the interaction, reciprocal interplay and influence between source and target domains. To illustrate this, consider the biblical metaphor “'ה is our Lawgiver, 'ה is our King” (Isaiah 33:22). The expressions used as source – “lawgiver, king” – highlight some aspects of the target (conveying the idea that G-d is a ruler, a promulgator of a body of law, and a judicial authority) while hiding or ignoring others. It also reveals the importance of the figure of the lawgiver and the imaginative significance of the king who is perceived as a judge.

The employment in tannaitic jargon of female images as source domain, i.e., as a significant source of meaning, to define target domains that are specifically relevant to the rabbinic collective – like the Divine, prophecy, the people of Israel, the rabbinic movement, Torah study, the commandments, the Temple, the Land of Israel, the rabbinic calendar, sacred items or halakhic, ritual tropes – represents an end to the creation of value. The female figurative image constitutes a source from which significance is drawn to construct the rabbinic world. The employment of the feminine as a salient feature with the goal of interpreting/constructing halakhic reality is significant for the construction of female gender and its imaginative impact.

On the other hand, when the target in the gendered metaphor is a religious topic¹ or a halakhic, rabbinic aspect, the gender in the source acquires a connotation of significance through its interconnection with the other end of the figurative construction, which empowers it within its own cultural frame of reference. As noted, for instance, about a figurative expression describing Moses with a female source domain: “[the figure of the] woman ultimately earns a place next to Moses, with whom the parable compares her.”² Thus, the she-figure gains a position in the collective cultural assets. For example, like the king and the lawgiver, the wise woman and the

¹ The term ‘religious’ is intended merely as indicating a system based on the relation to and worship of, in this case, G-d.

² Beth BERKOWITZ, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 82.

pregnant woman – *'ishah 'ubarah* (two images analyzed in this project) are part of the particular, rabbinic, imaginative set of coordinates used to map the target domain of G-d relating to Israel. While the image of the king and the lawgiver for G-d are inherited from the Hebrew Bible, the female source domains analyzed in this study are all original rabbinic constructions and a rabbinic own contribution. The question driving this study is about the precise role and function of these images within the rabbinic production. The aim is to define in detail their features and functioning in the tannaitic conceptual map.

- Taking metaphorical, figurative language as a line of research in rabbinic texts

Conceptual metaphor theory has long argued how metaphorical language does not merely describe rhetorically an existing connection between two elements, but it actually *creates* that connection in the first place, and with it entirely new concepts.³ The association of two different domains establishes novel conceptual structures in the mind of those who encounter these images. For instance, the similarity between a female subject and the prophetic role is not illuminated by the metaphor but is actively created by it. The link between source and target creates new meaning that is much more than the sum and overlapping of the meanings of source and target. In other words, metaphorical thinking structures knowledge, creates reality and is the main part of the learning and cognitive processes, influencing the formation of individuals and their specific cultural imprinting. Metaphor has been defined as the primary conceptual structure through which we reason and organize our knowledge and understanding of the world.

Regarding the religious sphere, Ellen Haskell has pointed to how “religious images reorganize internal perceptions of the things they describe, leading to changes in behavior and experience. [...] They actively construct the worshipper’s experience.”⁴ Thus, metaphors represent a core moment for meaning-making, human cognition and action, as well as for judgement and for the development of concepts, notions and subjectivity. The expressions they give voice to are central to the comprehension of the culture that produced them and, in this specific case, for the appreciation of rabbinic thought. Tannaitic metaphorical language was chosen as research topic for this project because it is an aspect prominently involved in subject formation, education and action. Metaphor is a central topos in epistemology, and organized knowledge plays a central role in the historical forms of Rabbinic Judaism, which has at the centre of its ritual practice a form of study, labelled as Torah or Talmud, and which establishes the constitution of its community on a knowledge performance (e.g., mPea 1:1, SifNum 119). Rabbinic texts represent a project of knowledge or study, and their collection creates very different basic conceptions of what it means “to know.” As noted by Panayiota Vassilopoulou in the volume “Late Antique Epistemology: Other Ways to Truth,” in Late antiquity sources of knowledge even more powerful than

³ George LAKOFF and Mark JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁴ ELLEN HASKELL, *Suckling at My Mother’s Breasts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012) 10-11.

argumentative reason were “non-rational practices, such as oracular testimonies, theurgic rituals, erotic passion, poetic inspiration, metaphors, and myths.”⁵

It can be argued that metaphorical language, with the female images analyzed in this study, is used by tannaitic discursivity as an educational means and a linguistic tool for the transmission of knowledge and praxis, serving a tannaitic pedagogical and ideological aim. Such intentionality can be theorized both for an oral tradition and for a written one. Images support memory better than abstractions. “[M]aterial which is high in imagery value is easier to remember than abstract material.”⁶ Thus, in an oral setting, metaphorical or figurative language helps teaching and memorizing, and certain concepts in this way remain impressed longer in the individual and collective consciousness. Many tannaitic pedagogical and ideological texts focus indeed on memory and forgetting, signaling a main concern for this issue (see sections 4.1. and 4.2.)

The tannaitic body of traditions employs a specific imagery which becomes constitutive of its internal reflection, informing the tannaitic knowledge project and ways of reading the world. This creates a different understanding of experience, and produces religious knowledge, ideological value and instruction. In this metaphorical imagery, several female images appear and stand out, where an intentional employment can be argued for. This research attempts to understand the meaning of these female images and the pattern they share, analyzing a number of them that were selected on the basis of their representative character.

- Why concentrating on tannaitic, halakhic-legal sources as field of inquiry

This work focuses on tannaitic material to see what specific function female gendered metaphors have within halakhic-legal material, in rabbinic law and in the first, foundational strata of rabbinic literature, which has a structure halakhic in nature. Looking at metaphors with women as source domain and the religious world as target domain, previous research has concentrated mainly on later, aggadic material.⁷ However the metaphors analyzed in previous studies are already found and originate in the tannaitic sources, and it is worth analyzing them in their earliest appearance. Together with these, in tannaitic texts, many other female images appear which have never been mentioned or analyzed in the existing scholarly literature, and are presented in this research for the first time.

Moreover, I’m particularly interested in the influence and role of these metaphorical structures within the halakhic – that is, legal – reasoning of the tannaim – *halakhah* being the main tannaitic and rabbinic form of expression. The analysis and argument of this dissertation aim to contribute to the appreciation of the specificity of rabbinic law, and to see how gendered images with a female source domain play an important role in it. In the Bible and in the aggadah, these sort of metaphors with female source domains appear in prophetic or poetic, narrative contexts. But within the economy of rabbinic legal language, their function is different and their influence particularly pronounced. The

⁵ Panayiota VASSILOPOULOU, “Introduction,” in *Late Antiquity Epistemology: Other Ways to Truth* (eds. Panayiota Vassilopoulou and Stephen R. L. Clark; New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009) 7.

⁶ Elizabeth MINCHIN, “Similes in Homer: Image, Mind’s Eye, and Memory,” in: *Speaking Volumes: Orality and Literacy in the Greek and Roman World* (ed. Janet Watson; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2001) 27.

⁷ Like Midrash Rabbah see, for instance, Inbar RAVEH, *Feminist Rereadings of Rabbinic Literature* (trans. Kaeren Fish; Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2014).

insertion of these gendered figurative expressions in this context conveys how these are considered constitutive and indispensable to the structure of tannaitic law and practice, meaning to the rabbinic undertaking in its foundation and in its main structure of knowledge and action.

Lakoff, in the volume “Metaphor and Thought,” points out how classical theory of metaphor since Aristotle has considered metaphors “instances of novel poetic language in which words like ‘mother,’ ‘go,’ and ‘night’ are not used in their normal everyday sense [referring to poetical statements as “do not go gentle into that good night” of Dylan Thomas]. [...] Metaphorical expressions were assumed to be mutually exclusive with the realm of ordinary everyday language: everyday language had no metaphor, and metaphor used mechanisms outside the realm of everyday conventional language.”⁸ In the same way, gendered metaphors with female gender as source domain (for example, the image of G-d as having a womb) has been understood as belonging to the realm of prophetic, aggadic material, and as being somewhat separated from the everyday, ordinary and central structure of halakhah, halakhic thought and tannaitic practice. However, when we consider how metaphor is central in creating ordinary thought processes, through constant cross-domain mapping (conceptualizing one domain in terms of another), we see how tannaitic, halakhic material is structured through metaphors and, interestingly enough, how many of them have a source that is gendered in the feminine.

In the same essay, Lakoff states about law and metaphor:

Law is a major area where metaphor is made real. For example, Corporations are persons is a tenet of American law, which not only enables corporations to be “harmed” or assigned “responsibility” so they can be sued when liable, but also gives them certain First Amendments rights.⁹

In the same way, when the sound of the shofar is described as a woman’s voice, since the shofar is understood and actively constructed by tannaitic discourse both as the voice of G-d calling onto Israel and vice versa of Israel calling onto G-d, this understanding and humanization is achieved by the female image. The rabbinic construction of particular sounds for the shofar as staccato or long sounds (a concept absent in the Bible) is conveyed through the woman’s voice image (section 7.2.). Or when Torah learning is described as pregnancy and child-bearing, its forgetting as loss and as the burying of a new-born child, and its continuation as breastfeeding, Torah learning becomes a new concept created by the rabbis as a precarious and instable activity, that requires constant tendering and care. The image renders Torah study so central to the rabbinic enterprise, as its more ‘natural’ process, requiring the utmost commitment, but also as a process that can always shift, beyond a person’s best effort –, as being partially beyond human reason and capability. The law (in this case the context is the study of utterly unreasonable laws as the red cow and purity laws around death), and the ‘image of the law’ of forgetting as child loss, points to the irrational and the unknowable as a source for Jewish rabbinic practice (section 4.2.). Another example of constructing rabbinic reality and law through these images with a female source domain is the one whereby the Torah as law is described as a queen (4.3.). This makes the Torah as legal structure – once again a rabbinic

⁸ George LAKOFF, “The contemporary theory of metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought* (ed Andrew Ortony, 2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993) 202.

⁹ LAKOFF, “The contemporary theory of metaphor,” 243.

innovation¹⁰ – the principle ruling the entire life of her people, requiring outmost reverence. This is expressed through the image of Queen Esther, mentioned in the metaphorical image, representing embodied subjectivity as a woman.

Here metaphors are not a rhetoric, but a knowledge-discourse. Given a preceding oral transmission, we can consider how these images were developed together with the legal material, discussion and reflection – thus being an intrinsic part of it – and not merely with the later, written and redactional composition. Consider the case where the tannaim create the metaphor themselves when they compare the rabbis to an old, wise mother in the effort to sustain the rabbinic institution of *berakhot*/blessing and *taqqanah*/edict about pronouncing the Divine Name in mundane settings (I will discuss this later in this PhD research). Evidently, the rule is not uncontroversial, because of the biblical prohibition on pronouncing G-d's Name in vain. The image can be seen as originating from a contextual debate. Rather than clarifying the prescriptive character of the law, its applicability or its implicit sense, the metaphorical comparison creates a sense of the rabbis who are taking risks like a mother takes risks (even life-threatening, like during labor)– thus creating a specific conceptualization of the rabbinic project. Thus, along with the laws themselves, some existential conundrum they embed or some crucial moment to which they are connected is clarified and a message is transmitted. I shall speak in this case about how rabbinic expressivity creates *rabbinic images of law*,¹¹ and here specifically with a female image or female source domain.

- The relevance of this inquiry for gender studies in rabbinic Judaism and previous research

Scholars have long recognized the significance of metaphors in the rabbinic production and its conceptual construction, as well as their importance for gender – an imaginative force in itself. Source domains declined in the feminine are used as source of meaning to create rabbinic law and they are parts of its structure in its foundational corpora, the tannaitic corpora. This is unlike metaphors where the feminine, as target domain, is made an object of legal discourse and transformed into speakable material. In much of the existing work on halakhic material, the analyzed metaphors are of the latter kind.¹² Cases

¹⁰ “There is nothing inevitable or natural about the translation of Torah into law (halakhah). While Torah had always been a central Jewish religious idea, and G[-]d's law had been culturally defining, this grand translation of religious knowing into legal expertise; worship into legal study, is unprecedented. Neither other Jewish groups nor early Christians, who share a Torah tradition, develop in this direction.” Natalie B. DOHRMANN, “Can “Law” Be Private? The Mixed Message of Rabbinic Oral Law,” in *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion* (eds. Clifford Ando and Jörg Rüpke; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2015) 190.

¹¹ Where Simon-Shoshan speaks of “Stories of the Law” (Moshe SIMON-SHOSHAN, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]), I speak of “Images of the Law.”

¹² Studies on metaphors and gender in rabbinic corpora are Gail S. LABOVITZ, *Marriage and Metaphor: Constructions of Gender in Rabbinic Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Cynthia BAKER, “The Well-Ordered Bayit: Bodies, Houses, and Rabbis in Ancient Galilee,” in: *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2002) 34-76; Charlotte E. FONROBERT, “The Woman as House: Conceptions of Women's Corporeality in Talmudic Literature,” in: *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000) 40-67; Tal ILAN, “House-Wife,” in: *Massekhet Ta'anit, A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud II/9* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 26-28;

in which women or their bodies are marked as the target domain express the difficulty of the subject, and ways to conceptualize women and women's bodies within the halakhic/legal structure and its network of corporeal practices. "[T]he nature and mysteries of the female body and its corporeal specificity,"¹³ menstruation and the female reproductive system (as well as male seed) are intense objects of halakhic scrutiny and implicate an effort of translation – the work of metaphor – as touching on transcendent, enigmatic and crucial aspects of human existence.

One such metaphor, extensively used, is the one where the female body is described in terms of the architecture of a house. Such an "architectural/mnemonic" metaphor of the body as house (בַּיִת) is extensive. It contains the images of the "wife as house" (mYom 1:1, cf. mPar 3:1), the "vagina as house" (mNid 2:1), female anatomy and reproductive organs as "room" (probably indicating the uterus), a "vestibule" (possibly the vagina) and an "upper chamber" (mNid 2:5), and female genitals as "external house or room" (mNid 5:1). Metaphorical language, architecture and the human body is a very important literary topos in rabbinic texts. Where mYom 1:1 speaks of a wife as "his house," mSot 1:2 and tNid 5:12 speak of a husband as "her house," with a gender symmetry in the house imagery. Spouses having sexual relations are understood as being home one to another.¹⁴ MPar 3:1 speaks of the high priest as being separate from "his house," meaning from having sexual relations with his wife. MSot 1:2 speaks in a parallel way of a wife as being permitted or forbidden to go to "her house." GenR 18:3 states that "the woman has extra store-room (the womb) more than the man," implying that all the organs of the human body are conceptualized as rooms. The human body and anatomy are a difficult topic in need of inquiry, conceptualization and translation into legal language.

In another example (mNid 5:7-8, tNid 6:4) different phases of a girl's physical development to reproductive maturity are assessed through her breasts' development. This is metaphorically compared to the ripening of a fig, distinguishing among a green/immature fig, an almost-ready-to-pick fig and a ripe fig. The Tosefta relates the famous fig metaphor of the parallel mishnah explicitly to breasts: "If she is an unripe fig on the top she has still no hairs on the bottom, etc." Here the fig image is clearly connected only with the breasts (cf. Rashi on bNid 47a about the mature fig as referring to the breasts coming forth fully developed).

The representation of women's bodies through metaphors, like a house or a fruit, is a way to transform them into understandable topics. In other words, metaphors are used to explain something unknown, whose understanding is challenging. When an object, like a house or a fruit, is used to map the female body this is conceptualized and perceived as entailing a mysterious, transcendent aspect in need of translation and mapping.

Christiane H. TZUBERI, "A House Inside a House - Mishnah Ohalot 7:4," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 28 (2015): 134-146. More recently, attention has started to move to female images as source domains in halakhic texts, see, e.g., Sarit KATTAN GRIBETZ, "Women's Bodies as Metaphors for Time in Biblical, Second Temple, and Rabbinic Literature," in: *The Construction of Time in Antiquity: Ritual, Art, and Identity*, (eds. Jonathan Ben-Dov, Lutz Doering; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 173-204; Cecilia HAENDLER, "Trees as Male and Female: A Biblical Metaphor and its Rabbinic Elaboration," *lectio difficilior* 1/2015.

¹³ FONROBERT, "The Woman as House," 42.

¹⁴ "[H]usbands, as well as wives, can be thought about using metaphorical transfers from the source of houses" (LABOVITZ, *Marriage and Metaphor*, 133).

It is interesting to see how in the literature and studies mentioned above about women and women's bodies as *target domain* in halakhic sources two main imaginative focuses have emerged: architectural images for the female body (the house metaphor) and reproductive power as expressed through agricultural plants images (the fig metaphor). Looking at figurative structures with women or women's bodies as *source domain* in halakhic sources these tropes appear again (the two following examples will be explained in this work). Mishnah/Tosefta Yoma defines the laver in the Temple, on which the ritual purity and service of the priests depend, and the ark, as having "breasts" (טט) that nurture Israel. The Temple's architecture and the house of G-d are described with a woman's image. In Mishnah/Tosefta Orlah trees that are subject to biblical ritual laws are described as a "young or old woman" – *qtanah* and *zqenah*, against the biblical male metaphor of 'orlah representing the foreskin and its removal as representing male fertility. The tannaitic production takes the pain to revert the legal image of Leviticus into a female one, without changing anything on the level of the practical or prescriptive significance of the ruling, but doing so on the level of the figurative force entailed in this law (in this case the role of reproductive power). A potential next step of investigation could be to study the relation between figurative images with women as *source domain* and those with women at *target domain* in the tannaitic production as creating an imaginative shared pool, and considering reciprocal influence.

The novelty of this study lies in pointing out the importance and role of female images as conceptual sources with which inquiries and relevant topics are addressed by the tannaitic construction of law. Women's images express traits perceived as salient and significant for the tannaitic system of meaning. In these figurative patterns, they represent interpretative keys for structural matters. This doctoral project attempts new ways to read the imaginative role of female gender in rabbinic law. When, e.g., Tosefta Sanhedrin states that "the Divine creating the world is a wise woman" or Mishnah/Tosefta Berakhot speaks of the rabbis competing for leadership as an "old/wise mother," or when a connection between motherhood and prophecy role is established, gender in the feminine is employed to give meaning to a culture's religious and belief system. Aspects of the halakhic reality are rendered closer and comprehensible through a figurative female depiction, and the feminine is projected onto existential enigmas as an exegetical and explicative tool for legal, metaphysical and social questions, namely as a bearer of some truth relative to the rabbinic world. When women or feminine images are used to describe, create or sort the reality created by tannaitic law, they represent the source of legitimacy and serve to humanize law, nature and the Divine, and the rabbinic readings thereof, i.e., to recognize them as good and close. When the target in the gendered metaphor is a halakhic, rabbinic aspect, the gender in the source acquires in some form a positive connotation through its interconnection with the other end of the figurative construct; its significance and value are constructed through it. Consider again as an example the case in which the Divine creating the world is described as a wise woman building her house. Lakoff and Johnson state that "metaphors can shape how we perceive reality, such that creation of a new metaphor can change how we think about the metaphor's subject."¹⁵

What is peculiar is the use of female embodied images to describe the main assets of a culture. This usage is connected to the rabbinic understanding of the body and lived

¹⁵ Tina M. SHERMAN, "Biblical Metaphor Annotated Bibliography," Brandeis University 2014 (cf. <http://biblicalmetaphor.com/annotated-bibliography/>).

experience or practice as an indispensable point of entrance for every inquiry, knowledge project and relation to the Divine. It is compelling to see how the encounter of metaphorical/figurative language and gender in tannaitic, halakhic texts is the site where rabbinic identity, cultural competitions and deep concerns are expressed through female images. These imaginative constructions with a female source domain are a core element to understand rabbinic, tannaitic work, selfhood and particularity. They show how figurative expressivity with a gender marking in the feminine can be the ground, within a halakhic textual fabric, of a rabbinic reworking, creating distinctive meanings.

- Methodological, analytical approaches and structure of the dissertation

This research begins from reading and working through the textual material found in the electronic collection on a Disk on Key (DOK) of the Bar Ilan responsa database:¹⁶ for the Mishnah, the standard Vilna Romm edition (based on the Heller edition) is used; for the Tosefta, the Lieberman edition 1965-1988 (until Bava Batra) and the Zuckerman edition 1975 (from Sanhedrin); for the Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishma'el on Exodus, the Horowitz-Rabin edition 1970; for Sifra on Leviticus (Aqivan), the Weiss edition Vilna 1862; for Sifre on Numbers (Yishmaelian), the Horowitz edition Jerusalem 1966 and in parallel the new edition of Kahana 1982, 2011 and 2015; for Sifre on Deuteronomy (Aqivan), the Finkelstein edition New York 1969. Each image is discussed only if attested in the best manuscripts at our disposal.

The fragmentary halakhic midrashim Mekhilta de Rabbi Shime'on bar Yohai on Exodus (Aqivan, Epstein-Melamed edition Jerusalem 1979) and Mekhilta le-Devarim (Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy, Yishmaelian, Hoffmann edition Tel Aviv 1963) are quoted as central sources only if they are attested in the genizah fragments collected by Kahana, *The Genizah Fragments of the Halakhic Midrashim* 2005.

Every relevant passage containing a metaphorical image of the kind relevant for this analysis is analyzed through a critical study of the textual witnesses and a commentary on its meaning, gender construction, relation to the legal question and function in the literary, exegetical and historical-comparative contexts.

Literary approaches applied to tannaitic study have shown how, e.g., the Mishnah's literary and redaction structures are not casual, but rather present an inherent poetics,¹⁷ as well as how short narrative is used in the Mishnah to sustain law, and to make it accessible to its audience's emotions.¹⁸ This is a way to discuss how normativity/law and intimacy, emotions or interpersonal boundaries can go together.

To these approaches it could be added how, beyond the fact that metaphor-making is a structural cognitive function, metaphorical significance in rabbinic legal texts is connected to the peculiar form of rabbinic law as a law-system aimed to create a relation with G-d in everyday life. The bridge between transcendence and the ordinary range of human experience is represented primarily by a set of prescriptive, embodied practices. The tannaitic production, as a legally-framed, body- and action-oriented system, thus does

¹⁶ BAR ILAN University, פרויקט השו"ת – *The Global Jewish Database, The Responsa Project: Version 20*, Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1972-2012.

¹⁷ Cf. Avraham WALFISH, "The poetics of the Mishnah," in: *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective* (eds. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner, vol. 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 153-189.

¹⁸ SIMON-SHOSHAN, *Stories of the Law*.

not delve into existential questions. As a unique mix of human-Divine law¹⁹ it addresses such questions, but it expresses them in many occasions through images and short metaphorical constructions inserted in the legal texts. The function of metaphors of putting abstractions into concrete terms, namely to concretize complex, theoretical concepts or specific emotions and sensibilities, is suitable for this specificity of rabbinic law.

Connected to this aspect, religious and cultural meaning, theological ideas and feelings are generally not explicitly articulated in rabbinic discourse, but rather encoded. It seems that in this way they are put beyond a protective fence of implicitness, a move that expresses their importance, and they are also represented as an undercurrent animating the entire legal discussion – unseparated from it, as requiring its own subject discussion. To this end, metaphorical language and its rendering of complexity are particularly apt, whereby the figurative image represents a condensed question to be unfolded, and which entails implicit cross-references.

Much exegetical thought is put into tannaitic wordings – language is compact, descriptions brief, and it spares unnecessary extra lexical effort. Metaphorical images offer the possibility to summarize an entire question even in one word, befitting the dense, shortened character of the halakhic language (see terms as *dad* in Yoma, or *qtanah* and *zqenah* in Orlah below in the analysis, or consider the term *bayit* analyzed by preceding research). They require hyper-/inter-textual, thick rabbinic knowledge and a cognitive effort which is rooted into interpretation and exegesis.

Rabbinic language is generally understood as particularly associative, creating interpretative ‘hyperlinks’ and referring to preceding, interrelating texts. I thus use an exegetical approach as entry-point to the investigation in ‘gender and meaning’ of each metaphorical image:

“in the rabbinic world of late antiquity the reading and interpretation of sacred and authoritative texts were real and powerful sources in the construction of culture, and in the generation of halakhic developments – as real and powerful as famine and wars. Rabbinic texts are [...] fundamentally exegetical. [...] we [should] appreciate the degree to which, and the specific way in which rabbinic literature is generated and shaped by the reading of other texts.”²⁰

The questions the tannaitic texts pose are largely exegetical and this main concern is to be accounted for in order to understand the gendered images. The tannaitic production often reflects exegesis conflicting with competing exegeting groups (as is evident, for example, in the image of G-d as a pregnant woman (*‘ubarah*), which is an attempt to explain G-d’s anger – *‘evrah* – as described in the Hebrew Bible and to reverse it in response to polemical understanding of this idea).

Another main concern of the tannaitic production is, as already pointed out, the relation to G-d in ordinary life situations. In this sense, an insight can be found in cultural-comparative studies, showing how these gendered metaphorical expressions relate to the realities of everyday life with which the rabbis and their exegetical practices interacted and by which they were informed, and how they intertwine with cultural competitions.

¹⁹ Cf. Christine E. HAYES, *What’s Divine about Divine Law?: Early Perspectives* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2015).

²⁰ Christine E. HAYES, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993, repr. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 8.

Tannaitic metaphorical passages sometimes represent, as will be argued, the earliest site for the creation of such competition and later proliferation of a figurative idea.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, there emerges an analysis for these highly crafted images with a female source domain and their strategical employment as a significant aspect of the tannaitic production – an analysis that contributes to the investigation of gender and women’s images in the rabbinic culture.

The figurative constructions are divided according to a thematic categorization, which conveys how the sort of metaphorical language here considered covers the most important coordinates in the rabbinic world.

The metaphorical groups are sorted in 7 chapters, according to the following main threads in rabbinic perception and construction of reality or target domains which were important for the tannaitic work to be mapped: 1.) G-d /the realm of the Divine; 2.) the importance of prophecy, the prophetic role and revelation as imaginative force in Jewish understanding; 3.) the people of Israel and its priestly role or self-understanding; 4.) rabbinic leadership, authority, knowledge community and Torah study; 5.) the Land of Israel as a peculiar piece of land inscribed with laws, and the relation, through the communicative channels of agricultural and rain, between the natural world, G-d and Israel; 6.) sacred time, festivity and the calendar as a crucial form of rabbinic expression; 7.) the making sacred items as significant rabbinic and identarian symbols that shape tannaitic discourse and horizons.

G-d, Israel the people, the rabbis, prophetic images, rabbinic institutions, the Torah, the Temple, the commandments, the sacrifices, the sky/heaven, rabbinic rituals, the *shofar*, the rain, Shabbat, the moon marking the Jewish calendar, and time itself are all marked as feminine, or as having also a female face. These metaphors give us indeed a female face, a female character in the rabbinic scale of value and perception. We find a rabbinic construction of, and investment in, female gender and its performance as part of the rabbinic enterprise, reading of the world, identarian and imaginative project.

As target domain, we find mostly relationships and figures. It could be argued that this influences the vast presence of family-related and kinship roles in the source domain. As source domain, the image of the “mother” is very significant, and peculiarly also that of the “mother-daughter” relationship, based on women’s intergenerational transmission and relation, or the image of “Israel as mother of G-d.” Motherhood is used systematically to describe novelties promoted by the tannaitic movement. Other figures that emerge from this pattern are, e.g., those of the “old woman,” “the daughter,” “the wise woman,” “the wife” (with an image developing in amoraic sources in “G-d being the wife of Israel”), “the crying woman expressing justice,” “the ruling woman,” “the breastfeeding woman,” “the queen,” “the female orphan,” “the teacher,” “the child,” “the bride,” “the working woman,” “the young woman acting for herself,” “the woman with ornaments,” “the female advocate,” “the woman shepherd,” “the noble woman,” with a bright and diverse spectrum of original and unconventional representations – with the target domain influencing the gender performance or significance in the source for rabbinic, tannaitic culture. The unusual character of these figures is due to the particularity of the imaginative construct, which brings together different domains in an experimental and challenging way. This experimental tannaitic work and its meaning are investigated in this doctoral project, with the goal of finding out its reasons and deep patterns.

“yarn, n. Maybe language is kind, giving us these double meanings. Maybe it’s trying to teach us a lesson, that we can always be two things at once. Knit me a sweater out of your best stories.” David Levithan, *The Lover’s Dictionary*²¹

1. The realm of the Divine in female terms

1.1. G-d as wise woman building Her household, the Creation (tSan)

This section²² proposes an analysis of a tosefta in tractate Sanhedrin which creates an early rabbinic image of G-d in the feminine. This is an important attestation to a tannaitic description of the Divine which makes use of gender and human characterizations that go beyond biblical metaphorical usages of a similar nature.²³ This tosefta has no parallel in the Mishnah. It represents the last part of a long section, starting in tSan 8:3 and developing from the halakhic topic of witnesses in capital cases, that is somewhat philosophical in nature. It reflects on Divine justice; on the origin, equality and diversity of humanity; on the first human being created single (highlighting the singularity); and it concludes with the question on why *'Adam* was the last in the order of creation according to the Genesis account. This discussion revolves around the topic of the value of human life and humanity as the peak of creation.

The ensuing exegetical pattern of question and answer is also used in Christian exegesis, and often indicates a controversy with opponents.²⁴ This rhetorical form enlivens the text, and fits also into an oral, didactic setting, where the teacher/preacher asks for the attention of the public with a question. Different answers are provided: for instance, that humanity came last to show the *minim* (heretics) that nobody assisted the Divine in creation,²⁵ or so that the first human being (presented in a “rabbinized” manner) could immediately perform a *mitsvah* (namely, Shabbat observance).²⁶ The last answer provided is the idea that the late creation of humankind was a gift: “so that *'adam* could enter the banquet of the world at once, with everything ready.” The

²¹ I thank my sister-in-law Malvina Nissim for this quote.

²² Earlier versions of this research were presented at the British Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference, Durham University 2018, and at the SBL International/EABS Annual Meeting, Helsinki 2018, within the EABS panel “Parables in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity: Towards a New Comparative Approach.” This material has been published as an article in Cecilia HAENDLER, “The Wisest of Women: This is the King of Kings: Rabbinic “Theology” in Gendered Terms (Tosefta Sanhedrin)”, in: *Tosefta Studies: Manuscripts, Traditions and Topics* (eds. Lutz Doering and Daniel Schumann; Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 27; Münster: LIT Verlag, 2021) 177-193.

²³ This is part of a well-known rabbinic trend. As noted by Dov WEISS (*Pious Irreverence: Confronting G[-]d in Rabbinic Judaism* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017] 16), going much beyond the Hebrew Bible, the rabbinic G-d can be quite distinctively conceptualized, in that He “suffers, laughs, cries, kisses people, studies Torah in a yeshiva, follows the commandments (*mitzvot*), and even spends His time matchmaking and sporting with Leviathan, the monster of the sea.”

²⁴ Peder BORGES, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 101.

²⁵ Adiel SCHREMER (*Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010] 84) sustains “the possibility of identifying the *minim* here as Gnostics,” since “speculations concerning the divine nature of Adam were widespread among the Gnostics of the first centuries.”

²⁶ The *editio princeps* on tSan 8:7 asks why *'adam* was created on the eve of the Shabbat (בערב שבת), following the Bavli and Yerushalmi traditions (bSan 38a, ySan 4:9, 22c).

answer focusing on the performance of a *mitsvah* is formulated in tSan 8:8 as כּדִי שִׁיכְנֹס לְמִצְוָה מִיָּד “so that [the first human being] could immediately perform (lit., enter) a *mitsvah*.” In a parallel way, tSan 8:9 states כּדִי שִׁיכְנֹס לְסַעֲוֹדָה מִיָּד “so that [the first human being] could immediately enter the banquet,” thus connecting the two texts by way of association.²⁷ Another associative linkage is represented by the phrasing in tBer 5:1: לֹא יֹאכַל אָדָם בְּעֶרְבַּ שַׁבָּת מִן הַמִּנְחָה וּלְמַעַל כּדִי שִׁיכְנֹס לְשַׁבַּת כְּשֶׁהוּא תֹאוֹה “A person (*'adam*) should not eat on the eve of the Shabbat from *minhah* onwards, so that he will enter the Shabbat when he is craving.”²⁸

To support this last solution about *'adam* entering a feast already prepared, a parable is then introduced about a king (sc. the Divine) who makes a banquet (sc. the world) and invites a guest (sc. humanity):²⁹

ת' סנהדרין ח ז³⁰
 אדם נברא באחרונה. ולמה נברא באחרונה? (בראשית א א-ב ג) [...]
 ת' סנהדרין ח ט
 דבר אחר:
 א. כדי שיכנס לסעודה מיד.

²⁷ Cf. ARNB 1 (SCHECHTER and KISTER ed., א פרק, 152): הוּסַפָּה ב לְנוֹסְחָא א פֶּרֶק א – “On the sixth day He created *'adam*. Why? So that [*'adam*] could enter the banquet of Shabbat [*se'udat shabbat*] immediately.” Here the *mitsvah* of observing Shabbat and the topic of *se'udah*, which represents the banquet of the world but also the festive meal, are combined together.

²⁸ Hebrew text according to the Vienna MS. See LIEBERMAN ed., Zera'im, 1:25; LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Zera'im 1, 1:72–73. For the expression *yikkanes leShabbat* see also bPes 99b, yPes 10:1, 37b, bEr 41a, yTaan 2:14, 66b. bBer 23b has: לִיכְנֹס לְסַעֲוֹדַת קָבַע “to enter a regular meal ...” meaning “to have a meal.” This phrasing seems to express the participation in a ritual (a meal, Shabbat, the performance of a commandment) as creating a physical space involving the entire experience of the worshipper. Another figurative use of the *nif'al* לִיכְנֹס – “to enter in” is found in bShab 137b: כָּשֶׁם שֶׁנִּכְנַס לְבְרִית כִּךְ יִכְנַס לְתוֹרָה “just as he [sc. the circumcised new-born] has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into Torah, the nuptial canopy and good deeds.” Similarly, bBB 60b has לִיכְנֹס לְשַׁבּוּעַ הַבֵּן [...] לִישׁוּעַ “to enter [the celebration of the first] week of a son's [circumcision] [...] [to enter] the salvation of [a firstborn] son,” in the sense “to participate.”

²⁹ The entire section starting in tSan 8:3 has a parallel in the Mishnah (mSan 4:5) (KRUPP ed., 24–27, ALBECK ed., 181–182) but without the last question and the parable. Jacob N. EPSTEIN (מְבוֹאוֹת לְסִפְרוֹת) – *Mevo'ot le-Sifrut ha-Tanna'im: Mishnah, Tosefta u-Midrashai-Halakhah* [ed. Ezra Z. Melamed; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1957] 418) considers mSan 4:5 a later editorial addition to the Mishnah. The Mishnah shows a more advanced and refined stage of editorial and redactional harmonization than the Tosefta, and the end of a tractate is especially prone to secondary text-growth. Therefore, it could be argued that the Tosefta represents the primary tradition (see, e.g., David M. GROSSBERG, *Heresy and Formation of the Rabbinic Community* [TSAJ 168; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017] 79: “it is reasonable [...] that this tradition [sc. mSan 4:5] is a secondary adaptation from the Tosefta;” and Willem F. SMELIK, “A Single, Huge, Aramaic Spoken Heretic: Sequences of Adam's Creation in Early Rabbinic Literature,” in: *Ancient Readers and their Scriptures Engaging the Hebrew Bible in Early Judaism and Christianity* [eds. Garrick Allen and John Anthony Dunne; AJEC 107; Leiden: Brill, 2019] 186: “it seems far more likely that the Mishnah adopted and reworked the Toseftan block than vice versa”). In such a case, the Mishnah would have discarded the passage of interest with the gendered metaphorical element. This fits in the pattern uncovered by scholars about gender between the two corpora. Ground-breaking studies about the relation between Mishnah and Tosefta and related gender-questions are Judith HAUPTMAN, “Mishnah as a Response to Tosefta,” in: *The Synoptic Problem in Rabbinic Literature* (ed. Shaye J.D. Cohen; Providence: Brown University Press, 2000) 13–34; EADEM, “The Tosefta as a Commentary on an Early Mishnah,” in: *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 4 (2005): 109–132; EADEM, *Rereading the Mishnah: A New Approach to Ancient Jewish Texts* (TSAJ 109; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); and Tal ILAN, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women* (TSAJ 115; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 73–75, 102–103, 114.

³⁰ Metaphor and gender related parts of rabbinic quotations are underlined in Hebrew and emboldened in the accompanying English translation.

ב. מושלו משל: למה הדבר דומה? למלך שבנה פלטרין וחינכה והתקין סעודה, ואחר כך זימן האורחים.
 ג. וכן הוא או': "חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה" (משלי יד א).
 ד. "חכמ' נש' בנ' ביתה" (משלי יד א): זה מלך מלכי המלכים ברוך הוא שברא עולמו בשבעה בחכמה.
 ה. "חצבה עמודיה שבעה" (משלי ט א): אילו שבעת ימי בראשית. "טבחה טבחה מזגה יינה" (משלי ט ב): אילו ימים ונהרות ומדברות ושאר צורכי העולם. ואחר כך "שלחה נערוניה ותקרא ע' גפי מרומי קרת: מי פתי יסור הנה, וחסר לב [אמרה לו: לכו לחמו בלחמי ושתו בין מסכתי]" (משלי ט ג-ה): זה אדם וחווה.³¹

tSan 8:7

'Adam was created last [in the order of creation]. And why was ['adam] created last? (Gen 1:1–2:3) [...]

tSan 8:9

Another answer [to the question: "why was 'adam created last?"]:

- a. So that ['adam] might enter the banquet [*se'udah*]³² immediately [with everything ready].
- b. A parable was made [lit., he has made a parable, *moshlo masha*]: To what is the matter comparable? To a king who built a palace [*palterin*]³³ and dedicated it (fem.)³⁴ and prepared a meal [*se'udah*] and [only] afterward summoned the guests.
- c. And so he [sc. the biblical text] says: *The wisest of women has built her house* (Prov 14:1).
- d. ***The wisest of women has built her house*** (Prov 14:1): **This is the King of the kings** of kings, blessed be He, **who built His world** in seven days with wisdom.
- e. *She has hewn her pillars, seven* (Prov 9:1): These are the seven days of creation [lit., of the beginning, *bere'shit*]. *She has slaughtered her meat, has mixed her wine, [also laid out her table]* (Prov 9:2): These are the oceans, rivers, deserts, and all the other things which the world needs. And afterward: *She has sent out her young women, calls loud from the city's heights: Whoever the dupe, let her/him turn aside here, the senseless – [she said to her/him. Come, partake of my bread, and drink the wine I have mixed]* (Prov 9:3–5):³⁵ this refers to 'Adam and Eve [sc. to humanity].³⁶

³¹ This version of the Hebrew text is from the Erfurt MS. The passage is missing in the Vienna MS, due to missing folios. See ZUCKERMANDEL ed., 428, lines 6–12. The *ed. princ.* presents no relevant variations.

³² The term סעודה – *se'udah* "meal, dinner, feast" is a rabbinic neologism vs. biblical ארוחה – '*arukah* "meal" (Prov 15:17, Jer 40:5, Jer 52:34, 2 King 25:30). It is possibly derived from the biblical סעד "to eat," which is commonly associated with bread (Gen 18:5, Judg 19:5, Ps 104:15). The ritual of the Shabbat dinner is called *se'udah*. mBer 8:1; mPea 8:7 and mShab 16:2 speak of three *se'udot* required for Shabbat.

³³ From Latin *praetorium*, Greek πραιτώριον (Marcus JASTROW, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literatures* [New York: Judaica Press, 1996], 1180). Cf. Samuel KRAUSS, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* (2 vols.; Berlin 1899; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) 2:455, s.v. פלטור I, "government palace." The original Latin term indicates especially the residence of the praetor, the governor in a province: Chariton T. LEWIS and Charles SHORT, *A New Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 1436; online at: Gregory R. CRANE (ed.), *Perseus Digital Library*, Tufts University, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>. Henry G. LIDDELL, Robert SCOTT, and Henry S. JONES, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) 1458 define πραιτώριον as "official residence of a governor" or "imperial household." The word could also be confused here with פלטרין (*palatium, παλάτιον*) "palace" (from the main hill in Rome on which the emperor's house was situated, LEWIS and SHORT, *Latin Dictionary*, 1291). The terms standing for Roman power and prestige are systematically appropriated and reverted in rabbinic literature to indicate the Divine palace (e.g., NumR 1:12, 13:1).

³⁴ The *pi'el* חנך is a technical term, meaning "to train, initiate (a child); to inaugurate, prepare for office; to dedicate" (especially for the altar, the Temple [cf. mMen 4:4; tMen 7:5 חנוכת המזבח]; for the high priest's inauguration for the Yom Kippur service [yYom 1:1, 38b, 2–5], or the biblical חנוכת הבית, or the dedication of a house in Deut 20:5; mSot 8:2; see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 483). Here its object is feminine, although the term *palterin* is grammatically masculine. The terminology used in the parable and the midrash are specifically rabbinic, characterizing and marking it with a diversifying note.

³⁵ The translation of the biblical text is from Robert ALTER, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010) 233–234.

³⁶ The translation of the text of the Tosefta is mine. For other English translations see Jacob NEUSNER, *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew. With a New Introduction* (2 vols., 2nd ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 2:1174 and Herbert DANBY, *Tractate Sanhedrin Mishnah and Tosefta* (New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919) 81, who both render the biblical text as *the wisest of women* (see below on this phrase).

tSan 8:9 thus supports its statement with a parable (introduced by the formula מושלו (משל), and then explains it again with a midrash on Prov 14:1, which is introduced by the phrase “And so he says...” (וכן הוא אומר). The expression “and so, likewise, he says ...” also opens the second part of the comparison created by the *mashal*: “To what is the matter comparable? To a king who built ... and so, likewise, ...”³⁷ The midrash infuses the parable with additional meaning, as will be shown below.

The question about *'adam* being created last, along with the parable (*mashal*), is arguably the older block of this compilation, as suggested by the fact that it is found also in Philo’s *Opif.* 77–78 (1st cent CE) and in the Church father Gregory of Nyssa’s *De opificio hominis* 2:131–133 (4th cent CE).³⁸ This indicates that the parable preceded the Toseftan text as a separate tradition and was integrated into it.³⁹ The common exegetical traditions between Philo and rabbinic texts have been explained as being “dependent upon a common ancient midrashic pool” or as a “well-known rabbinic tradition deeply entrenched” in Jewish popular understanding on which Philo depends.⁴⁰ Philo, *Opif.* 77–78, states:

³⁷ According to David STERN, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) 8, almost all rabbinic *meshalim* are indeed composed of two parts: “a fictional narrative about a king, the *mashal-proper*; and the narrative’s application, the *nimshal*. Both the *mashal-proper* and the *nimshal* begin with formulaic phrases: “it is like” (*mashal le* or a variant) and “similarly” (*kakh*) [C.H.: “so, likewise”]. In addition, the *nimshal* usually concludes by citing a verse, the *mashal*’s proof-text. That verse offers the *mashal* its exegetical occasion, and the exegesis serves as the *mashal*’s literal climax.” In this case, the *nimshal* is exegetical in nature (ibid., 17), “midrashizing” the *mashal*. The midrash is thus an explanation for the parable, giving the parable a biblical support and a rabbinic character. See also Alexander SAMELY, *Forms of Rabbinic Literature and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 188–190.

³⁸ Cf. also traces of this tradition in GenR 8:7: “צנה [...] משברא צרכי מזונותיו ואחר כך ברא [...] אלהים כולם” (תהלים ח ח) [...] “ציפור שמים ודגי הים” (תהלים ח ט) [...] מגדל מלא כל טוב ואין לו אורחים מה He created him [sc. the human being] with intelligence: in that He created his foodstuff and only afterward He created him [...] *Sheep and oxen all of them* (Ps 8:8) [...] *birds of the heavens and fish of the sea* (Ps 9:9) [...]. A tower full of good things and no guests – what pleasure has its owner in having filled it?” (THEODOR and ALBECK ed., 60–61). *Mekhilta’ deRabbi Yishm’a’el mishpatim neziqin* 1 (HOROWITZ and RABIN ed., 246) applies the metaphor of a banquet ready for its participants to the Torah: “ואלה המשפטים וגו’ אשר תשים לפניהם” ערכם לפניהם כשלחן ערוך [that you shall place before them] (Ex 21:1): Set them before them like a “set table” [*shulhan arukh*] (Ez 23:41),” with Rashi on Ex 21:1: “כשלחן הערוך ומוכן לאכול לפני האדם” “like a table set and prepared to be eaten before a person.” In mAv 3:16 “הכל מתוקן לסעודה” “everything is prepared for the banquet” refers to the world to come. For bBB 75a the Holy One will make a banquet in the future for the righteous feeding them the meat of the Leviathan.

³⁹ A very close parallel which shares the same terminology of this tradition is found in tSuk 2:6 (see LIEBERMAN ed., Mo’ed 2:263, LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Mo’ed 2, 4:856). Here, eclipses, understood as a bad sign for the nations of the world (Vienna MS) or for the world in its entirety (Erfurt MS, London MS, ed. *princ.*), are compared to a king switching off the light on his guests (text according to Vienna MS, very close to the Genizah fragment T-S AS 74.146): משל למלך בשר ודם שבנה פלטרין ושכללה והתקין בה את הסעודה, ואחר כך הכניס את האורחין. כעס עליהן, אמ’ לשמש “ונטל את הנר מלפניהן” ונמצאו כולן יושבין בחשיכה “A parable [*mashal*]: [it can be compared] to a king of flesh and blood who built a palace [*palterin*] and finished it (fem.) and prepared [*hitqin*] in it (fem.) a banquet [*se’udah*], and afterward entered [*hiknis*] the guests [*’orhin*]. He got angry with them and said to the servant [*shamash* wordplay with *shemesh* “sun”], “Take away the light from them,” and all of them turned out to be sitting in the dark.” Erfurt MS presents the variants ומשל דומה הדבר דומה and מושלו משל למה הדבר דומה and והזמין האורחים, which also recall the language of our toseftan text; London MS also recalls it with וחינכה.

⁴⁰ Adam KAMESAR, *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 237.

Opif. 77⁴¹

Question:

You might inquire⁴² for what reason humans were the final item⁴³ in the creation of the cosmos.

For, as the sacred writings⁴⁴ indicate, the Maker and Father⁴⁵ produced them after all the others.

Ἐπιζητήσῃε δ' ἄν τις τὴν αἰτίαν, δι' ἣν ὕστατόν ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως.

ἐφ' ἅπασι γὰρ τοῖς ἄλλοις αὐτὸν ὁ ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ, ὡσπερ αἱ ἱεραὶ γραφαὶ μνηύουσιν, εἰργάσατο.

Opif. 78

Answer:

Just as givers of a banquet,⁴⁶ then, do not invite⁴⁷ their guests to the entertainment⁴⁸ before they have provided everything for the fest.

and as those who celebrate gymnastic or dramatic contests, before they assemble the spectators, provide themselves with an abundance of competitors and spectacles, and sweet sounds, with which to fill the theatres and the stadia;

so in the same manner did the Ruler of all things,

like someone proposing games,

or giving a banquet and being about to invite others to feast⁴⁹

and to behold the spectacle,

first provide⁵⁰ everything for every kind of entertainment,

καθάπερ οὖν οἱ ἐστιάτορες οὐ πρότερον ἐπὶ δεῖπνον καλοῦσιν ἢ τὰ πρὸς εὐωχίαν πάντα εὐτρεπίσαι

καὶ οἱ τοὺς γυμνικούς ἀγῶνας καὶ σκηνικούς τιθέντες, πρὶν συναγαγεῖν τοὺς θεατάς εἰς τε τὰ θέατρα καὶ τὰ στάδια, εὐτρεπίζουσιν ἀγωνιστῶν καὶ θεαμάτων καὶ ἀκουσμάτων πλήθος,

τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ὁ τῶν ὄλων ἡγεμῶν

οἷά τις ἀθλοθέτης

καὶ ἐστιάτωρ ἄνθρωπον καλεῖν μέλλων ἐπὶ τε εὐωχίαν

καὶ θεωρίαν

τὰ εἰς ἐκάτερον εἶδος προεுτρεπίσατο,

⁴¹ Based on the translation of David T. RUNIA, *On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses* (PACS 1; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 66–67. The Greek text is from Francis H. COLSON and George H. WHITAKER, *On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses: Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II, III, by Philo* (vol. 1; LCL 226; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929) 60.

⁴² The verb ἐπιζητέω in the aorist active optative 3 sg. “one may inquire, request, seek after” corresponds to toseftan rhetorical structure הַמַּל “why.”

⁴³ Note that ὕστερος “last” means last in time, but also in rank, indicating “inferiority in age, worth, or quality” (LIDDELL, SCOTT, and JONES, *Dictionary*, 1906). The parallel term used by the Tosefta, the biblical הַמַּלְאָכִים, has no such connotation.

⁴⁴ The expression αἱ ἱεραὶ γραφαὶ “holy/sacred writings” appears to occur only in Jewish sources (George H. VAN KOOTEN, “Ancestral, Oracular and Prophetic Authority: “Scriptural Authority” According to Paul and Philo,” in: *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* [ed. Mladen Popović; Leiden: Brill, 2010] 290). With this phrase Philo gives a biblical reference for the inquiry.

⁴⁵ The term ὁ ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ “the Maker and Father” is taken from Plato, *Tim.* 28c.

⁴⁶ A ἐστιάτωρ is “one who gives a banquet, host” (Plato, *Tim.* 17a).

⁴⁷ The verb καλέω means “to call, summon, call to one’s house or to a repast, invite.” This recalls the invitation of the toseftan text מִיַּיִט – *zimen* “to invite, esp. to a meal,” which in turn recalls the rabbinic ritual of מִיַּיִט – *zimmin* “invitation to say *birkat hamazon*” (mBer 7:1).

⁴⁸ The word δεῖπνον indicates “a meal, a cultic meal, feast, dinner.” Philo, *Contempl.* 83, uses it to describe the evening meal of Shavuot, after his description of the Shabbat meal.

⁴⁹ “Good-cheer, feasting” (εὐωχία), used by Josephus, e.g., (*Ant.* 4.74) for private feasts (such as weddings or circumcisions probably).

⁵⁰ The verb προεுτρεπίζω is, as εὐτρεπίζω above, another expression for “making ready before, preparing.”

in order that when humans came into the world they might at once⁵¹ find a feast ready for them,
and a most holy theatre;
the one abounding with everything which the earth, or the rivers, or the sea, or air, brings forth for use and enjoyment.

ἵν' εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσελθὼν εὐθύς εὖρη καὶ συμπόσιον
καὶ θέατρον ἱερώτατον,
τὸ μὲν ἀπάντων πλήρες ὅσα γῆ καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ θάλαττα καὶ ἄῃρ φέρουσιν εἰς χρῆσιν καὶ ἀπόλαυσιν.

The problem of Philo, as he states explicitly, is the unexpected order in the biblical account, since his assumption is that the last is the most inferior in rank. As emphasized by Peder Borgen, the answer given by Philo is basically the same as the one in tSan 8:9 and “this answer goes beyond the narrative in Gen 1. [...] In both passages the picture of a banquet is used to explain why Adam was created last.” Philo and Tosefta share parallels even in their wording:⁵²

καθάπερ οὖν τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον	just as... so in the same manner	to what is the matter comparable? To... and so, likewise, He says...	למה הדבר דומה? וכן הוא
καλοῦσιν καλεῖν	invite	invite	זימן
ἐπὶ δεῖπνον πρὸς εὐωχίαν συμπόσιον	banquet / meal for the fest / feasting fest / symposium	banquet	סעודה
οὐ πρότερον προ(ε)υτρεπίσατο	then ...first	and afterward	ואחר כך
εὐτρεπίσαι (προ)ευτρεπίσατο	provide / make ready	dedicated it and prepared	וחינה והתקין
ὁ τῶν ὅλων ἡγεμῶν	Ruler of all things	King of the kings of kings	מלך מלכי המלכים
γῆ καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ θάλαττα	the rivers, and the sea	these are the oceans, rivers, deserts	אילו ימים ונהרות ומדברות
εἰς χρῆσιν καὶ ἀπόλαυσιν	for use and enjoyment	and all the other things which the world needs	ושאר צורכי העולם

“All these similarities in wording give support to the conclusion that Philo, *Opif.* 77–78, and *t. Sanh.* 8:7 and 9 render the same tradition. [...] Thus, this tradition was widespread and originated at the time of Philo or before.”⁵³

Two other elements reinforce this possibility. First, Philo explicitly states that he reports the answer of the “scholars on the laws [of Moses]” (*Opif.* 77: λέγουσιν οὖν οἱ τοῖς νόμοις ἐπὶ πλέον ἐμβαθύναντες “Those, then, who have studied more deeply than others the laws of Moses”).⁵⁴ Second, there is an additional parallel between Philo’s text, stating that “at the moment of his coming into existence the human being found all the provisions for life” (*Opif.* 79), and the Toseftan parallel, “so that [*’adam*] might enter the banquet [*se’udah*] immediately [with everything ready].” Note that

⁵¹ The adverb εὐθύς “immediately” matches the Toseftan מיד.

⁵² BORGAN, *Philo of Alexandria*, 87–88.

⁵³ BORGAN, *Philo of Alexandria*, 88–89.

⁵⁴ RUNIA, *Creation*, 247–248 stresses that “Philo makes quite clear that he is indebted to anterior traditions of exegesis.” He goes on to say that this phrase is “the clearest indication” in the tractate that Philo “draws on anterior traditions.” Note also that Philo poses a question and gives multiple answers to it (here only one is reported), this method is similar to the rabbinic one.

the rabbinic midrash (not the *mashal*) incorporates elements from the *mashal* in Philo (namely, the seas, and oceans).

Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* (“On the Creation of Humans”) 2:131–133 is also very similar to these Jewish traditions in both content and literary form, and he draws on material from Philo’s tradition:⁵⁵

Why humans appeared last, after the creation.⁵⁶ When, then, the Maker of all had prepared beforehand a royal lodging for the future king⁵⁷ (and this was the land, and islands, and sea, and the heaven arching like a roof over them), and when all kinds of wealth had been stored in this palace⁵⁸ [...] He thus manifests humans in the world, to be the beholders⁵⁹ of some of the wonders therein, and the lords of others; that by their enjoyment they might have knowledge of the Giver. [...]

For this reason humans were brought into the world last after the creation. [...]

And as a good host⁶⁰ does not bring his guest to his house before the preparation of his feast, but, when he has made all due preparation, and decked with their proper adornments his house, his couches, his table, brings his guest⁶¹ home⁶² when things suitable for his refreshment are in readiness,⁶³— in the same manner the rich and munificent Entertainer of our nature, when He had decked the habitation with beauties of every kind, and prepared this great and varied banquet,⁶⁴ then introduced humans, assigning to them as their task not the acquiring of what was

Διὰ τί μετὰ τὴν κτίσιν τελευταῖος ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν οἷόν τινα βασιλεῖον καταγωγὴν τῷ μέλλοντι βασιλεύειν ὁ τοῦ παντός ποιητῆς προηυτρέπισεν. Αὕτη δὲ ἦν γῆ τε καὶ νῆσοι καὶ θάλαττα καὶ οὐρανός ὑπὲρ τούτων ὀρόφου δίκην ἐπικυρτούμενος· πλοῦτος δὲ παντοδαπός τοῖς βασιλείοις τούτοις ἐναπετέθη. [...] οὕτως ἀναδείκνυσιν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῶν ἐν τούτῳ θαυμάτων τῶν μὲν θεατὴν ἐσόμενον, τῶν δὲ κύριον, ὡς διὰ μὲν τῆς ἀπολαύσεως τὴν σύνεσιν τοῦ χορηγοῦντος ἔχειν. [...]

Διὰ ταῦτα τελευταῖος μετὰ τὴν κτίσιν εἰσῆχθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος [...]

Καὶ ὥσπερ τις ἀγαθὸς ἐσιτάτωρ οὐ πρὸ τῆς παρασκευῆς τῶν ἐδωδῖμων τὸν ἐσιτώμενον εἰσοικίζεται, ἀλλ' εὐπρεπῆ τὰ πάντα παρασκευάσας καὶ φαιδρύνας τοῖς καθήκουσι κόσμοις τὸν οἶκον, τὴν κλισίαν, τὴν τράπεζαν, ἐφ' ἐτοίμοις ἤδη τοῖς πρὸς τὴν τροφὴν ἐπιτηδείοις, ἐφέστιον ποιεῖται τὸν δαιτυμόνα, κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὁ πλούσιός τε καὶ πολυτελής τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ἐσιτάτωρ παντοίοις κάλλεσι κατακοσμήσας τὴν οἴκησιν καὶ τὴν μεγάλην ταύτην καὶ παντοδαπὴν πανδαισίαν ἐτοιμασάμενος, οὕτως εἰσάγει τὸν

⁵⁵ Jean DANIELLOU, “Philon et Grégoire de Nyssa,” in: *Philon d’Alexandrie: Lyon, 11–15 septembre 1966* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1967) 335–336.

⁵⁶ Based on the translation of William MOORE and Henry A. WILSON, *On the Making of Man* (by Gregory of Nyssa, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1954) 132–133.

⁵⁷ Philo, *Opif.* 84: καθίστη τῶν [...] ἀπάντων βασιλέα “He appointed him [sc. humanity] king of all the creatures” (same verb as LXX Ps 8:7: κατέστησας “You appointed [humanity] as ruler;” RUNIA, *On the Creation*, 69) and PesR 21 בריותיו כל על גלגל מלכותו ולי “to appoint [‘adam] [...] king over all of His creatures.”

⁵⁸ The term βασιλεῖον “palace, kingly dwelling, seat of empire” parallels the Toseftan *palterin*. The “palace” is absent in Philo.

⁵⁹ The θεατής “beholder, spectator in the theatre, one who sees, goes to see, contemplates” here parallels Philo’s τοὺς θεατάς “spectators” and θέαμα “spectacles.”

⁶⁰ Key term from Philo, *Opif.* 78.

⁶¹ This is also a technical term: δαιτυμών is a banquet guest, an invited guest, one that is entertained (LIDDELL, SCOTT, and JONES, *Dictionary*, 366; the term is found in Plato, *Tim.* 17a).

⁶² The expression ἐφέστιος means “at one’s own fireside, at home” (LIDDELL, SCOTT, and JONES, *Dictionary*, 743).

⁶³ Adjective ἐτοῖμος “ready, prepared” parallels rabbinic מְקַדְּמָה and philonic προευτρέπιζω/ εὐτρεπιζω “making ready before, preparing.”

⁶⁴ A πανδαισία is “a complete banquet at which no one and nothing fails” (LIDDELL, SCOTT, and JONES, *Dictionary*, 1296).

not there, but the enjoyment of the things which were there. ἄνθρωπον, ἔργον αὐτῷ δοῦς οὐ τὴν κτήσιν τῶν μὴ προσόντων, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν τῶν παρόντων.

Gregory’s wordings and concepts resemble the Tosefta, as well as Philo, quite closely.⁶⁵ Like the rabbinic text, Gregory speaks not only of a “Maker of all” but also of a “house” (τὸν οἶκον).

However, the rabbinic text presents an additional element, absent in the texts by Philo and Gregory: the midrash encapsulated within the parable. This rhetorical strategy aims to rabbinize the parable, giving a rabbinic twist and a biblical support. But it also conveys a new meaning to the parable, coloring it in the feminine. The midrash is anchored within the parable, infusing it with additional meaning. This rabbinic *matryoshka* structure – a midrash within a parable – brings new additions from the biblical text, namely the term “woman” and “house,” which are nested back in the initial analogy.

טענה	משל	מקרא	מדרש
	מלך	חכמות נשים	מלך מלכי המלכים
	שבנה	בנתה	שברא
	פלטירין	ביתה	עולמו
	וחינכה	חצבה עמודיה שבעה	שבעת ימי בראשית
	והתקין סעודה	טבחה טבחה מזגה ינה	ימים ונהרות ומדברות ושאר צרכי העולם
	ואחר כך זימן האורחים	שלחה נערותיה ותקרא לכו לחמו בלחמי	אדם וחיה
כדי שיכנס לסעודה מיד			

The only peculiar difference between the Tosefta and the other texts is the metaphorical construction and explicit comparison of “the Divine creating His world” as a “woman building her house,” which has no correspondent in the parallel texts.

Is gender here intentional or accidental? To answer this question, one must analyze the second patch sewed in the rabbinic tapestry, namely the biblical quotations. The first citation in the Tosefta (ביתתה בנתה נשים) is from Prov 14:1, whereas all the following quotations are from Prov 9:1–5. Now, the opening sentence of Prov 9:1 is identical to that in Prov 14:1, except that it misses the term נשים – *nashim* “women”: *חכמות בנתה ביתה*.⁶⁶

The tannaitic authors thus choose deliberately a verse with a more explicit and stronger feminine mark: rather than “wisdom has built her house” (*חכמות בנתה ביתה* / *hokhmot bantah veitah*) of Prov 9:1, they quote Prov 14:1 “the wise ones (fem.) of women / the wisest of women has built her house” (punctuated in the Masoretic text as *חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה* / *hakhmot nashim bantah veitah*).

Prov 9:1	משלי ט א	משלי יד א	Prov 14:1
wisdom has built her house	חכמות בנתה ביתה	חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה	the wisest of women has built her house
	hokhmot	hakhmot nashim	

⁶⁵ The terms προηυτρέπισεν (“prepare”), ἑστιάτωρ (“host”), ἀπόλαυσιν (“enjoyment”) are taken literally from Philo.

⁶⁶ ZUCKERMANDEL ed., 428, on line 8 notes that “*nashim* is absent in the verse,” referring to Prov 9:1.

The Tosefta collapses two halves of different verses into one when it quotes in the midrash: “The wisest of women has built her house (Prov 14:1), set up her seven pillars (Prov 9:1).”

Prov 9:1 (MT)			Prov 14:1 (MT)
חכמות בנתה ביתה,	Wisdom [<i>hokhmot</i>] has built her house,	The wise ones (fem.) of women / the wisest of women [<i>hakhmot nashim</i>] has built her house,	חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה,
עמודיה חצבה שבעה.	she has hewn her pillars, seven.	but the foolish with her own hands destroys it.	ואולת בידיה תהרסנו.
Prov 9:2			
טבחה טבחה, מסכה יינה, אף ערכה שלחנה.	She has slaughtered her meat, has mixed her wine, also laid out her table.		
Prov 9:3			
שלחה נערותיה, תקרא על גפי מרמי קרת.	She has sent out her young women, calls loud from the city's heights:		
Prov 9:4			
מי פתי יסר הנה, חסר לב אמרה לו:	Whoever the dupe, let her/him turn aside here, the senseless – she said to her/him.		
Prov 9:5			
לכו לחמו בלחמי, ושתו ביינ מסכתי.	Come, partake of my bread, and drink the wine I have mixed.		

The tannaim needed a scriptural proof text to reinforce the parable. The parable may have been known from other contexts, thus requiring biblical support. It could then be argued that the only biblical passage convenient for this purpose that the rabbis were able to find was Prov 9:1–5. Thus, the characterization of wisdom in feminine terms could be an accidental secondary effect within their interpretation. “Wisdom builds a house (v. 1), prepares a fest (v. 2), and issues an invitation (vv 3–5).”⁶⁷ This is a perfect matching for the parable of the Divine creating the world and inviting *’adam* as last. However, the Tosefta mixes two biblical passages, whereby it needs Prov 9:1–5 for the comparison, but it substitutes its opening verse with the one unmistakably marked in the feminine from Prov 14:1. This strongly suggests a conscious and intended exegetical move regarding gender. The Tosefta could indeed have used the verse of Proverbs without explicit mention of women (Prov 9:1), thus creating a more ambiguous construction in gendered terms.

Since the feminine is the less expected gender aspect and the stronger hermeneutical marker, incidental confusion of verses is less probable. Moreover, the

⁶⁷ Adele BERLIN and Marc Z. BRETTLER (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 1462.

term *nashim* is used twice: once in the quote of the verse and then again in the explanation of the verse within the midrash.

The Masoretic text punctuates the expression חכמות נשים of Prov 14:1 as חכמות נשים – *ḥakhmot nashim*, lit. “the wise ones (f.) of women” (like the phrase in Judg 5:29 חכמות שרותיה – *ḥakhmot saroteyha* “the wisest of her princesses”). Since the verb is in the singular, this should probably be understood as “the wisest of women.” The plural can be understood as enhancement, identity and majestic plural (“Ausdehnungs-, Identitäts- oder Hoheitsplural”)⁶⁸ and the construct state as “*genitivus partitivus*” (partitive genitive). The plural of the subject takes the meaning of a superlative through its referring to the partitive genitive. So, we have a shifting from the personified “wisdom” with feminine attributes of Prov 9:1 to a wise *human* woman (or wise *human* women) in 14:1.

The Septuagint indeed translates Prov 9:1 with ἡ σοφία (“wisdom”) and Prov 14:1 with σοφαὶ γυναῖκες ὠκοδόμησαν οἴκους (“**wise women** built houses”);⁶⁹ the Vulgate with *sapientia* (“wisdom”) for 9:1 and *sapiens mulier aedificavit domum suam* (“**a wise woman** has built her house”) for 14:1;⁷⁰ the Targum of Proverbs with חכמתא (“wisdom”) for 9:1 and חכימתא בנשיא (“**the wisest of women**”) for 14:1;⁷¹ the Syriac Peshitta has “wisdom” for 9:1 (ܫܚܘܬܐ) and “**wise woman**” for 14:1 (ܫܚܘܬܐ ܫܚܘܬܐ).⁷²

Børge SALOMONSEN, in his translation of Tosefta Sanhedrin, chooses the rendering “the wisest of women.”⁷³ SALOMONSEN explains his choice on the basis of the following rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, whereby a personal character should be preferred in this tannaitic context. I would add the Masoretic punctuation as a further support for translating in this manner – a tradition which prefers a human woman over an abstract idea and which is also adopted in all the other translations mentioned above that belonged to the cultural context of the rabbis: most probably this understanding was thus shared by the tannaim as well.

Thus, we can see that the tannaim opt for a personal, human, female figure – a woman – rather than an abstract concept expressed with a word that is grammatically feminine. In the construction חכמ' נש' בנ' ביתה: "זה מלך מלכי המלכים ברוך הוא – *The wisest of women has built her house* (Prov 14:1): This is the King of the kings of kings,” the scriptural quotation and the rabbinic interpretation are connected only through the term זה “this is.” The explanation of the biblical text is introduced by a single word, thus being extremely direct and clear about what is connected to what – in this case, the Divine being compared to a wise woman.

⁶⁸ Cf. Børge SALOMONSEN, *Rabbinische Texte*, Reihe 1, *Die Tosefta: Seder Nezikin IV/3: Sanhedrin – Makkot* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1976) 136 n. 56.

⁶⁹ Alfred RAHLFS and Robert HANHART (eds.), *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006) 197, 206.

⁷⁰ Robert WEBER and Roger GRAYSON (eds.), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007) 1356, 1360.

⁷¹ Céline MANGAN, John F. HEALEY, and Peter S. KNOBEL, *Targum of Job, Proverbs, and Qohelet* (Aramaic Bible 15; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 26, 34–35. Cf. Michael V. FOX, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) 1000–1001.

⁷² “Aramaic Targum Search”, in: Stephen A. KAUFMANN (ed.), *CAL – The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, (<http://cal.huc.edu>), Targum search, Aramaic Bible.

⁷³ SALOMONSEN, *Sanhedrin – Makkot*, 136: “Die weiseste unter den Frauen baute ihr Haus.”

According to this comparison, G-d is like a woman. And like a wise woman builds her house in a wise way, so G-d has created and built the world by wisdom. It was wise to build the world, and He also did it very well. The Tosefta assembles different biblical texts in a story-image of the Divine creating the world as a woman who constructs her household and cares for it, building and sustaining it, and preparing food. Wisdom is attributed to domestic work which, projected on the Divine, acquires value and creativity is recognized in it. The comparison of the Creator to an intelligent woman is an unexpected, indeed shocking element that conveys rabbinic views on the feminine, the Divine, and the world.

G-d creating the world = construction of a building
= preparing food, caring for the household

In this construction, caring for the household is seen as “building it.” Intelligence is attributed to household work.⁷⁴ The role of a woman within this figure is a gendered constructed task. But activities such as caring for the household and preparing food acquire value when projected on G-d creating the world. Moreover, although rabbinic literature knows the setting of the banquet, here the focus is shifted to the house and domestic food preparation (this is also the case in Gregory’s text). The translation of the Septuagint at Prov 9:2 is “she has mixed her wine into a *krater* (a mixing bowl)”, whereby the terminology “into a *krater*” (εἰς κρατῆρα) was added to elaborate the picture of a symposium. This element, present also in Philo, is absent from the rabbinic text.

This text has no problem in representing G-d as a woman. As pointed out by Tal ILAN, “[a] feminine simile for G[-]d is not absent in Jewish midrashim,”⁷⁵ with ILAN here referring to later, amoraic midrashim. The tosefta analyzed here shows that we find this construction already in tannaitic/halakhic literature, expressed in an explicit and unworried way. The metaphor binds together two parts: G-d is compared to a working woman and a woman is compared to G-d, whereby her household work has value, and the upkeep of the household has religious significance, in imitation of the Divine. As noted by ILAN, already in the image of Proverbs used by the rabbis “[in] chapters 1 and 9 she [*hokmah*] is an independent householder who calls all to come to her and holds a banquet for them. [...] [She is] an independent assertive woman.”⁷⁶ She invites guests and decides for the good of her microcosms. Similarly, the Divine

⁷⁴ Carol MEYERS (“Prov 14:1 – Wise Woman Building Her House”, in: *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* [eds. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000], 306) considers that already in the biblical text, “[d]espite the difficult syntax in the Hebrew, the association between ‘woman’ and ‘house’ as well as ‘wisdom’ is clear. This verse can thus be added to the four explicit uses of ‘mother’s house’ (Gen 24:28; Ruth 1:8; Song 3:4; 8:2), a term for the family household [...] that reflects a woman’s perspective and also expresses female agency in managing an agrarian household in ancient Israel. The link here with wisdom adds the dimension of female technological expertise and sagacity.” Consider also Ruth 4:11 where it is said that the matriarchs Rachel and Leah have built the house of Israel.

⁷⁵ Tal ILAN, “The Women of the Q Community within Early Judaism”, in: *Q in Context II: Social Setting and Archaeological Background of the Sayings Source* (ed. Markus Tiwald; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015) 209. In LevR 5:8, for example, “the situation where the Israelites pray to G[-]d, to provide for their daily needs is compared to a wandering man petitioning a woman to give him supper. Israel is the wanderer. G[-]d is the woman” (ibid., 207).

⁷⁶ ILAN, “Women,” 204.

acts like a female householder in her rabbinic home. The metaphor with the term *nashim*, indicating a female human being, is more concrete and stronger. Midrashim were often part of sermons, with a moralistic lesson for the public. This makes even more relevant the use of a comparison between G-d and a woman.

This figurative structure humanizes the Divine, highlighting again the main topic of this section: the value of humanity. Just like G-d puts on *tefillin* (bBer 6b), so the rabbinic G-d also cares for the house and its “fireplace”: She slaughters Her meat, sets out Her table, calls loud for people to come to Her feast.

In sum, the polemical context and the remark on the commandment’s performance, with the focus on the idea of *mitsvah*, make this contribution seem consciously perceived by the rabbis as their own. The effect of the gendered addition and of the parable itself is determined by the complex interaction of all the parts of this rabbinic puzzle. A “theological” rabbinic message is created. A rabbinic view on “theology” is offered in pictorial terms. The original context is halakhic, and the rabbinic view on “theology” and humanity is used to justify its legal rulings. And, finally, this entire structure is based on a feminine image, deliberately created by the Tosefta. The significance of the feminine source is here particularly intriguing and evident.

Concerning the reception history of this gendered midrash, the amoraic midrash LevR 11:1 reports a tradition very similar to that of the Tosefta, according to its “best” manuscript London, British Library Add. 27,169 (340),⁷⁷ with a repetition of the phrase חכמות נשים:

ויקרא רבה יא א
"חכמות נשים בנתה וגו'."
ר' ירמיה בר' לעזר פתר קרייה בברייתו שלעולם.
"חכמות נשים בנ' ב'": זה הקב"ה שברא את כל העולם כולו בחכמה.

LevR 11:1

The wisest of women has built her house (Prov 14:1).

R. Jeremiah b. R. Ele'azar interpreted the verse (Prov 14:1 and Prov 9:1–4) to speak of the creation of the world. *The wisest of women has built her house* (Prov 14:1): This is the Holy One, blessed be He, who created the entire world by wisdom.

The midrash then continues illustrating the rest of Prov 9:1–4 as in the Tosefta, with additional explicative verses. LevR has the same reference to *nashim* as in the Tosefta, and thus the mix of verses from two different sections of Proverbs. LevR develops the midrash on the biblical text of Prov 14:1/9:1–4 with four different interpretations. In LevR 11:1, R. Jeremiah b. R. Ele'azar interprets it in relation to the creation of the world (as mentioned above); in LevR 11:2, R. Yonah in the name of R. 'Abba' bar Yirmiyah understands it as referring to the Gog war in the future to come: "חכמות נ' בנתה ביתה": זה בית המקדש, בחכמה יבנה בית

⁷⁷ MARGULIES ed., 1:219 (ריט). The transcription of the London MS is the best witness selected by MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language* (<http://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=24000&mm15=000011001000>). The synoptic edition of the manuscripts of LevR initiated by Chaim MILIKOWSKY and Margarete SCHLÜTER can be found online at: <https://www.biu.ac.il/JS/midrash/VR/outfiles/OUT11-01.htm>, and it shows that the copyists often left out the term *nashim*. The term *nashim* is found in the MS Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, Hebr. no. 149 (this manuscript is online at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9064497w.image>, our text can be found at p. 124 of the PDF); in the MS Klosterneuburg, Bibliothek des Chorherrenstifts 462, 539; in the MS Oxford, Bodleian Opp. Add. fol. 51 (although in parenthesis); and in the MS Friedberg, Sasson 920 Toronto.

has built her house (Prov 14:1): This is the Temple, with wisdom He will build a house;” LevR 11:3 has Bar Qappara’ explaining the text with the Divine creating the Torah as a house built by a wise woman: "חכמות נ' בנתה ביתה": זה תורה; and for LevR 11:4, the wise woman is Betsal’el constructing the *'ohel mo'ed* by divine inspiration.⁷⁸ Thus, in the aggadic midrash we have an explanation and an expansion of the metaphoric image, persistently in the feminine.

The term *nashim* is employed in the Venezia edition of the Bavli (bSan 38a), which often preserves old readings, as well as in the Barco edition (and in the Yemenite haRav Herzog manuscript, quite a trustworthy textual witness, although the term is here blurred and cancelled). By contrast, in the versions of the Vilna edition, in MS München 95 and in the Genizah fragment Cambridge T-S F 2(1.)148, *nashim* is emended.⁷⁹ The passage in Yerushalmi Sanhedrin quoting the parable and the question about *'adam* as the last creation (ySan 4:9, 22c) has only two textual witnesses (the Venice ed. and the Leiden manuscript) that do not attest the term *nashim*.⁸⁰ However, the tradition with the term *nashim* also emerges again at some point later, as in the Yalqut Shim‘oni on the Torah (a late Midrashic collection, 13th century):

81

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת בראשית רמז טו

ד"א: כדי שיכנס לסעודה מיד. משל למלך בשר ודם שבנה פלטרין והתקין סעודה ואח"כ הכניס אורחים. שנאמר: "חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה" (משלי יד א).

Yalq Gen § 15

Another thing: So that [*'adam*] might enter the banquet [*se'udah*] immediately [with everything ready]. A parable [*mashal*] about a king of flesh and blood who built a palace [*palterin*] and prepared a meal [*se'udah*] and [only] afterward let the guests in. As it is said: **The wisest of women has built her house** (Prov 14:1).

Another example is the 16th-century *Be'er haGolah* of the Maharal of Prague:

82

ספר באר הגולה באר הרביעי פרק ח

נמצא כי העולם הזה הוא כמו בית, שיש לו מקומות מתחלפות, חדרים פנימיים וחיצוניים. ודבר זה נמצא מאוד שהעולם נקרא 'בית', כמו שאמר הכתוב: "חכמת נשים בנתה ביתה" (משלי יד א) "חצבה עמודיה שבעה" (משלי ט א), ודרשו פסוק זה בפרק אחד דיני ממונות (סנהדרין לח א) על העולם שנברא (בששת) [בשבעת] ימי בראשית, כדאיתא שם. וחלוק יש בין חיצונית והפנימית; כי לעולם הפנימי הוא לקדושה האלקית, וזה בכמה מקומות, כי הפנימי הנסתר הוא מיוחד לקדושה.

Sefer Be'er haGolah, Be'er 4, chap. 5

We find [in Jewish tradition] that **this world is like a house**, [namely] that it has different spaces, internal and external rooms. And this thing is strongly present [in the sources] that the world is called "house" [*bayit*], as Scripture states: **The wisest of women has built her house** (Prov 14:1) *she has hewn her pillars, seven* (Prov 9:1). **And this verse was expounded in chapter one "monetary laws" [*dinei mamonot*] (bSan 38a) about the world that was created in the seven days of Genesis**, as is recounted there. And there is a division between the external (fem., *hitsonit*) and the internal (fem., *ha-pnimit*); because the internal world is for the Divine holiness, and this recurs in several places, because the internal and hidden is set aside for holiness.

⁷⁸ Hebrew text according to the London MS 340.

⁷⁹ The synopsis and textual witnesses of the Bavli were consulted at the FRIEDBERG Project for Talmud Bavli Variants website "*Hachi Garsinan*," academic director Menachem KATZ, 2016 (<https://bavli.genizah.org>).

⁸⁰ Peter SCHÄFER and Hans-Jürgen BECKER (eds.), *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*, vol. 4, *Seder Neziqin* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995) 176.

⁸¹ Hebrew text from the LANDAU ed.

⁸² The translation is mine. The Hebrew text is from the HARTMAN ed.

Thus, the metaphorical association that conceptualizes creation in terms of a house and the Creator as a woman, cross-mapping and linking the two domains, has echoes in rabbinic language as a set cognitive pattern. Metaphoric expressions trigger mechanisms of change, structuring thought, focusing on certain aspects and ignoring others, and form a certain cultural understanding – in this case, the humanization and “feminization” of the act of creation.

“The wisest of women: This is the King of kings” – the two superlatives makes the image a strong mnemonic phrase to echo down through the transmission chain of the rabbinic production.

1.2. G-d as pregnant woman (SifDeut)

The previous section has focused on how G-d is described as acting as a rabbinic wise woman (*hakhmot nashim*) building her house, setting the table and slaughtering meat. Within the tannaitic figurative language of G-d and within the rabbinic images of G-d living the life of His people, as a member of a rabbinic society performing mitsvot, the Divine is also depicted as living like a Jewish woman and sharing her gendered everyday/ritual/work experience (Tosefta Sanhedrin 8:9).

Tosefta Sanhedrin conceptualizes G-d as a wise woman building Her household, namely setting the house, the Creation and preparing it for humanity, Her guests and, translated, Her children. This idea is related to a metaphorical thread that is matrifocal in delineating G-d as a mother and her children/child as representing the family and social foundational relationship. The most important and peculiar trait of the G-d of Israel is, already in the biblical corpora, His relational character; His relation with Israel. This is expressed figuratively many times through metaphors of family relationship, filiation and consanguinity. For this inquiry, it is interesting to follow the tannaitic, original thread that focuses on a mother-child/daughter bond in order to speak of the relationship between G-d and Israel. The family and filiation link expresses mutual but asymmetric relationship, vicinity and the sharing of a destiny, whereby the image of a mother concentrates on an even closer, visceral proximity, protection and nurture, expressed by the maternal *body*. The connection between the previous section on the commandments and the current one on pregnancy (as well as the next section about breastfeeding), in that G-d not only performs commandments, but He does so, metaphorically, from within a Jewish body.⁸³ The tannaim describe G-d as having a womb and carrying the fetus Israel in it, and through this figurative construction they concretize the relationship and bond between G-d and Israel, as well as the involvement of G-d in forming Israel.

⁸³ About the rabbinic production describing G-d’s body as being circumcised see: “We, who went through the theological philosophies developed in the Middle Ages do not accept such bodily personification of G[-]d (although we do accept psychological ones, such as stating that G[-]d is gracious). Talking about G[-]d’s hands and feet does not make sense to us, let alone his private parts. However, for the rabbis, an embodied (albeit non material) G[-]d was common sense, and although talking about his private parts is not common, it does appear here and there in rabbinic literature. For example, in Avot de Rabbi Nathan we find the assertion that Adam was created circumcised, because he was created in the image of G[-]d. Coming to think of it, if talking about G[-]d’s body is common sense, then surely this body would be circumcised; can one imagine otherwise the G[-]d of the Jews?” (Ronit NIKOLSKY, “The Mystery of Abraham’s Circumcision,” 2020, at: <https://confabulatingapge.wordpress.com/2020/07/11/the-mystery-of-abrahams-circumcision>).

Isa 46:3 speaks in a unique passage of G-d as being pregnant with Israel, carrying it in the womb: “Listen to Me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who were sustained since the time of pregnancy, who were carried from the womb” (הַעֲמִסִים מִנִּי-בֶטֶן הַנְּשִׂאִים מִנִּי-רַחֵם). The gynomorphic image is created in the biblical verse by the nouns בֶּטֶן and רַחֵם, which represent two explicit gender markers, indicating the womb. The verbs עָמַס and נָשָׂא denote in a parallel way the element of “carrying, bearing, sustaining a load.” The image in its entirety evokes the dependence of Israel on G-d. This passages in Isaiah refers to Deuteronomy which largely employs the idea of G-d carrying Israel (e.g., Deut 1:31 through the metaphor of a father carrying his child: כָּאִשׁ אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ). Isaiah transforms it, shifting to the concept of female embodiment of the Divine. Moreover, the verb עָמַס – ‘amas creates an additional layer of meaning, indicating not only the action “to sustain,” but also the carrying of a burden. These aspects are all evocated in the rabbinic text, which seems to clearly allude to Isaiah. The tannaitic passage comments on Deuteronomy and its passages about G-d carrying Israel, but it prefers the female gender of Isaiah over the male or neutral gender in Deuteronomy. It also moves a step forward the image of Isaiah, whereby the prophetic passage marks the female gender through the bodily part of the womb, and the tannaitic one compares G-d direct to a woman (“G-d is like a woman...”), bringing in the entire female figure and subject, and her personal experience. The tannaitic construction is from a literary point of view complex and the rhetoric of the feminine metaphorical language central to its structure. Israel is described as being in the womb of G-d (and G-d as being a pregnant woman) in the following tannaitic passage in Sifre Deuteronomy 29:

ספרי דברים כט
 "וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם [ולא שמע אלי]" (דברים ג כו):
 ר' אליעזר אומר: נתמלא עלי חימה.
 ר' יהושע אומר: כאשה שאינה יכולה לשוח מפני עובריה.⁸⁴

SifDeut 29

And 'ה was cross⁸⁵ [vit'aber] with me because of you, [and He did not listen me] (Deut 3:26):

R. 'Eli'ezer says: He [G-d] was filled with rage against me.

R. Yehoshu'a says: **Like a woman who cannot bend because of her fetus/pregnancy [ubarah].**⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Hebrew text according to the Vatican MS ebr. 32:2, 45 (the best manuscript for SifDeut, cf. MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*, <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21002&mm15=00000029000>). The text is also attested in the fragment JTS MS Rab. 2392, p. 17; London MS Add. 16406, 325; Berlin MS Or. Qu. 1594, 82; Oxford MS Bodl. Or. 150, 380a. In all these textual witnesses the verb is the particular form לִשׁוּחַ – *lashuah* “to bend.” FINKELSTEIN ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 45. Cf. the identical passage in MekhDv 3:26, which is not attested in its early textual witnesses.

⁸⁵ This is Robert ALTER translation for G-d being angry. ALTER'S choice is very poignant, and relevant for this analysis: “Though the verb used in this translation – as by Friedman – is a little too mild for the Hebrew *hit'aber*, which is closer to “was angered,” it has the virtue of preserving the pun, transparent in the Hebrew, on the same verb (-b-r) in the *qal* conjugation, “to cross” or “cross over,” both used for the advance of the Israelite (verse 21) and in Moses's plea to G[-]d (verse 25 [“Let me, pray, cross over that I may see the goodly land which is across the Jordan”]). Such punning switches of meaning are a regular technique of biblical narrative employed to effect transitions” (Robert ALTER, *The Five Books: A Translation with Commentary* [New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008] 896).

⁸⁶ The translation of the text of SifDeut is mine. Cf. the translations of Marty JAFFEE, *Sifre Dvarim: A new translation of the 4th-century rabbinic oral commentaries on Deuteronomy* (Seattle: University of Washington Stroum Center for Jewish Studies, 2016, <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/book/sifre-dvarim/chapter/pisqa-29-2/>), Reuven HAMMER, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of*

Deuteronomy 3:23-29 contains Moses' plea to G-d to enter the Land of Israel. In chapters 2 and 3 of Deuteronomy the verb עבר – 'avar in the *qal*, "cross over," is repeated many times. In Deut 3:25 Moses prays to cross over (אָעֲבֹרָה־נָא... בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן) and in Deut 3:27 G-d answers again that he will *not* cross over (כִּי־לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן (הַזֶּה)).

According to Moses (Deut 3:26, the middle verse between the plea and the refuse) G-d did not listen to him, and He was furious at him because of Israel (וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי) (הִתְעַבֵּר) – *hitpa'el* (הִתְעַבֵּר) – *hit'aber*), a homonym of the same verbal root, meaning in its plain sense "to be angry, furious."⁸⁷

In Deut 3:20-21 the new generation of Israel is promised, on the contrary, to cross over to the Land beyond (בְּעֵבֶר – *be-'ever*) the river Jordan (אֶתְּהָ עֵבֶר ... בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן (שָׁמָּה)).

This "crossing over" is related to G-d as the subject achieving the dislocation of Israel; He is "bringing them" and "carrying them" in their movement, migration or change of place. Such "crossing, coming from another place, and change of place," as well as the idea of "carrying from one place to another" is associated by the tannaim to pregnancy, as the moment in which the human being is transported "from one world to another" by her mother. Pregnancy is also a moment of tension and uncertainty, a "border": the fetus is not here, in our world, but it is at the edge of it. However, the focus of the tannaitic text is much more on the mother, on G-d.

G-d being angered/furious at Moses is the interpretative starting point. R. 'Eli'ezer (ben Hyrcanus) states that G-d was "filled" with rage against Moses (נתמלא). This statement is found in a longer and anonymous version in Sifre Numbers 135: "וַיִּתְעַבֵּר" *"And ה' was cross [yit'aber] with me: Like a person saying: So-and-so was angered with me and was filled with rage against me."*⁸⁸ In this interpretation the verb *yit'aber* is understood literally and in its "plain"/*peshat* meaning, the same as in biblical Hebrew of Deut 3:26.

Mekhilta' de Rabbi Yishm'a'el *beshallah 'amaleq 2* reports the opinion that G-d should not be spoken of or addressed in such way: "וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי" – "ר' אלעז' בר' שמע' – *"And ה' was cross [yit'aber] with me: R. 'Ele'azar bar Shim'on: [This means:] with me He spoke harshly—this, however, a human being [lit. flesh and blood] cannot say."*⁸⁹ The Mekhilta' seems to align here with Philo's Hellenistic-Roman theological conceptualization according to which G-d is without wrath or anger (*De Abr.* 202, *Quod Deus* 59-60). Philo asserts how the Divine cannot be described in these terms and how the biblical terminology

Deuteronomy (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1986) 53 and Jacob NEUSNER, *Sifre to Deuteronomy: An Analytical Translation* (vol. 1, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987) 78.

⁸⁷ This is a rare term, associated with the noun עֲבָרָה – 'evrah "anger, wrath, fury, rage, in the sense of outpouring, overflow, outburst." LXX has ὑπερεΐδεν – *hypereiden* "overlooked, ignored," "taking *hit'abber* literally as 'passed over.'" (Moshe WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [The Anchor Bible, vol. 5, New York: Doubleday, 1991, repr. Yale University Press, 2008] 190).

⁸⁸ KAHANA ed., vol. 4, 457, 1153. Hebrew text according to the Vatican MS ebr. 32:2, 181 (see MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*, <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21001&mm15=000000135010%2000&mismilla=6>).

⁸⁹ HOROWITZ and RABIN ed., 183.

has merely the pedagogical aim to speak on the level of understanding of those to be educated, but that such language should not be replicated by someone wise (*Quod Deus* 61-69). Anger/wrath (ὀργή) is used in the Bible for G-d, because “this the only way in which the fool (ἄφρων) can be admonished.” Origen (c. 185–254, *Contra Celsum* IV 71-72) responds to the pagan philosopher Celsus’ ridiculing the images of Divine wrath in the Bible in Philo’s terms. Clement (c. 150–215, *Stromateis* 4.11.68.3) argues similarly about G-d’s anger. The tannaim are aware of the polemics of their time, in that the Mekhilta’ adopts the same (or a similar) positioning. Our text in SifDeut however resists such a conceptualization. For R. ’Eli’ezer G-d is actually angry at Moses.

R. Yehoshu’a ben Hananiah (second generation of the tannaim; together with R. ’Eli’ezer ben Hyrcanus one of the five students of R. Yohanan ben Zakkai, mAv 2:8) offers a midrashic reading of the text, which is antithetical to the position of R. ’Eli’ezer, but that it is even more at odds with the Hellenistic idea of the Divinity adopted by Philo and the Church Fathers. This image is more andromorphic, speaking of G-d as having a body. And on a step further in its figurative construction, as being like a woman, a pregnant woman. The gender of the image is even a stronger form of estrangement in the theological language of the period. Additionally, his *derash*-interpretation changes radically the anger of G-d toward Moses into a mother’s struggle and effort in carrying her child.

R. Yehoshu’a picks up R. ’Eli’ezer image of G-d’s “being entirely filled,” but rather than with anger, with a child. The expression נתמלא עלי חימה – “He become filled with rage against me” has a specular parallel in the expression והקב"ה מתמלא עליכם רחמים – “HQBH is becoming filled with compassion about you” (Genesis Rabbah 58:33), whereby R. Yehoshu’a (in principle positioned as a more lenient and accepting ruler, like Bet Hillel) would emphasize the compassion/*rahamyim* of G-d and R. ’Eli’ezer (depicted as a restrictive figure, like Bet Shammai, cf. tSan 13:2) the side of hot anger/*hemah*.

R. Yehoshu’a specifically chooses a female metaphorical image. This is the only place in the entire tannaitic corpora where the comparative phrase כאשה – *ke-’ishah* “like a woman” appears, and it does so in a metaphorical expression referring to G-d as target domain. The phrase כאיש – *ke-’ish* “like a man” as comparative for G-d appears also only once (MdRY *beshallah de-shirah* 1), but it is a biblical quote from Isa 42:13 (ה' כגבור יצא כאיש מלחמות). This means that to the biblical phrase comparing G-d directly to a man (*ke-’ish*), the tannaitic text creates the original phrase and form of comparison in the female gender, “like a woman” (*ke-’ishah*) to speak of G-d, a formula not found in the Hebrew Bible. The tannaitic phrase is very close to the existing biblical formulation, but it is completely revolutionary in its gender inversion.

We have in the midrash halakhah a gendered interpretation which plays on the verb *hit’aber*: this becomes from “to become angry” “to become pregnant.” The assonance between *yit’aber* and *’ubarah* makes the midrashic interplay clear. G-d is a woman pregnant with fetus, burdened with the pregnancy.

In Deut 3:26 Moses laments how G-d did not listen him (ולא שמע אלי). For R. Yehoshu’a the interpretation G-d did not listen was not because She was angry, but because She was busy, being pregnant with Israel; occupied with her fetus, the task

of carrying it, its burden. The verb לשוח – *lashuah* means “to bend”⁹⁰ and could signify that G-d has a belly too big to bend down and listen to Moses or talk with him. G-d is occupied in carrying, sustaining and forming the people Israel. What KESSLER states in general about rabbinic embryology is explicitly attested in this passage: “[G-d] forms and sustains Israel – like a fetus in its mother’s womb.”⁹¹ Pregnancy is understood as a demanding task, both physically and mentally. The verb לשוח “to bend” is used in GenR 63:7 (THEODOR ALBECK ed. 45) to describe how G-d speaks, communicates and engages with humans: He “bends” from above to listen to them when they call upon Him (cf. Psalm 31:3 “Incline Your ear to me” also expressing the anthropomorphic image of G-d’s bending down to hear a person’s prayers). This image of bending is used in this interpretation and projected on G-d as a woman: G-d as a pregnant woman cannot bend because of her belly – meaning that G-d cannot listen to Moses.

The prophetic text which focuses on the image of the womb, the body as a place of security, protection and force, and the act of carrying by the mother. On the contrary, the tannaitic interpretation focuses on the sensations, emotions and work of the mother, whose task of carrying is challenging, demanding, binding, and requiring her energy and focus.

To bring the people into the Land of Israel, the promised land, is the goal and fulfilment of the entire Divine plan, as the fulfilment of the pregnancy is to bring the child safely into life. There is a scale of values and interest, on the side of G-d/the mother, and priority. Moses is occupied with his personal entry in the Land, whereby the focus of the narrative in the entry of the people in the Land. To give space to Moses personal interest would mean to lose the message and the point G-d wants to make about the deliverance of a people, the task of a people as His messenger – not of a person – even its leader and prophet of prophets. G-d, like the pregnant woman, is occupied with the future, with the next generation, with the people of Israel. The metaphor of the pregnant woman is employed because the pregnant woman is occupied with something that takes priority over other things: her pregnancy and her child (in the tannaitic text: מפני עוברת – *mi-pnei ‘ubarah* “because of her fetus,” meaning also “because of her pregnancy,” cf. bYev 37a: “her embryo (pregnancy) is felt...”⁹²). The biblical למענכם – “because of you” is paralleled by the tannaitic interpretation מפני עוברת – “because of her fetus,” creating a clear comparison: the fetus is Israel.

Israel as G-d’s people, the entire people as Her child, Her messenger, and Her deliverance are not questionable – to grant permission to Moses’ request would diminish the centrality of this point.

G-d is not only not angry at Moses, but just too busy for the irrelevance of his request, which would uselessly and even harmfully shift focus from the importance of G-d’s pregnancy and work, but also Israel (“because of you”) are, in R. Yehoshu’a interpretation, no more cast in a negative light. The belly, the pregnancy are a physical inevitability, which cannot be ignored or bypassed, whereby the use of the specific

⁹⁰ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1530: “שוח I (b. h.) to bend, sink.”

⁹¹ Gwynn KESSLER, *Conceiving Israel: The Fetus in Rabbinic Narratives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 88.

⁹² This is also Jastrow understanding, cf. JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1047: “עוברת ניכר לשליש ימיה Yeb. 37a her embryo (pregnancy) is felt when she has arrived at the third portion of her days of pregnancy (three months). Sifré Deut. 29.”

verb “she cannot bend” evokes the bodily, embodied and physical compulsion of pregnancy and of G-d’s situation. For the mother, her belly is in front of her, ever-present, limiting her movement and absorbing her mind, like Israel for G-d. Israel has this special place, whereby there is not much space for others.

The image of G-d as a pregnant woman highlights in its metaphorical mapping the necessity to make/create space, to dedicate and focus on something, a sort of specialization, as G-d concentrates on Israel as His people.

There is an attempt to make sense of G-d’s anger as a human feeling through the image of a pregnant woman. This means that G-d cared for Israel, and carried it when it was difficult. Anger means actual involvement and caring. Even in times of crisis in their relationship, G-d carries Israel and takes care of its needs. The image of the pregnant body, the feelings of a pregnant woman and the term for pregnancy allow the transformation of the Divine anger into carrying, and the expression of mercy into difficulty. Through a literary analysis, we can see how this allows an interplay between crisis and Divine forgiveness. Why the image of a pregnant woman is specifically employed to depict the anger of G-d? Pregnancy represents a risky time, loaded with mixed feelings of fear, difficulty and love, it expresses importance and a possible positive outcome. It explains anger as Divine care and as G-d being concentrated on Israel, carrying it, and G-d is imagined as having Israel in Her own body. The associative ideas of “load,” “mercy,” “importance” and “significance” play in the background of the image.

In the tannaitic text there is an implied message about G-d being angry with Israel as meaning that She does not really want a separation from Israel, as a pregnant mother and her child are not separated, but a unique, inseparable entity.

The biblical descriptions of G-d’s anger were considered difficult and subjected to great exegetical elaboration by Christian interpreters contemporary to the tannaitic passage in SifDeut, or, e.g., by Philo of Alexandria. Paul’s words about G-d’s wrath on the Jewish people (1 Thess 2:16), as reproduced in the interpretation of Origen or in Marcion’s idea of a G-d of wrath, could elicit a tannaitic response aimed to depict G-d’s wrath differently. G-d is carrying Israel as a pregnant mother carries her child, at times with great difficulty, but as inextricably connected to her body and feelings of love – an experience unique and particular in its nature. In this way we find G-d with a woman’s face.

In sum, in the image “the Divine is like a woman...” of SifDeut we find rabbinic theology between body, gender and estrangement. SifDeut 29 crafts the image of “the Divine is like a woman...” – a particularly explicit figurative construction. Against the biblical formulation *ke-ish* “like a man” as direct comparative for the Divinity (Isa 42:13), the tannaitic text creates the original phrase in the female gender, “like a woman” (*ke-ishah*), a formula absent in the Hebrew Bible. It does so within a polemic on the biblical anthropomorphism of Divine wrath/anger. MdRY *beshallah-amaleq* 2 states that the expression in Deut 3:26 *yit’aber* “being cross/angry,” referring to the Divine, should not be read as such. The Mekhilta aligns with Philo’s Hellenistic theological conceptualization according to which anger cannot be ascribed to the Divinity (*De Abr.* 202, *Quod Deus* 59-60), whereby biblical terminology would be a pedagogical tool to frighten the fool. This view is reproduced by the Church Fathers Origen (*Contra Celsum* IV 71-72, responding to Celsus’ ridiculing the images of Divine wrath in the Bible) and Clement (*Stromateis* 4.11.68.3). The tannaim are aware

of the polemics of their time, in that the Mekhilta adopts a similar positioning. Our text in SifDeut 29, however, resists such a conceptualization. For R. Eliezer, the Divine in Deut 3:26 is *actually* angry with Moses. R. Yehoshua's antithetical midrashic interpretation is even more at odds with the cultural sensibility of the period about what can be said about the Divinity. According to his midrashic interplay, the Divine is not angry (*yit'aber*), but is rather "like a pregnant woman" (*'ubarah*). The embodied gender of the image clashes with the prevailing theological discourse. Divine anger is changed into a mother's effort when carrying her fetus, Israel. The anthropomorphic image of the Divine bending down (*lashuah*) to listen to humans' prayers (Ps 31:3, GenR 63:7) is transmuted in the Divine being like a pregnant woman who, because of her belly (the Divine is pregnant with Israel, delivering it to the land), cannot bend down and listen to Moses' prayers. Such a graphic maternal body image is a statement of estrangement from common theological language, metaphor and gender.

1.3. G-d, the Temple's laver and the ark as breastfeeding (MTYom, TSot, SifNum)

This section starts the analysis of a metaphorical cluster on breastfeeding and the realm of the Divine from a figurative gendered image (*dad* and *kior*) that so far has remained unnoticed in the scholarly literature.⁹³ Both Mishnah and Tosefta Yoma present, at the beginning of a list of fancy contributions to the Temple, the remarkable figurative expression דד לכיור – *dad la-kior* "breasts for the [Temple's] laver" for its two spigots⁹⁴ (mYom 3:10,⁹⁵ tYom 2:2⁹⁶). The phrase is quoted in bYom 37a, bZev 20a, yYom 3:8, 40b, and in Rashi on Ex 30:18: דוד גדולה ולה דדים – "The laver: a large (f.) pot (*dud*, m.) which has (f.) breasts (*dadim*)."⁹⁷ The term *dad* in tannaitic literature means only "female breast(s)." This textual tradition is one of three cases only in which the term *dad* is used figuratively within the tannaitic corpora (the three target domains are: the laver, the ark and the Divine). Such an image with the female body as source domain is unmistakably

⁹³ An early draft of this paper was presented at the AJS 51st Annual Conference 2019.

⁹⁴ See below on why *dad* is translated with the plural "breasts."

⁹⁵ The expression is found in the Mishnah's main manuscripts variants Kaufmann A50 (fol. 63r), Parma de Rossi 138 (fol. 38v), Cambridge Add. 470.1 (fol. 50r), München 95 (fol. 93v) and in all the mishnaic witnesses, spanning from Genizah fragments, NY JTS rab. 113 and 934, to the Napoli and Pesaro printed editions, the Vilna Mishnah, Maimonides Mishnah commentary autograph and Maimonides Mishnah Paris 330, the Yerushalmi Leiden Scaliger 3 MS and the Bavli MSS Munich 6, London 400, JTS Enelow 270 and 271, as well as the Bavli printed editions of Vilna and Venice. For this phrase in the critical editions of the Mishnah – none of which comments on the gendered image or points to it – see Yehoshua ROSENBERG, *Mishnah "Kippurim" (Yoma) critical edition, HUJI dissertation* (vol. 2; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1995) 32; ALBECK ed. (*Seder Mo'ed* vol. 2; 1952) 231; KRUPP ed. (*Joma* 2003) 14-15, that translates *dad* with "Hähne," "spigots." Jacob NEUSNER (*The Mishnah: A New Translation* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988] 269) renders "stopcocks." These translations hide the actual meaning of the term, which is "female breasts," whereby it is only by inference that we understand it as referring to the laver's spigots. In fact, in all other tannaitic sites where the term *dad* appears it is translated with – and undoubtedly referring to – "female breasts." The Naples edition attests לה "to her" for the laver in this mishnah, rather than לו, "to him."

⁹⁶ The term *dad* is found in all textual witnesses: Vienna, Erfurt, London, ed. *princ.* and Genizah frag.E1, but it is not analyzed in any of the editions: LIEBERMAN ed., *Mo'ed*, 2:230; *Tosefta Kifshutah*, *Mo'ed* 2, 4:759; ZUCKERMANDEL ed., 183.

gendered, whereby “when artists of the ancient world molded the human form, breasts signified a woman.”⁹⁷ The target domain, namely the laver, represents a key symbol in itself. The laver as a sacred part of the Temple’s structure is indeed an essential item in rabbinic religious self-understanding/identity, imagery of the Temple’s architecture and choreography of human-Divine communication. There seems to be no particular necessity to use the term *dad* “female breasts” if not for its gendered meaning.

The association *dad-kior* does not seem to create an accidental literary construction rooting merely on the similarity and visual impression that both have sort of “taps” for some liquid. Moreover, the Temple’s laver has no taps/spigots in any attestation from the Bible to Josephus, besides in this rabbinic tradition (see below). To point out only the physical similarity could be reductive of the significance of the laver as a ritual device essential in the religious economy of the rabbis and its role in this mishnaic tractate. Why to invest exegetical energy in alluding to a mechanical coincidental correlation – inherent also to other items and bodily expressions –, whereby gender is a marker employed by the texts carefully and deliberately? *Kelim* “utensils” are described often in Mishnah *Kelim* with bodily metaphors. Water is described within the Mishnah as coming out from a mouth/*pe* in numerous *kelim*. The Hebrew Bible describes already the laver with bodily, though gender-neutral, characterizations containing the term *pe* for its opening (see below). Moreover, lavers and sprouts are often depicted in Roman art with faces with mouths from which the water comes out, as in many Roman fountains of the period (while breasts are not attested in that context, but only much later, during the early modern period). Is there something in which a breast evokes the laver, which no other competing images and source domains can offer in the same level of metaphorical effectiveness? In this analysis it is argued that this figurative pair – a uniquely rabbinic development – is based on the idea of breastfeeding and maternal nurturing as connected to the Divine, the Temple and the cult.

There is an object, a “cup of wine” used at banquets and feasts (of *‘amei ha-‘arets*, tDem 3:6), which is labelled as (של יין) / מניקת / מניקת – *meneqet* (*shel yayin*), the biblical term used for a breastfeeding woman. This recalls the Greek *μαστός* (*mastos*, lit. “breast”), a wine cup shaped like a woman’s breast that was used at the domestic symposium, with an “allusion to drinking and plenitude through its parallel to the nursing breast,”⁹⁸ but also as a cultic and ritual object for votive offerings in requests or thanks-giving for continued lactation.⁹⁹ Although *meneqet* is understood as an everyday object, a small cup (which was put on the top of the cane as knob-decoration or under a door as a pivot, mKel 14:2, tKel BM 4:5), its cultic function transpires in tZev 1:12, where it is said that one can pour out the drink offering of wine (and water) with the vessel for libation and also with a *meneqet* (בין בקסוה בין [...] ניסוך היין שנסכו). More closely resembling a water-spout like in the Temple’s laver, the term *meneqet* is also employed for a siphon used for drawing wine out of a

⁹⁷ RAVEH, *Feminist Rereadings*, 1.

⁹⁸ Helene A. COCCAGNA, “Manipulating Mastoi: The Female Breast in the Sympotic Setting,” in: *Approaching the Ancient Artifact: Representation, Narrative, and Function* (eds. Amalia Avramidou and Denis Demetriou, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014) 408. The term *mastos* refers mostly to a mother’s breast (402), whereby female breasts “enjoy such a prominent role as markers of women as mothers and nurses of children” in literary and artistic contexts of period (404). And although in the sympotic setting the erotic connotation of the female breast was central to the cup’s signification, this element is suppressed by the tannaitic text through the use of the term *meneqet* “breastfeeding/nursing woman.”

⁹⁹ COCCAGNA, “The Female Breast in the Sympotic Setting,” 400, and Celia E. SCHULTZ, *Women’s Religious Activity in the Roman Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 54.

delicacy on the part of the biblical writers but to an evident convention whereby ‘breasts’ signify ‘nourishment’ and not sexual pleasure.¹⁰²

For this inquiry about the rabbinic insertion of the term *dad* in a cultic context, it is extremely relevant, as noted by Kingsmill, that the use by Ezek 23 “of the words for ‘breasts’ in the context of idolatry links with [...] a cultic use of breast imagery, understood as yielding nourishment, either for good or for evil.”¹⁰³ Generally, Kingsmill demonstrated how “breasts in the Bible function at their primary level of providing nourishment,”¹⁰⁴ often in a metaphorical, poetical way.

B.) *DAD* AND *SHAD* IN THE TANNAITIC CORPORA: DEPENDENCY AND IMAGINATIVE SIGNIFICANCE

Looking at all the occurrences of the terms *dad* and *shad* in all their variants within the entire tannaitic corpora, it turns out that in the totality of cases they refer to female breasts with nurturing, maternal characterizations. The tannaitic authors share with the Hebrew Bible a main interest in female breasts as uniquely capable (*vs.* male ones) of breastfeeding. Following the biblical text, they also transfer the significance of this aspect of existence in the figurative realm, as bearing religious significance.

The image of *dad* in the tannaitic sources is used to express the following ideas: 1) maternal breastfeeding – as providing nutrition, life as well as cultural, imaginative value – and dependency (tSot 6:4, MdRY *behallah-de-shira* 1, tKet 5:5, mKel 8:11, mNeg 2:4, 6:8, Sifra *tazria* 3, tShab 9:22; tShab 4:5, mShab 5:2, tShab 15:2 (cf. Lam 4:3); mBekh 7:5, mNeg 6:7, Sifra *tazria* 1, cf. mMakh 6:4,7-8, tShab 8:23-29); 2) female (re)productive ability and breastfeeding, rather than sexuality (tYev 10:7, mNid 5:8, tNid 6:4, mSot 1:5-6, tSot 3:3-4); 3) dependency and formation in Divine breastfeeding imagery (tSot 4:3, SifNum 89, SifDeut 321).

C.) FEMALE BREASTS IN METAPHORICAL IMAGES: THE DIVINE, DEPENDENCY AND FORMATION

The term *dad* is used in tannaitic literature as a metaphorical image for the Divine in tSot 4:3 and SifNum 89 (cf. bYom 75a), which speak of the Divine nursing infant Israel in the desert as a reference to forming the Jewish people. In these texts, a.) the Divine is compared to a mother who is nursing, b.) the manna to the mother’s breast (*dad*) c.) and Israel to the suckling. In the metaphorical image comparing G-d, on whom everyone depends, to a breastfeeding mother, the breastfeeding woman explicitly becomes the figure upon which value depends:

tSot 4:3: G-d gave them manna in the desert, *and its taste was like the creaminess of oil* [*leshad ha-shemen*] (Num 11:8): It was oil like that which comes out from the breast [*min ha-dad*] (לשד השמן:) (שמן כיוצא מן הדד). Just as the breast [*ha-dad*] is essential for the suckling, and everything else is secondary for it [the suckling] (מה דד זה עיקר לתינוק והכל טפל לו), so the manna was essential for Israel, and everything else was secondary for them. Just as this breast [*ha-dad*], even if the suckling

¹⁰² Edmée KINGSMILL, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of G[-]d: A Study in Biblical Intertextuality* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 75. For the analysis of breast imagery in Song of Songs as *not* primarily erotic see 80ff.

¹⁰³ KINGSMILL, *The Song*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ KINGSMILL, *The Song*, 55.

sucks from it all day long, it does no harm to it (מה הדיד הזה אפי' תינוק יונק הימנו כל היום אינו מזיקו), so the manna was made that even if Israel eats it all day, there is no harm.¹⁰⁵

The creamy taste of the manna, as evoked by the difficult biblical term *leshad*, together with the similarity of this term itself to *shad* or *dad*, and the manna's white color (Exod 16:31) contribute to liken it to milk. Maternal milk is described in the Tosefta as fundamental for the suckling, the manna as what Israel primarily needed to develop and grow, with everything else, aside from this food coming directly from the Divine, defined as secondary to Israel's formation. There is something very physical in this image. The manna comes directly from the "body" of G-d, expressing the closeness, proximity and intimacy between G-d and Israel, and also the pains G-d takes with such a bonding.

Israel completely depends on G-d, in that for infant Israel the manna is vital for survival, both on a physical level as nourishment, and on a broader level of general growth, in perception, thought and attachment. Breastfeeding is a transformational experience for all those involved, helping mother and infant to feel connected and attached to each other. Breastfeeding not only provides food, it also builds trust, closeness and reciprocal knowledge. The two acts of the descending of the manna and of breastfeeding are understood as shaping the relationship between the giver and the recipient. The exclusivity and intensity of suckling and manna-feeding cause no harm, in a parallel unique way.

A tradition that the manna changed its taste according to the desire of the eater is attested in the Wisdom of Solomon 16:20-21 and in Origen, *Homilies Ex 7:8*. This tradition is somehow independent, since both in Wisdom of Solomon and in Origen there is no attestation about G-d breastfeeding Israel and the manna as breast-milk. The tannaitic tradition, however, also transforms the idea about the different tastes of the manna in a gendered image, declining it in the feminine and using as source domain a quite concrete woman's embodied experience:

SifNum 89: Just as this breast [*ha-dad*], it is of one kind, and yet it becomes of many kinds (מה הדיד הזה שהוא מין אחד ומשתנה למינים הרבה), so the manna became for Israel anything they wanted. A parable: One says to a woman: Do not eat garlic and onion because of the suckling (משל: אומר (לאשה: אל תאכלי שום ובצל מפני התינוק (מה הדיד הזה תינוק מצטער בשעה שפורש ממנו)), so Israel were distressed when they separated from the manna.¹⁰⁶

For this tannaitic tradition, the fact that the manna could change to many tastes is compared to maternal milk which changes taste depending on the food the mother eats. This is explicated by a prosaic parable about a nursing woman being told to avoid certain foods because their flavor is transmitted to the suckling through breastfeeding. The miraculous manna is explained through the every-day aspect of changes in maternal breast-milk.

¹⁰⁵ Text according to Vienna MS. The Erfurt MS presents a similar, although slightly shorter version (Erfurt has *שד* – *shad* rather than *דד* – *dad*). The Genizah Fragments T-S E2.141 preserves same parallel sentences, mentioning the manna and the suckling. LIEBERMAN ed., *Nashim* 2, 4:168-169; LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, *Nashim* 3, 7:645-646, lines 52-69.

¹⁰⁶ HOROWITZ ed., 89, lines 15-21. KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 3, 617-618. The gendered aspects are present in London MS Add. 16406, 285; Oxford MS Bodl. Or. 150, 334a; Vatican MS ebr. 32,2, 89 (selected by MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*); Berlin MS Or. Qu. 1594, 25. Cf. Jacob NEUSNER (ed.), *Sifré to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation* (2 vols.; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986) 91.

The element of ‘taste’ evokes what Israel likes, because it was nurtured as infant in the desert with Divine milk. For the tannaim, a teaching process takes place through nursing, where a pre-discursive embodied knowledge is transmitted. Exposure to certain flavors during lactation seems indeed to influence taste preferences and flavor acceptances later in life, possibly so that the infant will adapt to the food at disposal in her environment and get used to her family’s nurturing manners. Among the first and most lasting cultural experiences of an infant are indeed distinctive food flavorings.

The idea that at the center of the image of the Divine as a nursing mother and Israel as a suckling infant, what is at stake is the formation of Israel as people, informing what it will like or dislike and its formative origin-story, can be found also in the description of Torah as maternal milk in SifDeut 321: “*The suckling* (Deut 32:25): For they sucked words of Torah like the suckling who sucks milk from his mother’s breasts [*mi-dadei imo*]” (שהיו מניקים דברי תורה כיונק זה שיונק חלב מדדי אמו).¹⁰⁷

“G[-]d’s maternal *teaching* [...] consists [...] in the nurturing, tedious, and frustrating work of caring for the newborn nation.”¹⁰⁸ Like the infant’s taste is shaped by the experience of nursing, so Israel’s formation as a people is forged through the manna. Having eaten manna has formed Israel as G-d’s people and this attachment process is best rendered, for the tannaitic authors, by nursing. It provides the well-being of the vulnerable suckling Israel, informs its taste and development, and it also undergoes a process of weaning and detachment with the entry into the land, after the time in the desert as a period of exclusive breastfeeding. Thus, it parallels perfectly and roundly human nursing.

In this tannaitic image we have a.) the element of teaching, b.) the (unique, exclusive) attachment of G-d to Israel c.) and vice versa, d.) and, especially, the element of complete dependency, connected to the constant anxiety of dying in the desert as an infant would die without a breastfeeding mother. The element of dependency fits in the context of Tosefta Sotah. The interest here is Divine retribution. The gendered image of nursing is not casual, but rather it represents the ultimate retribution structure, where Israel recognizes its complete dependency on the Divine. Torah is the milk of a mother, the Divine, and it draws its vital legitimation from maternal milk. Maternal milk draws in turn its power from the comparison to a Divine practice. The Divine body and the maternal body provide formative nutrition. G-d’s nursing a child with breast-milk like a woman testifies to the Divine’s greatness, in that miracles (the manna) testify to it.

Breast images of the Divine and, as will be seen, the laver are all connected with the idea of dependency and nurturing. Indeed, the complete dependency of Israel on the Divine in the desert and the complete dependency of the infant on the breast, in both cases for survival, life and nourishment, parallel the laver as the crucial point on which Israel’s atonement depends – namely the purity of the priests, their suitability to officiate, and thus to atone for the people. In general, the laver is vitally necessary to establish Israel’s relationship with the Divine, for thanksgiving, forgiveness and communication through the performance of sacrifices. Atonement/Yom Kippur is an issue of life and death more than others, a vital issue of Israel’s survival (literally and spiritually). The entire nation *needs* atonement. Such a need vis-à-vis G-d evokes the need of an infant vis-à-vis her mother. Much depends on this small object and the functioning of its spigots: the

¹⁰⁷ FINKELSTEIN ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 359. Text from London MS Add. 16406, 378; attested also in Berlin MS Or. Qu. 1594, 159 and Oxford MS Bodl. Or. 150, 432b. Translated as JAFFEE, *Sifre Dvarim*.

¹⁰⁸ Mara BENJAMIN, *The Obligated Self: Maternal Subjectivity and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018) 64-65.

fulfilment of purity requirements of the priests (Exod 30:17-21) and thus the service in the Temple. This metaphor highlights the purity/Temple/Divine's centrality to the economy of rabbinic and Jewish imagination and religious belief in late antiquity.

D.) *KIOR* IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

If we look at the biblical texts about the *kior*, the laver or basin for the priests' purification, we can see that the priests are commanded to wash their hands and feet at the laver before approaching the sacra, namely the tent of meeting and the copper altar *lest they die* (Ex 30:17-21). Thus, the laver is associated with life/death or survival (as well as survival of Israel as a people needing atonement from G-d), just like the maternal breast which is pivotal for life (e.g., Tosefta Shabbat). The tannaitic image genders the biblical humanization of the laver (as a non-gendered body with shoulders, mouth, lips and hands, 1King 7:23-2) and echoes the construction of the laver with copper mirrors of "the women who did service at the door of the tent of meeting" (Ex 38:8). The laver is like the women, situated at the entrance of the Temple, blocking or allowing the entrance to it, acting as guardian and boundary, whereby we have an inversion of gender roles about the women as guardians and doing service/work at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

The biblical text mentions "mouth" (1King 7:31) for the laver's border and "lips" for its brim (1King 7:23). However, not only does it never speak of "breasts," spigots too are not mentioned (neither in Kings concerning the First Temple, nor in Exodus regarding the Tabernacle in the desert). There is no biblical precedent about the laver as having spigots on which to construct the metaphor of *dad* in Mishnah and Tosefta. In his accounts, Josephus is very close to the biblical text and does not mention spigots as well (*Ant.* 3:114 about the Tabernacle, 8:79f. about the First Temple build by Solomon). He does not mention the laver in either of his descriptions of Herod's Temple (*Ant.* 15:391-402, *BJ* 5:184-226). He also does not mention it in his report of the Temple vessels in *CA* 2:106-107. The laver is the only item missing in his descriptions as compared to the Exodus account— although he states that all the items he lists are present in the biblical description of the Tabernacle —, aside from the ark which was absent in the Second Temple (*BJ* 5:219). However, mMid 3:6 places the laver between the altar and the hall leading to the interior of the Temple, in the same place Exodus places it in the Tabernacle, whereby the tannaim are primarily following an exegetical reasoning and biblical precedent when positioning the laver, rather than factual memory. Spigots are an innovation we find in the tannaitic texts — and virtually only there. The tannaitic corpora states that the laver had *originally* two *dad*/breasts or spigots, until a donor made twelve of them. This image, either historical or imaginative, is relevant to the rabbis, though not to Josephus.

E.) *KIOR* FOR THE RABBIS: SIGNIFICANCE

We may ask why this metaphor was applied, of all the items in the Temple, to the laver/*kior*? Why was the laver so significant for the rabbis? The laver stands at the entrance of the Temple, allowing its service. At the beginning of the day, the priests wash their hands and feet and only then they may enter the Temple (cf. mTam 1:4 and mTam 2:1 about the prohibition to touch any vessels or the altar to clear the ashes in the morning, before the priests have washed at the laver). Similarly, rabbinic ritual washing of the hands before prayer marks the beginning of the day (bBer 14b: "one relieves himself, washes his hands, dons *tefillin*, recites the *shema* ' and prays...one who does so, it is as if he has built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it, as it says, *I will wash my hands, so I*

will encompass your altar (Ps 26:6)"); without this, the day or the service cannot start, and no liturgical or cultic service can take place.¹⁰⁹ The laver is vital to Israel's service, nurturing it, allowing it to exist and function. In bHul 106a-b the hand-washing before eating is compared to the washing with which the priests began the day in the Temple (cf. mYad 1:1). The metaphor of the laver's breasts defines the laver as the crucial point on which the atonement of Israel and its service/worship depends. It also produces cultural work on the imaginative force of hand-washing, continuing without the Temple, as rabbinic ritual. The exegetical work the metaphorical image provides is critical. The metaphor of female breasts is used to create a sense of attachment to the idea of handwashing and the laver as imaginative and ritual forces, whereby *dad* assumes in turn value and significance by the tannaitic tradition.

F.) IDENTITY AND DEPENDENCY – CO-TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Another consideration about dependency, atonement, worship and handwashing goes to the closer co-textual context of the metaphorical image comparing the laver to female breasts:

tYom 2:2: There was an urn,¹¹⁰ and in it were two lots. They were of boxwood¹¹¹ and Ben Gamla made them of gold, and they would mention him in praise.

Ben Qatin made twelve **breasts [spigots] for the laver [dad la-kior]** (בן קטין עשה שנים עשר דד לכיור),¹¹²

twelve priests would sanctify [wash] from it, for at the beginning there had been **only two** (לא שמתחלה לא) (היו בו אלא שנים), two priests would *sanctify* [wash] from it, they would mention him in praise.

tYom 2:3: King Molbaz had the handles of all the knives for Yom Kippur made of gold, and they would mention him in praise.

mYom 3:9: There was an urn, and in it were two lots. They were of boxwood and Ben Gamla made them of gold, and they would mention him in praise.

mYom 3:10: Ben Qatin made twelve **breasts [spigots] for the laver [dad la-kior]** (בן קטין עשה שנים עשר דד לכיור)

for there had been **only two** (שלא היו לו אלא שנים).

He also made a mechanism¹¹³ for the laver, so that its water would not become unfit by remaining overnight.

King Monbaz had the handles of all the vessels for Yom Kippur made of gold.

¹⁰⁹ On breastfeeding taking place in the morning as literary *topos* see 1King 3:21: "I woke up in the morning to breastfeed my child..." and bBer 3a about the third night watch, e.g., the early morning when people begin to rise and one should recite the *shema*, which is a time when "the child breastfeeds from her mother's breasts."

¹¹⁰ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1381: "קלפי (κάλπη) urn for drawing lots."

¹¹¹ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 128: "אֶשְׁכָּרוֹעַ (v. P. Sm. [*Thesaurus Syriacus*] 408) box-tree."

¹¹² The singular "*dad*" (breast) for the plural "*shneyim asar*" (twelve) is a Hebrew construction, and *shneyim asar dad* is to be understood in the plural: "twelve breasts." Note how the Kehati explanation to the Mishnah needs to clarify "*dad*/breasts: [this is] *berez/spigot*" (ברז - דד) (Pinhas KEHATI, *משניות מבוארות – Mishnayot mevū'arot* "Explained Mishnayot" [*Mo'ed*; Jerusalem: Hechal Shelomo 1972] 32).

¹¹³ A Greek loanword: "מוכני (μηχανή) machine for lifting weights, wheel-work." JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 741, according to which "he made a machine for sinking the wash-basin into the well." mTam 1:4 and mTam 3:8 mentions the *mukhani* and Ben Qatin in relation to the laver, but not *dad*; while our tYom 2:2 mentions *dad*, but not *mukhani*. tYom 2:15 speaks of *dadim* referring to the poles of the ark (absent in the mishnah), thus making Tosefta Yoma the probable original context of the *dad/kior* metaphor (see below). mYom 4:5 states "On other days the high priest *sanctified* (cf. tYom 2:2.) his hands and feet from the laver, but this day from a golden ladle (קיתון) from the Greek κώθωσ."

His mother Helena made a golden lamp over the opening of the Temple sanctuary. She also made a golden tablet, on which *parashat sotah* was inscribed, so that when the sun rose, sparks would come out of it, and people would know that the sun was rising.¹¹⁴ tYom 2:4: All the gates were changed to be of gold except for the Nicanor's gates, for a miracle was done to them. ...When Nicanor was bringing them from Alexandria of Egypt ...

His mother Helena made a golden lamp over the opening of the Temple sanctuary. She also made a golden tablet, on which *parashat sotah* was inscribed.

Nicanor, miracles were done to his gates. And they would mention him in praise.

These texts (mYom 3:9-10, tYom 2:2-4) form a list of contributions to the Temple. There are many loanwords and borrowed ideas from other cultures in this tannaitic passage, where Ben Qatin (cf. Latin *catinus* "basin")¹¹⁵ who improved the laver, the converts Queen Helena and Monbaz (*Ant.* 20.17f.), and Nicanor from Alexandria all bring intriguing mechanisms and fancy foreign contributions to Jerusalem's Temple – a literary device of subjugation. These elements may indicate the wish to depict wealthy converts and diasporic Jews who bring technologies and beautiful decorations from foreign cultures to Jerusalem, as subjected to the centrality of the Temple.¹¹⁶ In other words, this depiction might mask a hint to the idea that the Jewish identity of those people, who came with gifts, depended upon the Temple. This contributes on a more subtle level to the metaphor's ideas of dependency and the laver's 'nurturing' capacity. The text thus constructs the gift donors' dependency for their identity on this literary Temple, or better on rabbinic normativity expressed in a female image.¹¹⁷

G.) METAPHORICAL EXPANSION AND IDENTARIAN COMPETITION: FROM THE DIVINE/TEMPLE TO LEADERS AND PROPHETS

The metaphorical use of *dad* in tannaitic sources is extremely careful and restricted, the topic of *dad*/breastfeeding is exclusively used for the Divine/Temple, with the three target domains: *the laver*, *G-d* (as mentioned above and in the next tradition discussed here) and *the ark* in Tosefta Yoma (discussed below). In tractate Yoma of the Tosefta, the laver and the ark form a unit regarding the Temple.

¹¹⁴ Note how the elements about Helen being the mother of Munbaz ("*his mother*"), the reference to the *sotah* and the beginning of the day marked by the rising sun could be a literary play in the text alluding to its metaphorical layer about *dad*, whereby the tannaitic text would purposely stage these figures and not others. I am thankful to Judith V. BRESINSKY for pointing this out to me.

¹¹⁵ Given the similarity with the Latin *catinus* "basin," it is possible that the text calls this person "the one of/with the basin, *catinus*." For LIEBERMAN (*Tosefta Kifshutah*, Mo'ed 2, 4:759) Ben Qatin means "small." Lieberman relates Ben Qatin to Ben Gamla, whereby Gamla means "weaned, mature, big." Small child and weaned, mature child could also be an image at play here (cf. the connection between weaning and breastfeeding).

¹¹⁶ Note the passage between "two breasts" as in a woman to "twelve breasts" as in an animal, maybe like the wolf of Romulus and Remus, or as Greco-Roman statues of goddesses with multiple breasts, provided by Ben Qatin and expressing fascination with Greco-Roman metaphorical ideas. Tal ILAN and Judith V. BRESINSKY has helped me to elaborate this point.

¹¹⁷ It is important here to note the later midrash in GenR 53:9 about "[Sarah's breasts which] were gushing forth milk as two fountains, and noble ladies came and suckled their children," who eventually converted or become "G-d fearers." Here "woman's body is used to affect a crossing of ethnic boundaries." Sarah's permeable body or better her breast spilling milk "acts as the *gateway* for incorporation into the normative political body," whereby her breastfeeding prompts conversion (Joshua LEVINSON, "Bodies and Bo(a)rders: Emerging Fictions of Identity in Late Antiquity" *The Harvard Theological Review* 93:4 (2000): 355). Sarah's body is seen as dialogic, establishing a communication between two worlds (372).

In the Torah, metaphorical breastfeeding is vaguely and indirectly alluding to the Divine only in Deut 32 and Num 11. Deut 32:3 depicts G-d suckling/breastfeeding (*yanaq*) Israel “honey from the crag, oil from the flinty stone,” although this image is more indirect than the tannaitic one in that it uses expressions as “crag” or “stone” instead of the rabbinic “breast” that gives a concrete illustration of the female body. In Num 11:12 Moses complains about the burden of the people: “did I give birth to them, that You should say to me, Bear them in your lap, as the nurse bears the suckling (*yoneq*)?” Through this question, Moses seems to attribute to G-d the birthing and breastfeeding of Israel. Gen 49:25 “*Shaddai* who will bless you [...] with the blessings of the breasts [*shadayim*], and of the womb” could also represent an allusion to G-d as a breastfeeding mother. A parallel elaboration could be at work between two rabbinic metaphors in this sense. In distancing itself from feminine *Asherah* trees-worship, the Hebrew Bible speaks metaphorically in its trees-laws of masculine *’orlah* “foreskin” (Lev 19:23). However, tannaitic and rabbinic literature on *’orlah*-laws reverts to feminine metaphorical images for trees (e.g., *zqenah* “old woman” and *yaldah* “female child”) – with these biblical/rabbinic set of laws connected figuratively with reproduction.¹¹⁸ Similarly, the image of *Shaddai* or G-d with female breasts could have slipped in the background of the Hebrew Bible,¹¹⁹ possibly in response to idolatrous breasts-cult, whereby the image of female G-d breastfeeding is enlivened again in tannaitic texts.

All in all, the Hebrew Bible has few and rather vague allusions to Divine breastfeeding. Isa 49:15 states “can a woman forget her suckling child?” referring to G-d and Israel. The prophetic text likens G-d here to a breastfeeding mother. “A mother who is breast-feeding is physically unable to forget her child: if she does not express milk every few hours, her breasts become engorged and painful. G[-]d is physically connected to the Jewish people, the prophet insists, as a breast-feeding mother is connected to her infant.”¹²⁰ Kingsmill pointed out how “her breasts ever slake your thirst” of Prov 5:19 actually refers to the student drinking milk from the breasts of Wisdom,¹²¹ thus alluding also to the Divine as breastfeeding.

It seems that, in the biblical traditions, the only maternal breastfeeding is consistently from G-d, while *male figures* described as *metaphorically breastfeeding* are understood as *wet nurses*. In Isa 60:16 “You shall suck the milk of the nations, you shall suck the breast of kings,” upon which Israel will go back to the breasts of its mother, G-d. In Isa 49:23 it is stated that “kings will be your wet nurses, and their queens your nursing mothers.” On the contrary, female Jerusalem is described as a nursing mother, who after birthing her children breastfeeds them: “That you may suck, and be satisfied with the breast of her consolations” (Isa 66:11). Dependency from G-d as mother is absolute, and others are marked as temporary wet nurses.

Only one tannaitic text derives from G-d’s breastfeeding and breasts a metaphorical image for the rabbinic sages/leaders as having breasts (although they are secondarily marked as “younger sister”): SifDeut 304 compares the absence of leadership, Torah and sages from Israel to the absence of female breasts: “And it says [about Israel’s

¹¹⁸ HAENDLER, “Trees as Male and Female.”

¹¹⁹ Cf. David BIALE, “The G[-]d with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible,” *History of Religions* 21:3 (1982): 240-256.

¹²⁰ Benjamin D. SOMMER, “Would Our Mother Forget Us?” *JTS Commentary* 2018 (<https://www.jtsa.edu/would-our-mother-forget-us>).

¹²¹ KINGSMILL, *The Song*, 58.

leadership]: *We have a little sister, who hasn't yet any breasts* (Song 8:8) (אחות לנו קטנה) (ושדים אין לה). Four empires will rule over Israel, yet they will have no sage, nor even a person of insight [to guide them].” We find here an earlier site of a shifting from metaphorical Divine breastfeeding to (wet-)nursing leaders. Moses complains in Num 11 that he is not the breastfeeding mother of Israel, implying he is unwilling even to be their wet nurse. This image is used by Paul and the Qumran leader.¹²²

The tannaitic descriptions of the Divine, the laver and the ark as having *dad*/breastfeeding-capacity, as related to the idea of dependency, might represent the earliest site for a metaphorical concept and an important motif that are underdeveloped in the Bible and become augmented by the tannaitic rabbis. The creation by SifDeut, Paul and Qumran of a derivative breastfeeding image from the Divine to the leaders of the Jewish people as wet nurse or a younger sister to G-d represents a second step. Later, this image broadens to other metaphorical target domains like rabbis, prophets, Moses, leaders, Church fathers in numerous repeated images, acquiring much metaphorical power.¹²³ In SifDeut the image is still derivative from the Divine, but in the amoraic midrashim we find Moses who breastfeeds Aaron and Aaron subsequent sages (e.g., CantR 4:12: “Just as breasts are full of milk, so Moses and Aaron fill Israel with Torah. Just as from whatever the woman eats the infant eats and is nourished from these breasts, so all the Torah that our master Moses learned, he taught to Aaron,” see section 2.2. for this text). The comparison between maternal milk and Torah covers many ideological aims in the rabbinic Torah-project. Like a mother’s milk provides the entire nourishment that a newborn needs, so the Torah contains all the sustainment which the people of Israel need (everything is in it). Like a mother’s milk is produced only when the infant suckles it, so the Torah is perpetuated only when Israel toil in it. Like a mother’s milk changes and it adapts at different moments in the life of the infant, so the Torah changes according to the needs of its recipient. In a similar way, in Christian exegesis, Jesus, then the Church, Church-fathers and different saints are described as breastfeeding milk/faith (e.g., Irenaeus and Clement).¹²⁴

Another site showing competition around the metaphor of *dad*/breastfeeding, dependency and leadership is found a narrative where R. Joshua asks to R. Yishmael:

mAZ 2:5: How do you read, *for your love* (*dodekha*, ‘your’ in the masculine, referring to G-d) *is better than wine* or *your love* (*dodayikh*, ‘your’ in the feminine, referring to Israel) *are better* (Song 1:2)? (כי טובים דודיך מיין או כי) (טובים דודיך).

He said, *Your love* (*dodayikh*, ‘your’ in the feminine, referring to Israel) *are better*. He said to him, It is not so (אין הדבר כן), for the next verse teaches: *to the smell of your good oils*

tPara 10:3: How do you read, *for your love* (*dodekha*) *is better than wine* or *your breasts* (*dadayikh*) *are better* (Song 1:2) (כי טובים דודיך) (כי טובים דדיך מיין)?

He said, *Your breasts* (*dadayikh*) *are better* (כי) (ידיך). He [R. Joshua] said to him, **So [indeed] is the matter** (הדבר כן), for the next verse teaches: *the smell of your good oils*, [*your name is like finest oil*]” (“לריח שמניך טובים”) (Song 1:3).¹²⁵

¹²² Paul (1 Thess 2:7-8) uses a breastfeeding metaphor in describing his role as leader of newly born Christianity: “Just as a nurse (τροφός f.) cares for *her* children, so we cared for you.” The Qumran leader (1QH^a XV 21) describes himself as a wet nurse as well: “You set me as [...] a wet nurse to the people of portent [מפת] [וכאומן לאנשי מפת] [...]. They open their mouth like a chi[ld on the breast of its mother, כיונק שדי] like a suckling child in the lap of its wet nurse.”

¹²³ And even to angels, cf. bSot 11b. I am thankful to Mika AHUVIA for pointing this out to me.

¹²⁴ John PENNIMAN, *Raised on Christian Milk: Food and the Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University, 2017), 107.

¹²⁵ Vienna MS. The version in the *ed. princ.* is changed to be identical with the Mishnah version.

(*shemanekha*, 'your' in the masculine, referring to G-d) ..." (Song 1:3) [The love of Israel for the Divine would be more than their love for the foods of non-Jews, as cheese, milk].

For Kingsmill, the Mishnah also points to a discussion on gender and breasts, whereby the question posed to R. Yishmael would actually be: should the biblical text be read *dadekha* "your male breasts" or *dadayikh* "your female breasts"?¹²⁶ She points out that the rabbis here are also discussing cheese and milk, and there is thus an association with milk-suckling and breasts. The insertion of the letter *vav* (plene spelling for "loves") in the Mishnah's variants would be a later addition. This possibly older reading of the Mishnah agrees with the Tosefta, where the question is explicitly about whether to read "loves" or "breasts." The answer of R. Yishmael favors "breasts" which is also the reading of Origen's commentary on Song, where he understands the verse as meaning "your breasts are better than wine." For his reading, the milk from the breasts represents the teaching of Jesus, and the wine the Law and Prophets. YSan 11:4, 30a interprets the verse from Song as: "the words of the scribes are more beloved than the words of Torah, *for your breasts are better than wine,*" whereby the milk of the breasts is compared to the words of the rabbis, and the Torah to wine.

In the Tosefta R. Yishmael interprets the verse in Song 1:2 as referring to "your breasts" (דדיך) and R. Joshua sustains his position (הדבר כן) using the juxtaposition of the following verse (Song 1:3) which speaks of "your good oils" (שמניך טובים), and "your name is the finest oil." In the allegorical reading, "oil" is understood as Torah/G-d's law. Moreover, within tannaitic literature, "oil" in texts about breasts is understood as "maternal milk from the breasts" (tSot 4:3). In sum, this tradition connects G-d with female breasts and their nutritional capacity of giving milk/Torah. The adage would then be: "Breasts-milk/Torah from G-d is better for Israel than wine." Moreover, the competition around breasts imagery in the Song between the Yerushalmi and Origen speaks in favor of a strong identity issue and exegetical race about the true successors in breastfeeding breast-milk, overriding every other food or drink: is this the oral Torah of the sages or the teaching of Jesus? The metaphorical expansion points to the importance and power of the image of G-d's maternal breastfeeding, striking a deep imaginative cord.

H.) TEMPLE AND BREASTS LANGUAGE IN TOSEFTA YOMA

When, in the Tosefta, we follow the High Priest on Yom Kippur from the courtyard with the contributions of the foreign donors and the laver with its breasts/spigots (tYom 2:2-4), we finally see him enter into the Holy of Holies, where we find the last tannaitic text containing the term *dad*. Reaching the ark he would place the coal-pan upon its two poles (ונתן המחטה בין שני הבדים) and then pour out the incense onto the coals until the entire space was filled up with smoke (tYom 2:13). tYom 2:14 adds "when the ark was taken away [i.e., when it was absent in the Second Temple], on the foundation stone they would burn the incense before the innermost altar," thus creating a gap for the reader: we imagine the ark with the poles, although the Tosefta admits it was not there ever since the time of the First Temple. TYom 2:15 mentions again the absence of the ark, and then it describes the ark's poles in a metaphorical way:

¹²⁶ KINGSMILL, *The Song*, 85-86.

The two poles of the ark protruded from the ark until they reached the veil (שני בדי ארון היו יוצאין מן) (הארון עד שמגיעין לפרוכת [...] *But they [the ends of the poles] could not be seen from outside [...] The ends of the poles were seen* (2 Chron 5:9) (ויראו ראשי הבדים) [...]. Thus one must conclude: the poles reached the veil, pressed against the veil and were seen from it (מתוכה והיו נראין מתוכה). About them it is explicated in the tradition, *A bundle of myrrh is my lover to me, that lies between my breasts* (בין שדי ילין) (Song 1:13).¹²⁷

The two poles of the ark pressing again the veil are said to be visible like a woman's breasts' contours are seen through her garments. They come out of the ark like breasts from a woman's body and the veil represents the woman's clothes. BYom 54b understands the Tosefta in this sense: "The poles of the ark pushed, protruded and stuck out against the veil, and appeared like the two breasts of a woman (נראין כשני דדי אשה) (Rashi: pushing against her clothes)." The term יוצאין "come out, protrude" in both the Tosefta and the Bavli is a key term in creating the parallel between female breasts and poles, both coming out of a body.

This interpretation and image are a strongly verse-driven exegetical construction, consciously conceptual.¹²⁸ The High Priest removes the veil/the clothes of the woman and puts the incense between the bare poles/breasts. Song 1:13 "*A bundle of myrrh is my lover to me, that lies between my breasts*" reverts the image in Hosea 2:2: "*May your mother [Israel] put away her adultery from between her breasts.*" Both biblical texts have Israel as the female subject and breasts as a nurturing place (connected to children). However, in Tosefta Yoma the female subject is G-d. Note the parallel between tYom 2:13 where the incense is placed "between the poles" (בין שני הבדים) and the biblical verse of Song with the narrating female voice saying that the myrrh is put "between my breasts" (בין שדי).¹²⁹ According to the interpretation of tYom 2:15, the female subject of Song, speaking in the first person ("my breasts"), is G-d and the poles are Her breasts, G-d's breasts. The male subject of Song is for the Tosefta Israel who puts the incense/bundle of myrrh, representing itself and its faithfulness, in G-d's breasts. The subject assigned to the female body in the Tosefta is G-d.

For the Bavli, the ark of covenant, where G-d rests, is positioned *intentionally* in a way that its poles protrude through the curtain like the breasts of a woman (bMen 98b and Rashi there about the west/east orientation of the ark). In a way, they are positioned in order to create the reality/impression of representing the "Divine breasts." Positioned in another spatial direction, they would not press against the veil. Bavli Menahot stresses the point of intentionality. The Tosefta remarks how the ark represents the Divine itself.

¹²⁷ The metaphorical expression and biblical quotation are present in all the manuscript variants: Vienna, Erfurt, London, *ed. princ.* LIEBERMAN *ed.*, Mo'ed 2:238, lines 125-126; LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Mo'ed 2, 4:773, lines 121-122.

¹²⁸ Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, *The Burnt Book: Reading the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 223, states: "To comprehend the contribution of this verse, we must understand that "the image of the breasts" is above all a production of the verse, and not the reverse. In other words, it is not the "image of the breasts" that evokes the verse; the verse produces the image, and we shall see how the image *is* in the verse. The meaning of the image will be analyzed in its production from the verse [...]. One might say that the reality of the text is more real than the visual perception itself." I am thankful to Jeffrey RUBINSTEIN for pointing out this reference to me.

¹²⁹ The terms שני בדי – *shnei badei* "two poles" at the beginning of tYom 2:15 and בין שדי – *ben shaday* "between my breasts" of Songs play on similar sounds. OUAKNIN, *The Burnt Book*, 224, quoting the Maharsha.

The Divine is here feminine and with breasts, positioned as such by the text. The female breast is both Divine and carnal – a Divine body part and a woman body part.

Another interplay is constructed between visible and invisible, what is beyond and what is seen, which is developed in the Bavli sugyah around the topic of “eroticism and transcendence,”¹³⁰ interacting on how the erotic is built in the Temple service. There is an unexpected “unsettling of assumed gendering” when the Divine is painted as the female figure instead of Israel in an erotic/visual image, making complex claims about “human-divine dynamics of visions,” gaze and power.¹³¹

Notwithstanding this aspect, the ultimate key point in the Tosefta’s textual context, contrary of the Bavli, seems to be the understanding according to which the breasts are connected to nurture, whereby the gaze of the reader toward the ark poles could be also like the gaze of the infant toward the maternal breast. Note that tYom 2:15 opens by mentioning objects that were stored with the ark, which are connected with the history of Israel and with episodes of symbolic nurture: “the bottle containing the manna, the flask of the anointing oil, the staff of Aaron, with its almonds and blossoms, the chest of the Philistines (sent as guilt-offering, 1Sam 6:8).” The biblical background of Hosea (and Song as its redemptive counterpart) refers to the breasts of a mother.

For the Aramaic Targum to Song 1:13, the verse “between my breasts” refers to “Moses with the two tablets,” namely with the Torah, through which the people are to be nourished. Breasts in Song 4:5 are understood also by MdRY *bahodesh* 8 as referring to the two tablets (which were posed *in the ark*). This reading of the Song might echo in the Tosefta. In the Tosefta, Israel’s faithfulness, expressed by the burned incense in the Temple and by the myrrh in the Song, lies/is put between the Divine nourishing breasts/Torah tablets (while in Hosea Israel’s unfaithfulness lies between the maternal breasts, and cf. SongR 1:14, bKer 6a mentioning מור/myrrh as one of the components of the incense).

Dalia Marx, who has shown how much metaphorical female language is used to describe the Temple in rabbinic literature, notes, in tYom “the staves are [...] likened to a pair of female breasts, a bold depiction of motherly nurturing.”¹³² In conclusion, we have two holy vessels in the Temple rendered in the feminine, depicted with female breasts: the outermost, the laver/*kior* with its spigots, and the innermost, the ark in the Holy of Holies with its poles. Whereas the poles have a biblical term (*badim*), the spigots of the laver are directly given the name of *dad*. In both cases, the magical power of breasts as symbol of life and death emerges as the key associative meaning, based on ideas of breastfeeding, nurture and dependency. We can thus see a broader tannaitic metaphorical cluster describing the Divine, the laver and the ark in the Temple as providing maternal breastfeeding. G-d’s covenant with Israel is expressed through female, maternal breasts both for the Torah/ark/poles and for the laver, which allows life and worship. New life depends on a woman’s body and work (whereby breastfeeding is understood as real work by the tannaim). G-d’s body and work have a similar function of providing sustenance and *cultural formation* – through the ark’s poles as breasts and the laver’s breasts.

¹³⁰ OUAKNIN, *The Burnt Book*, 223.

¹³¹ Rachel NEIS, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 94. Marjorie LEHMAN, who works on the poles as breasts in the Bavli and how the Bavli frames the text (as opposed to the tannaitic context discussed here), has called my attention to this discussion.

¹³² Dalia MARX, *Tractates Tamid, Middot, and Qinnim (FCBT V/9)*; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 124.

Female breasts/breastfeeding seem to represent a passage or a gateway, whereby they provide milk to the baby, but they also allow the baby to have access to the mother, to food, growth, development, communication and joy. The particular phrase of *dad* chosen for the laver in the Temple delineates it as a crucial gateway to the sacred within the tannaitic choreography of the Temple. The laver is depicted as an access or entry for communication with the Divine. This is likened to the communication with a mother based on the physical act of breastfeeding. Gender and the sacred in the original context of the Tosefta are connected through the image of Divine-human communication rendered as mother-child communication. The cult is understood as a strenuous activity, for both the breastfeeding mother and the suckling child, as nurturing and as access to the Divine through an embodied and relational act. This image shows how the laver and the rabbinic ritual of hand-washing are not merely an object and an act of cleansing, but they are a gate to the sacred and to a relationship with G-d. Like the mother-child relationship, it is constructed on a physical act of contact and an activity of exchange; on Israel that needs only G-d like a breastfeeding child and on G-d being bounded to Israel like a breastfeeding mother. This reading – and the case for the importance – of gender in the image of *dad-kior* points to the uniqueness of the breastfeeding experience as the interpretive key employed by this tradition to construct the rabbinic ritual of handwashing as a unique formative experience and as a contact point between Israel and its Deity. It also signifies the exclusivity and unicity of the relationship of G-d to Israel, like a breastfeeding mother to her child.

Like the child takes directly the milk from her mother's body, so Israel takes from the Divine instruction/Torah; and like the mother draws her child close and holds her attached to breastfeed her, so G-d draws Israel close and attached to 'Her body,' especially through the Temple and the Temple sacrificial service, expressing in rabbinic jargon the possibility of being close to the Divine (*qarov – qorbanot*).

1.4. G-d as mother, Israel as daughter and the Temple as mother's house (MdRY, MdRSbY)

This section analyzes the tannaitic, original thread that focuses on a mother-daughter bond in order to speak of the relationship between G-d and Israel. "Mothers and daughters" is an unusual imagery for Divine-human relationship found in the tannaitic midrashim.

The extensive imagery of "*G[-]d and Israel as Father and Son in Tannaitic Literature*" develops the biblical image focusing on the topos of election (G-d as Father of Israel), and attaining main tannaitic ideological aims, it expresses the concepts of filial responsibility and obligation; personal bonding (*vs.* the king-metaphor); fatherly care and never-ending protection; as well as that of keeping a son's status even when the son does not fulfil his responsibility (as shown by Alon Goshen-Gottstein's literary analysis in his dissertation project, HUJI¹³³). Divine fatherhood achieves the articulation of a sense of trust and closeness in the relationship between G-d and Israel. In the MdRY the image of G-d as a father serving His son Israel creates, through the inversion of the normative patterns of familiar and social hierarchical behavior, an idea of love (in Goshen-Gottstein's terms).

¹³³ Alon GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN, אלהים וישראל כאב ובן בספרות התנאים – *G[-]d and Israel as Father and Son in Tannaitic Literature* (PhD dissertation, Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986).

Contrary to the father-son image, which is found in Philo, the New Testament and other productions of the period, the unusual imagery of “G-d and Israel as Mother and Daughter” seems to be particular to the tannaitic production. Although a rare literary topos, it is attested in textual passages and traditions crucial to rabbinic self-understanding, and it contains a conscious aim to define the extraordinary character of the topic at hand through the unsettling of conventional metaphorical associative structures. The Divine-Israel Mother-Daughter metaphor is an all-female image of the most self-defining relationship envisioned by the tannaitic production, rich in strategies of inversion and reversal.

MdRY *beshallah shirah* 3 and MdRSbY 15¹³⁴ picks the “mother’s house” (*bet ’em*) of Song 3:4 (אֵל בֵּית אִמִּי), an already rare biblical occurrence (Gen 24:28, Song 3:4, 8:2, Ruth 1:8, vs. *bet ’av*¹³⁵), indicating female kinship ties, varying the classical exegesis of Song as a marital relationship between G-d and Israel into a kinship mother-daughter relationship:¹³⁶

<p>מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל בשלח דשירה ג <u>עד שאבוא עמו</u>¹³⁷ לבית מקדשו, וכן הוא או: "כמעט שעברתי מהם וגו', [עד שמצאתי את שאהבה נפשי, אחזתיו ולא ארפנו, <u>עד שהביאתני אל בית אמי ואל חדר הורתי</u>"] (שיר השירים ג ד).¹³⁸</p>	<p>מכילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי טו <u>עד שבאו לבית המקדש</u>, [שנא]: "כ [...] כמ]עט [שעברתי מהם עד] [שמצאתי א]ת שאהבה נפשי וגומ' [אחזתיו ולא ארפנו, <u>עד שהביאתני אל בית אמי</u> <u>ואל חדר הורתי</u>"] [שה"ש ג ד]: <u>זה אהל מועד שממש</u> נתחייבו יש' בה[וראה].¹³⁹</p>
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¹³⁴ Menahem I. KAHANA, *The Genizah Fragments of the Halakhic Midrashim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Magnes Press, 2005), 171.

¹³⁵ See Cynthia R. CHAPMAN, *The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), and Carol MEYERS, “To Her Mother’s House”: Considering a Counterpart to the Israelite *Bêt ’āb*,” in: *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on his Sixty Fifth Birthday* (eds. David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991), 50–51. Gen 24 speaks of Rebekah running to her mother’s house; Ruth is about the topic of returning to the mother’s house; and in Song the mother’s house is a private space where the female protagonist brings her lover. All three texts refer to the moment before a marriage – with the *bet em* as the conceptual place where to plan a marriage – whereby Gen and Ruth ends with leaving the mother’s house. All passages speak from the perspective of the female protagonist, moving alone and on her initiative to some place to find her future destiny.

¹³⁶ “[T]he word “mother” occurs seven times in Song of Songs while the word “father” does not appear at all. Similarly, while the “the house of the mother” occurs twice [two of the four references to the house of the mother in the Hebrew Bible], the “house of the father” is not mentioned” (CHAPMAN, *The House of the Mother*, 61).

¹³⁷ The expression עם אבוא אני means literally “I will come with,” since the verbal root of בוא in the *qal* means “to come,” while it means “to bring” only in the *hif’il*. I nevertheless translate this phrase as “I will bring him” because it is a midrashic interpretation derived from the biblical verse which reads “I will bring him.” LAUTERBACH (ed., 186) renders the tannaitic expression as “bringing” as well. Another manuscript variant literally reads “They brought Him with them.”

¹³⁸ Hebrew text according to Oxford MS - Bodleian Library Or. 150, Uri Hebr 119, Neubauer 151:2, Marshall Or. 24, p. 128, cf. MA’AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary* (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=6000&page=40>). The gendered metaphorical aspect is present in all other MSS. HOROWITZ-RABIN ed., 128, LAUTERBACH ed., 186.

¹³⁹ Hebrew text according to Paris Alliance Isr. XI 126.7a + John Rylands A. 1708.1 (F1) (The University of Manchester Library), see KAHANA, *Fragments*, 171, fragment 25, lines 12-15. EPSTEIN-MELAMED ed., 79. The gendered image, the entire verse and the complete term “learning / instruction” [*hora’ah*] are found also in the fragment T-S Misc. 36.132, 1a (F10), see Menahem I. KAHANA, *Manuscripts of the Halakhic Midrashim: An Annotated Catalogue* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1995), 58; published in Louis GINZBERG, Alexander MARX, and Israel DAVIDSON, *Genizah Studies in the Memory of Dr. S. Schechter, I: Midrash and Aggadah* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1928), 345-346.

MdRY *beshallah shirah* 3

Until I [Israel] will bring Him [the Divine presence] to His Temple, and so he [the biblical text] says: “I had barely passed on from them [when I found him I love so. I held him fast, and did not let go of him **until I brought him to my Mother’s house and to the chamber of Her who conceived me**”] (Song 3:4).¹⁴⁰

MdRSbY 15

Until they [Israel] came to the Temple, as it is said: “I had barely [passed on from them when I found] him I love so. [I held him fast, and did not let go of him **until I brought him to my Mother’s house and to the chamber of Her who conceived me**”] (Song 3:4): **this is the tabernacle [’ohel mo’ed]** from which Israel were obligated in learning / instruction [*hora’ah*].

Only a part of the verse is quoted by the midrash, whereby the tannaitic text actually refers to the part that is not written. The beginning of the verse is cited as a title or reference for the entire verse, known to the audience. From the broader literary context of this passage, it can be inferred how the point in the midrash is to establish a difference between two aspects of the Divine. The first one is the presence of G-d in exile, being with Israel in Egypt and then in the desert, pictured as the male figure of the Song. Israel, as the young woman of the Song, goes out in the darkness of the streets – representing the exile – still looking for the presence of G-d and grasping Him, taking the initiative. The second aspect is G-d in the Temple, the most powerful aspect of the Divine, the closest Divine presence, in the Sanctuary. This is depicted as a maternal kinship.

Israel goes to the House of her Mother [G-d], namely to the Temple; or to the chamber of Her [G-d], the one who conceived her, the daughter Israel. G-d is a mother, the Temple is Her house, Israel is Her daughter; the link between G-d and Israel is the link between mother and daughter, an intergenerational transmission and connection in female terms. This figure of G-d and Israel as mother and daughter creates significance for mothers-daughters’ bonds in the transfer of religious knowledge. It departs from the Song – a fabric of metaphors – and projects its female characters, the young woman and the mother, as well as the mother’s house, on the Israel-G-d relationship and the Tabernacle/Temple.

MdRSbY 15 makes the midrashic connection explicitly: The Mother’s house is the Tabernacle (זֶה אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד) where Israel gained instruction from her maternal teacher, indicating female familiar teaching. We know of rabbinic images where the father (as the significant teacher) teaches to daughters and where mothers teach to their rabbinic son (as the significant student and recipient). When both teacher and student are imaged as the female members in the family, a new association is achieved without requiring a legitimacy granted by a male figure.

The verse of Song is structured on a kinship image. This kinship imagery is expressed in a word pair divided in a parallel structure, whereby “the second element of the word pair narrows, specifies, and defines the first”¹⁴¹: “into the house of my Mother, into the chamber of Her who conceived me (*heder horati*)” (Song 3:4). The kinship bond is thus represented by the image of mother as the one who *conceived* the daughter. The mother is associated with the site of conception. The verb “to conceive” (הוֹרֵתִי – *horati* from הָרָה – *hara*) is evoked by the midrashic הוֹרָא – *hora’ah* “learning / instruction” (from הָרָא –

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Robert ALTER, *Strong As Death Is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel, A Translation with Commentary* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 20: “All that is reported is her passionate clinging to him and her bringing him to her mother’s house. This is, we should note, a young woman who takes the initiative, first daring to go out into the dark streets in search of her lover, then grasping him and leading him to her mother’s house.”

¹⁴¹ CHAPMAN, *The House of the Mother*, 18.

yarah “to shoot” – also of semen in conception –, the same root of Torah). The term הוֹאֲרַתִּי “my learning” is a homophone of the biblical term.

Song 8:2 is parallel to Song 3:4: “I would bring you into my mother’s house” but in its continuation the masoretic text and the Septuagint diverge: “MT: she will instruct me [תִּלְמַדְנִי – *telammedeni*]” vs. “LXX: and into the chamber of her who conceived me [εἰς ταμίειον τῆς συλλαβούσης με].” For the masoretic text the mother has an instructive role. The mother will instruct her daughter in her house, a topic extraneous to the context of the passage. It seems that the masoretic text has absorbed the midrashic interplay between הוֹרַתִּי and הוֹאֲרַתִּי on Song 3:4. For the Septuagint, like Song 3:4, the chamber of conception represents the poetic parallelism to the first part.

The masoretic text is reflected in the Aramaic Targum to Song of Songs 3:2-4 which renders: “The Children of Israel said to one another, ‘Let us rise and go to the **Tabernacle**, and let us request **instruction**/the law (אולפון) from G-d.’...and the people of Israel ... were occupied with the words of the Law in the **chamber** of the house of study of Moses, their rabbi” (וְעִסְקִין בְּפִתְגְּמֵי אוֹרְיָתָא בְּאֲדָרוֹן בֵּית מְדַרְשָׁא דְּמִנְשָׁה רַבְהוֹן) and to Song 8:2: “I will bring you (the Messiah) up to my Temple. And you will teach me” (לְבֵית מִקְדָּשִׁי (וְתִאֲלִיף).

The Targum on Song 8:2 and the MdRY avoids the direct description of G-d as mother teaching Israel, but the MdRSbY maintains unmistakably the idea, which remains in the interpretation of Rashi on Song 8:2:

אֵל בֵּית אֲמִי. בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ.
תִּלְמַדְנִי. כְּאִשֶּׁר הִרְגַּלְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד.

To my mother’s house: The Temple.

That she/you will instruct/teach me: As You were accustomed to do in the tabernacle [*’ohel mo’ed*].

This gendered figurative language covers all the functions of the father-son image. When G-d is described as mother of Her daughter Israel, the family, the kin are deeply embedded in the maternal body (conception), whereby embodied knowledge is a source for tannaitic ‘theology.’ In terms of kinship, a woman who gives birth or who chooses some offspring to care after is always a mother, and a particular intimacy with G-d as mother is created. Moreover, intergenerational transmission and education as passing from mothers to daughters is an unexplored subject emerging in this image. This is a fairly unfamiliar metaphor, where the tannaim reimagine the tabernacle as a mother’s house and represent that home as a *locus* of instruction between mother and daughter.

Based on the suggestions in Beth Berkowitz’s response to this analysis¹⁴² I discuss the importance of this image through the following conceptual points: metaphor, theology, family, reading strategies and stakes.

About METAPHOR AND LITERARY THEORY/CO-TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: this midrashic unit, as noted by Lieve Teugels, is possibly constituted by two midrashim on Exod 15:2 (זֶה אֱ-לִי וְאֶגְדָּלוֹ) – “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him”¹⁴³ In the first interpretation, attributed to the “sages,” the enigmatic biblical hapax אֶלִי וְאֶגְדָּלוֹ – [*e-li ve-]’anvehu* is understood as meaning אֶלִי וְאֶגְדָּלוֹ – *’alavenu* “I will accompany/join Him.” This sentence is then read as

¹⁴² This material was the topic of a presentation with the title “Mothers and daughters: an unusual imagery for Divine-human relationship in the tannaitic midrashim,” at “The Third Graduate Students Conference in Halachic and Talmudic Studies 2021, Bar Ilan University.”

¹⁴³ Lieve M. TEUGELS, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 176, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 270.

referring to the same topic addressed by Song 3:4: “I held him fast and did not let go of him until I brought him...” The subject, the speaking I, is explained as being Israel and the object as being the Divine presence: “I [Israel] I will accompany Him [the Divine presence] until I will bring Him to...” In this interpretation, Israel did not let go of the Divine presence in exile (“the night visions” of the Song) and through all its tribulations, or in other words, Israel was always with G-d no matter what. The sages also follow Yosef son of the Damascene who connects אנוהו – *anvehu* to the term נוהו – *navehu* “His habitation” and, based on its biblical usage (Ps 79:7, Isa 33:20), understands נוה – *naveh* “habitation, dwelling” as the Temple. Again Song 3:4 offers a good midrashic fit: the “habitation” is “the house of the mother” (בית אמי). The “chamber of her who conceived me” (חדר הורתי) is the Tabernacle, a smaller and more intimate space (MdRSbY).

In this interpretation we have a metaphor gendered in the feminine, a daughter-mother image for Israel-G-d, where Israel/the daughter is the subject taking the initiative, sticking to the Divine presence, always joining the Divine image in the world. G-d is the mother who has taught Her daughter Her Torah in the Tabernacle and given her instruction, before the daughter parted from Her to the world. Then, the daughter comes back by herself to the house of the mother, the Temple. The house is the place where a mother instructs her daughter, from which the daughter departs and to which the daughter returns. The biblical “house of the mother” is a place from which a daughter comes, to which she runs and returns. This allows to depict Israel’s experience of coming from and going back to G-d’s dwelling place. Moreover, the mother’s image depicts kinship and belonging. The maternal body provides a representation of how Israel originates from G-d (through the reference to conception – with the image of the chamber evoking the image of the womb as a chamber), and belongs to G-d. The figure of the daughter represents separation (she leaves the kin house) but also an indelible bond to the maternal imprinting and teaching.

There is a second interpretation of Exod 15:2, interwoven with this first one, preceding it and being attributed to R. ‘Aqiva, which contains a father/son metaphor. For R. ‘Aqiva takes אנוהו – *anvehu* to mean “make beautiful,” from נוה / נאה. He renders the verse as Israel saying “I will speak of the beauties of G-d...before all the nations of the world.” Then the nations of the world are described as implying that G-d has left Israel, through a midrashic reading of Song 6:1: “Whither has you beloved gone...whither has your beloved turned? Let us seek him...” The answer to this implication is provided through a *mashal* about how G-d has never left Israel. In the *nimshal* it is explicitly stated how He has accompanied them in and out of Egypt, at the Sea and in the desert, namely how He was always with them. This is explicated through the image of a king/father who goes after his son everywhere (to a country overseas, to a different country) and stays by him. The king who accompanies his son reverses common patterns of familiar hierarchical behavior, showing the love of G-d to Israel. The son represents the filial exclusivity felt by G-d towards Israel, an unbreakable familiar bond.

Both the father/son and mother/daughter images create a sense of “being/remaining together, accompanying,” whereby the father follows the son (G-d being the subject moving) and the daughter goes back to the mother (Israel being the subject in movement). The male image has a movement towards the outside/out, and it represents the situation of Israel in exile. The female image represents a movement towards the inside / in, a return to the house, and it represents the final redemption, whereby a hierarchy is established with the female image depicting the pinnacle of the theological conceptualization (in the typical image of exile and return). The image of the mother is

also the last one in this midrashic section on the first part of Exod 15:2. It is interesting how metaphorizing G-d as Israel's mother interacts with the king parable that is also found in this passage, since the authoritative image resides with the mother (the Temple), whereby the king is diminished in exile. The interplay between the father/son metaphor and the mother/daughter metaphor that crisscross in the text is a complex set of inversions about origins (the mother), displacement (the daughter, the king) and return (the daughter again).

In both images sticking loyalty is depicted by an unexpected and daring take: for the (old) father going out (painstakingly) after the son; for the young daughter finding her way outside and leading back to her mother (household). We do not expect old fathers and young daughters to be the subjects in movement: the father going out from his household, and even more, the daughter going back to hers in positive terms and on her own will. Those who are sought, again in a crisscross in the text, are the son (Israel) and ultimately, the mother (G-d). Metaphorical language and gender-play allow the theological message to be constructed and noticed. We can see this carefully woven tapestry through a literary analysis unfolding the co-text of the gendered metaphor.

About THEOLOGY: Preceding the interpretation about the Temple as a "mother's house" the statement "beautify and praise G-d before all the nations of the world" is interpreted by Yose son of the Damascene as "I shall make a Temple before Him." This expresses rabbinic theology as being based on the expression of faith/piety through the interface of a physical Temple and commandments. This is then wrapped with the nations of the world's rejection of such a conceptualization, in the allusion within the quote "and they have destroyed His house/Temple (*navehu*)" (Ps 79:7). A key point of rabbinic/tannaitic theology vs. other discourses of the time (Christian, Graeco-Roman) is the importance given to external acts and embodied practices as theologically meaningful and as not disposable. The intervention made here in theology is connected to the question: What new theological opportunities does the mother/daughter discourse offer? I think, the mother-image allows to give voice to the rabbinic idea of an embodied theology, to the importance of embodiment and physical reality. The figures of the house, the mother, the chamber, conception, the maternal body, maternal emotions of care and teaching create a rabbinic theological discourse and point.

Moreover, this midrashic passage focuses on "subverting the night visions" of Song.¹⁴⁴ A "Theology of Presence"¹⁴⁵ is created. The figure of the mother as a safe place to which it is always possible to go back allows to counteract the terror of the night visions in the Song, the anxiety, the absence. The evolutive attachment-theory describes the maternal presence as the place of security for the offspring. The image of the mother permits to express the constancy and consistency of G-d's relationship with Israel, as the place to which one can go back. It is an image of subversion, and a key element for the tannaitic "theology of presence."

The image of the daughter allows a sense of complicity between Israel and G-d, sharing the same-gender and gender-side within the household, a sense of a shared understanding and experience, only divided by age and wisdom. An important topic unfolding in this midrashic unit is the rejection of Israel and its theology by the nations of the world. The mother-daughter image in the female gender allows for the creation of the idea that the rejection of Israel implies also the rejection of G-d and the marginalization of the Divine.

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan KAPLAN, *My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 164.

¹⁴⁵ KAPLAN, *My Perfect One*, 175.

If Israel is a female daughter and as such marginalized, so G-d is a mother, the Temple a mother's house, and marginalization is actually a force. G-d is with Israel, on its side, on a gender line. Something of G-d's likeness and experience is reverberated on Israel – like mother, like daughter – but also a mother's identification with her daughter's destiny is evoked. This reverse and flipping are particularly interesting. Is there something about the mother-daughter metaphor that is more theologically flexible than father-son thinking? I think the female image allows to elaborate vulnerability and flexibility as being meaningful and a sort of 'boomerang' discourse is constructed. Theology is situated at the interaction of text and embodied Jewish society, embedded in social life.

About FAMILY: this is connected to family. Metaphors are two-way. This metaphor shapes not only how we think about G-d and Israel, but also how we think about mothers and daughters. We find the notion of a mother as teacher to her daughter, the mother-daughter bond as representing transmission and learning and as expressing rabbinic meaning, in an exclusively feminine relationship – a female space. The projection of mother and daughter images on G-d and Israel create new notions about these figures for the rabbinic recipients/audience as a stable social bond, based on cooperation and mutual understanding, for constructing the future of rabbinic transmission (this idea is expressed by the redemptive return of Israel). Real mothers and daughters could see something of their experience as expressing the particularity of Israel and its theological message – as being part of their community religious project and process of meaning-making.

About READING STRATEGY and method: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has proposed models of reparative reading and paranoid reading.¹⁴⁶ These texts are fairly terse in contrast to later midrashim, which put particular pressure on reading strategies. The mother's importance and the daughter's mobility created by the biblical text (meaning, the figure of mother is mentioned many times by the Song and cannot be ignored in its interpretation, as well as the daughter being the main subject) put a hold on tannaitic intentionality in creating this image. Moreover, how much is this image just functional to the tannaitic ideology and exegesis? This is part of the paranoid imperative towards exposure – the question if the rabbinic interpreters really want "women" to be there, or if these figures are incidental, and about the significance attached to this imaginative structure. It is an act to ask again and again for a proof about the existence of these subjects in the rabbinic imagination. On the other hand, this image of mother-daughter for G-d-Israel is so rich in meaning that cannot so easily be dismantled by a paranoid critical reading. It is important to employ a restorative reading on this text, meaning to give some credit to this figurative construction. To give it credit as it would be a male image, with the same easiness and obviousness, and to recognize the importance of these female images – *because they are there* in the text. Otherwise, we are accomplishing another act of erasure, of possible misrecognition. The imaginative ability allowed by this image works toward producing some other reality altogether or at least it opens this possibility.

About STAKES: Feminist and queer reading seem particularly apt for these texts, which *play* with gender roles, kinship relations and social hierarchies. The texts show mother and daughter to be subject to imaginative play and how this play is central in creating rabbinic imagination and meaning.

¹⁴⁶ EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You," in: *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke and London Duke University Press, 2003), 123ff.

2. Prophecy and women-related images

2.1. Moses, the most important prophet, as a woman shepherd (SifNum)

This section reflects on the inversions of gender roles and queering of male leaders within metaphoric images, and it focuses on Moses, the unparalleled prophet (“in Yisrael none like Moses arose” – or the pre-eminence of Moses among the prophets in the words of the “Thirteen Articles” of Maimonides).

In the tannaitic praise and exaltation of the Torah/Law-giver and paradigmatic prophet (“he was the most excellent of all prophets”), Moses is feminized and called by the Divine “the most beautiful of women” (SifNum 139). Insofar as Moses represents an exemplary model for rabbinic conduct, it is crucial to analyze the role of the feminine source domain in the rabbinic image or economy of self. There is an element of Moses/the prophet as female figure emulating G-d as female figure (as in the topic of breastfeeding: from G-d breastfeeding to Moses breastfeeding and so on).

ספרי במדבר קלט
"ולא תהיה עדת ה' [כצאן אשר אין להם רועה]" (במדבר כז יז): ועליו מפרש בקבלה, "הגידה לי שאהבה נפשי
[איכה תרעה איכה תרביץ בצהרים שלמה אהיה כעוטיה על עדרי חבריך]" (שיר השירים א ז): כענין שנא',
"ועטה את ארץ מצרים כאשר יעטה הרועה את בגדו" (ירמיה מג יב). "שלמה אהיה כעטיה [על עדרי חבריך]:
על עדרי אברהם יצחק ויעקב.
צא וראה מה הקדש השיבו "אם לא תדעי לך היפה בנשים": מעולה שבנביאים מעולה שבאנשים. "צאי לך בעקבי
הצאן": בעקבי אני עושה עמהן. "ורעי את גדייך". מנין אתה אומר שהראהו המקום למשה כל פרנסין שעתידין
לשמש את ישראל מיום שנברא העול עד שיחיו המתים, שני, "צאי לך בעקבי הצאן."¹⁴⁷

SifNum 139

So that the community of ה' will not be [like a flock that has no shepherd] (Num 27:17): and concerning him it is explicated in the tradition: Tell me, whom I love so, [where you pasture your flock at noon, for why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions] (Song 1:7).¹⁴⁸ As it is said: He shall wrap himself up in the land of Egypt (lit. he shall fold up the land of Egypt) as a shepherd wraps himself up in his cloak (Jer 43:12). For why should I be like one who is veiled [beside the flocks of your companions] (Song 1:7): beside the flocks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Come and see what the Holy One replied to him: *If you do not know, Most beautiful among women (Song 1:8): most excellent among all prophets, most excellent among all men/humans, go out in the tracks of the sheep (Song 1:8): in the end I will be with them, and graze your goats [by the shepherd's shelters] (Song 1:8). From where do you say that HaMaqom revealed to Moses all the leaders/providers (parnassim) that are destined to serve Israel from the day the world was created until the dead will be resurrected? For it is said: go out in the tracks of the sheep (Song 1:8).*

In Num 27:16 Moses asks G-d to appoint a new leader for the community after himself. His concern is to have someone leading the people into the Land of Israel, so that they would not be left “a flock that has no shepherd” (Num 27:17). The rabbis use this verse from Numbers to get a better understanding of what it is written in Song of Songs 1:7-

¹⁴⁷ Hebrew text according to KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 468-469, commentary 1167. HOROWITZ edition, 186. The gendered text is found in all the manuscripts.

¹⁴⁸ Adapted from ALTER, *Strong As Death Is Love*, 10, see also “The Hebrew ‘otiyah appears to mean “cover up, wrap,” [...] It is best construed as a reversal of consonants [...] for to’ah, “to wander or go astray.”

8.¹⁴⁹ The connection between the two passages is established through the key words תרעה “you pasture” (Song 1:7) which parallels רועה “shepherd” (Num 27:17), and עדרי “flocks” (Song 1:8) which parallels צאן “flock” (Num 27:17). This midrashic interpretation is strengthened by the term כעטיה “like one who is veiled” (Song 1:8) which is connected to a verse in Jer 43:12 which speaks of a shepherd who is veiled or wrap himself in his cloth. The figure of the shepherd is a classic figurative motive for leadership. All the prominent figures in the Bible are shepherds: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Josef, Moses himself and King David. The shepherd is a figure of solitude and long wanderings outside and far, meeting the Divine in remote, silent places. He guides and cares for his flock, seeking water, pasture and shade for them.

Moses asks G-d, according to this interpretation, why should he be veiled like a mourner in sorrow and preoccupation for Israel being without a prophetic leader. The image of the veil provides an input to express the apprehension of Moses (who, for this midrash, is the figure wrapping himself in Egypt of Jer 43:12). Moses looks at the flocks of G-d’s companions, the patriarchs, weeping over their plight. The image of the wrapped mourner weeping is again a female image, reinforcing the image of Moses in the female (cf. Rashi on Song 1:7: על צאני – “like a female mourner who veils herself over the lip weeping over her sheep/Israel.” It evokes also the image of dead Rachel weeping over her children in Jeremiah 31:15: “mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children.” Moses is like Rachel, dead and weeping for her exiled descendants, for the destiny of Israel. Moreover, consider how Rachel is herself a shepherd (Gen 29:9: וְרָחֵל בָּאָה עִם-הַצֹּאֵן אֲשֶׁר לְאִבֶּיהָ כִּי רְעָה הוּא). The name Rachel means in itself ewe of sheep (cf. Gen 31:38, 32:15). Rachel is described as beautiful (Gen 29:17), like Moses in this image (“the most beautiful of women”).

Shepherds migrated great lengths with their flocks and this image evokes the peregrinations and wanderings of the exile. The question in Song 1:7: “Where do you pasture your sheep? Where do you rest them at noon?” is understood as being addressed by Moses to G-d in the form of accusation or concern: “Where do You pasture Your flock (Israel) among the wolves / the nations in whose midst they are? And where will You rest them at noon, in this exile, which is a distressful time for them, like noon, which is a distressful time for the flock, because of heat?” (Rashi on Song 1:7, cf. Targum on Song 1:7). And then Moses adds: “Why should be I like a female mourner, veiled, looking at their destiny and weeping?”

The answer of G-d is to show Moses “the tracks of the sheep,” namely all the leaders guiding the flock of Israel after him and how G-d himself is its ultimate shepherd.

The biblical “footsteps, marks of the heels or footprints of the flock” (בעקבי הצאן – *be-‘iqvei*) is read as meaning “in the end, future world (בעקיב – *be-‘eqev*).” And so the midrash constructs the phrase “in the end I (G-d) will be/do with them (אני עושה עמהן)” and it adds to it the idea of “I (G-d) will guide/graze your goats,” quoting the continuation of the verse (ורעי את גדייותרך). The term גדייות – *gediyot* (sing. *gediya*) means actually “kids, young female goats” and it is a biblical hapax. The verse concludes with the expression “by the shepherds’ shelters” (משכנות), which evokes the Tabernacle (משכן). So G-d will guide/graze the flock of Israel/female goats to the shelter of the Tabernacle, a future Temple.

¹⁴⁹ Adiel SCHREMER, ““Most Beautiful of Women:” Story and History and Sifre Deuteronomy,” in: *The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade* (eds. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, Tzvi Novick, and Christine Hayes; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2017), 540, and KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 1167.

The same text of “the tracks of the sheep (and graze your goats)” is used to say that G-d revealed to Moses all the leaders that are destined to serve Israel from the day the world was created until the dead will be resurrected (כל פרנסין שעתידים לשמש את ישראל מיום (שנברא העול' עד שיחיו המתים). The verb שמש – *shamash*, pi'el *shimesh* (possibly related to the root “to touch, coming in contact”¹⁵⁰) means in its primary meaning “to officiate, minister.” In its Hebrew form it is a construction of rabbinic Hebrew, which is not found in the Hebrew Bible (where we find instead שרת – *sharet* “to minister, serve,” for instance Exod 28:35). It is derived from the Aramaic שמש – *shemash* “to minister, serve” attested in Daniel 7:10, where it indicates thousands of angels serving or attending G-d, which are described with the masoretic punctuation as *dina'* (“the Tribunal/Court”). The rabbinic term *shimesh* is used for the High Priest on Yom Kippur officiating in the inner parts of the House/Temple of G-d (mYom 7:5). Here it indicates the activity of the leaders/prophets/supporters/providers (*parnassim*) of the people/house of Israel.

The verb is used metaphorically to indicate marital relationships (mNid 1:7: שהיא עוברת – לשמש את ביתה – “she passes to serve her house” (meaning “she is about to engage in intercourse with her husband,”) and משמשת בעדים – “she engages in intercourse while using examination cloths”). From it the term תשמיש – *tashmish* is derived, which is used to indicate a *tashmish qedushah* “an object used for some sacred or ritual scope” (bMeg 26b) and *tashmish ha-mitah*, “marital relations” (mYom 8:1). M Miq 8:4 has the expression האשה ששמשה ביתה – “she serves/sustains her house.”¹⁵¹ (We will see this root in the next section, 2.2. about Moses and Aaron officiating in the Temple as mother and daughter). The term ‘upkeeping’ could render the range of significance of this rabbinic expression, in the sense of “keep it going/working.” It is at any rate also a gendered expression in this text.

“The most beautiful among/of women” is Moses, “the most excellent among all prophets” (היפה בנשים: מעולה שבנביאים) whom G-d directly addresses with this appellative, when showing him “the tracks of the sheep.” In SifNum 134¹⁵² and 135¹⁵³ Moses was already described with the superlative: “the sage of sages (a rabbinic title), the giant among giants, the *father* of the prophets” (משה חכם חכמים גדול גדולים אבי) (הנביאים). Without the part “father of prophets” the phrase is also found in SifDeut 29 and 306, as well as AdRN B 1:1, indicating that the particular focus of SifNum is the point that Moses “fathered” all other prophets. He was the most excellent of them, but also the first of them and their progenitor. He established a sort of metaphorical kin and family line, giving life to prophecy as a concept and possibility. He opened a line of imitation and transmission. This idea ignores the fact that Abraham is called a נביא “prophet” (Gen 20:7) before Moses, but it probably sets the revelation at Sinai as starting point of the particularity of Israel. The expression “most beautiful” recalls the biblical verse about Moses as the “most modest” of all people, above all people (Num 12:3). A very famous

¹⁵⁰ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1601.

¹⁵¹ The verb šmš in Aramaic with the meaning “to lie with, copulate (said of *either* sex)” is attested only in rabbinic texts and targumim (see “šmš vb. D to serve,” in CAL, <http://cal.huc.edu/>). For a wife working for her husband/household, the Aramaic root is attested in JMP 7.1.R(5) : [ואת]רציית הדא כלתא למיתנסב : להדא בעלה ולשמשא יתיה “this bride has agreed to be married to this husband of hers and to serve him” (Text according to Mordechai Akiva FRIEDMAN, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine, A Cairo Geniza Study, Volume II: The Ketubba Texts* [Tel-Aviv and New York: Tel-Aviv University, The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1981], 88-95.)

¹⁵² KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 1145.

¹⁵³ KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 1155.

shepherd – a humble figure in itself – praised for his modesty is R. ‘Aqiva’ (bKet 62b). We can see a literary structure returning in the rabbinic production.

The point of the figurative image is that if Moses is the most beautiful of women, it means that also all the other prophets of Israel are compared to women. The gender element was noted by the amoraic interpretation of this text in SongR 1:7: “Why were the prophets referred to as women?” (היפה שבנביאים המעולה שבנביאים, אמר רבי יוסי בר (ירמיה למה נמשלו הנביאים כנשים?). In the tannaitic text, the prophets and leaders of Israel, most of all Moses, are described as women, and so the text is also perceived by the later, amoraic rabbis. The amoraim have spotted the gendered metaphor and they were shocked/moved by it, which is significant. Leadership and leaders are here associated with the female character (a female shepherd guiding her sheep), to the point that the midrash aggadah asks why the prophets, Israel’s leaders, are the female character in the interplay between the Divine and Israel.

The aspect of *beauty* is not casual and the comparison does not reside only in the superlative structure “the best...among.” The etymology of the term “prophet” from נבא “to burst, pour forth, to cause to bubble up” defines prophecy as an act of revelation happening through communication and externalization, namely as making something externally manifest. The topic of externalization is important to the rabbis and allow them to connect the revelation of prophecy to the importance of externalization in rabbinic practice and piety, with its commandments about dress, and external signs, gestures and physical objects. Rabbinic piety as beauty is anchored in this concept of performative externalization. Female beauty is compared to the rabbinic external signs of dress in being subject to the gaze (see section 3.4.). The physical beauty of the female protagonist of Song is portrayed through metaphors, “using culturally specific imagery.”¹⁵⁴ For instance, the woman’s hair is compared to the dark black of “a flock of goats” moving on a hillside, and her teeth to the shining white of “a flock of ewes” climbing out from a water pool under the sun. Beauty is understood as something contextual and rooted in particularity and embodiment. Moreover, throughout the Song it is something that it is *made* and expressed, through some external act, of dress, ornament, anointments, voice. This capacity to move and attract is projected on the prophets of Israel, with the attribution to Moses of the most lasting impact and impression. The prophets / leaders of Israel are associated with the concept of attracting and moving the people to the commandments, thus leading them. Like weeping, this image implies an act of externalization meant to influence and affect. Moses’ question is if Israel will have someone to *look to* for guidance, as an example to follow and imitate.

Moses poses the question to G-d about Israel survival as a flock and about its leaders, whereby the tannaitic interpretation seems to transform the verse of Song in “tell me about whom I love, namely about Israel and its destiny.” Another possibility about the image of the “beautiful woman” is that Moses is the only beautiful female partner for Israel, namely only through him the Torah was given to the people, like the female figure of the Song is the only unique beloved. In any case, the prophet represents a female figure in relation to Israel, as her leader. In imitation of G-d as shepherd, Moses is represented as a female shepherd.

Israel’s prophets have always, especially Moses, negotiated and shaped the common (‘marital’) destiny with the Divine. Their biblical dialogues are impressively and intentionally non-hierarchical in a way. What is highlighted in the comparison of the

¹⁵⁴ KAPLAN, *My Perfect One*, 97.

Divine/Israel couple to the human couple, through the image of the couple of Song of Songs, is the non-hierarchical moment between them, and a specular and mimetic element.

The female shepherd of the Song goes outside alone, finding her way in long wanderings. Something of this image is projected on Moses and on Israel as people, with the sense of exposure (to violence) of the female subject, and her double daring. The character of the leaders of Israel and of Israel as leader in history remains a female one, also when the male partner / G-d is not part of the picture, remaining inherent to their character and particularity. It serves to transmit a rabbinic message about the exposure and power of being gazed/looked to by others – and followed as a guide – for Israel, and its prophets. The idea of the externalization of rituals and minute acts not as an empty mean but as affecting and impacting reality and others is at the base of this image and at the core of the meaning of rabbinic halakha.

2.2. Moses the mother and Aaron the daughter – female transmission: the prophet and the priest (Sifra)

This tradition also plays with the idea of Israel's leaders as female figures. The transmission between prophets, namely the prophetic transmission and the transmission of the Torah, is represented as the one occurring between a mother and a daughter, which is peculiar in itself. It is connected to the image of G-d and Israel as mother and daughter, with the concepts of female transmission and maternal teaching expressed there (section 1.4.). We can see that there are some recurring motifs in these metaphorical images with female figures as source domains. Moreover, a line is created between G-d transmitting to Israel/Moses, and Moses to Aaron all in the mother-daughter terms.

Significantly, Sifra is a halakhic midrash based on Leviticus, the less narrative, more legal/ritualistic text of the Torah –containing chiefly lists of laws – whereby the midrash of Sifra itself is naturally strongly legalistic, with just a 5% of aggadic/narrative content making out its entire material, the lowest percentage of all midrashei halakhah, and less than the Tosefta and the Mishnah as well. “Sifra is singular in the paucity of aggadic material it contains.”¹⁵⁵ With this very spare percentage of narrative material and within a very legalistic section dealing with sacrifice prescriptions (contained in *parashat tzav*), the midrash finds space for a gendered metaphorical analogy particularly strong in its characterization and clear or explicit in its very tightly fitting comparison. The section containing this gendered image, *mekhilta demilu'im*, commenting on the dedication of the Tabernacle at the end of *parashat tzav* (Lev 8:1ff.) – and specifically in our case on the ordination of Aaron and his sons – is a passage “from the school of R. Yishmael that apparently came from a Halakhic Midrash that went lost”¹⁵⁶ and was inserted in the Aqivan midrash of Sifra. Its topic, the ordination of the priesthood – central to the entire Temple system and to rabbinic imagination – is marked through a metaphorical structure in female terms. It is a central topic in the biblical book of Leviticus and Sifra, as a midrash, is the most quoted and used in the entire rabbinic literature. Its focus on the

¹⁵⁵ Menahem I. KAHANA, “The Halakhic Midrashim,” in: *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (eds. Shmuel Safrai, Zeev Safrai, Joshua Schwartz and Peter J. Tomson; Assen, the Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 2006), 83.

¹⁵⁶ KAHANA, “The Halakhic Midrashim,” 84.

sacrificial service, its meaning for the rabbis, the role of the priests and the Tabernacle are such a key point in the tannaitic construction of meaning, the structure of their composition and its cognitive pattern. The female image is meant to catch all these aspects in a metaphorical way:

ספרא צו - מכילתא דמילואים פרשה א יד
 <דף מא, טור ג>¹⁵⁷ "וישחט ויקח משה את הדם ויתן על קרנות המזבח סביב באצבעו ויחטא את המזבח ואת
 הדם יצק אל יסוד המ' ויק' לל' ע"¹⁵⁸.
 שכל שבעת ימי המילואים היה משה משמיש בכהונה גדולה.
 הוא היה שוחט. הוא היה זורק. הוא היה מזה. הוא היה מחטא. הוא היה (י) [יו] צק. הוא היה מכפר.
 שנ'. "וישחט ויקח משה את הדם ויתן על ק' ה' ס' ב' ויח' א' ה' ואת ה' י' אל יסוד המז' ויק' ל' ע".
 משלו משל: למה הדבר דומה?
 לבת מלכים שניסית כשהיא קטנה. ופסקה עם אמה שתהא משמשתה עד שעה שתלמד.
 אפ' כר אהרן. מתחילה לא היה אילא לוי. שנ'. "הלוא [אהרן] אחיר <דף מא, טור ד> הלוי {י}".
 וכשנבחר להיות כהן גדול, אמר לו המקום למשה: אתה תשמשם עד שעה שילמד.
 היה משה שחט. ואהרן ראו (ה) את! ה!. זורק. ואהרן ראה אתו. מזה. ואהרן ראה אתו. מחטא. ואהרן ראה אתו.
 יצק. ואהרן רואה אתו. מכפר. ואהרן ראה אתו.
 שנ'. "וישחט ויקח משה את הדם" וג'¹⁵⁹.

Sifra tsav mekhilta demilu'im 1:14

[41c] *And he slaughtered, and Moses took the blood and put it upon the horns of the altar roundabout with his finger, and purified the altar, and poured out [the remaining] blood at the base of the altar, and sanctified it, to make atonement for it. (Lev 8:15).*

That all the seven days of *milu'im* [inauguration] Moses served in the high-priesthood.

He would slaughter [the sacrificial animal], he would toss [the blood], he would sprinkle [the blood], he would perform the rite of purification, he would pour [oil], who would atone.

As it is said, *And he slaughtered, and Moses took etc. (Lev 8:15).*

A parable was made [lit., he has made a parable, *moshlo masha*]: To what is the matter comparable?

To a daughter of kings [*bat melakhim*]¹⁶⁰ who was married when she was a minor. And she made an agreement with her mother that the mother would serve / upkeep / officiate [for?] her [?] until [her daughter] would learn [what was required of her / the protocols of majesty].

So with Aaron. At first he was only a Levite, as it is said, *And is not Aaron, your brother, the Levite (Ex 4:14).* [41d]

But when he was chosen to serve as High Priest, *HaMaqom* said to Moses, 'You will serve until he [Aaron] will learn [the service].'

Moses slaughtered and Aaron observed her [him]; he sprinkled [the blood] and Aaron observed him; he sprinkled [the anointing oil on the altar] and Aaron observed him; he purified [the altar] and Aaron observed him; he poured out [the blood at the base of the altar] and Aaron observed him; he atoned and Aaron observed him.

As it is said, *And he slaughtered, and Moses took etc. (Lev 8:15).*

This section employs an image of mother-to-daughter cultural transmission to depict the roles of Moses and Aaron in the ordination of Aaron in the high priesthood.

¹⁵⁷ WEISS ed., 41c-41d.

¹⁵⁸ The biblical verse without the abridged parts in the rabbinic passage reads: וישחט ויקח משה את הדם ויתן על קרנות המזבח סביב באצבעו ויחטא את המזבח ואת הדם יצק אל יסוד המזבח ויקדשהו לכפר עליי.

¹⁵⁹ Hebrew text according to Vatican MS - Biblioteca Apostolica 66 (Codex Assemani) (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=18000&page=59>). The gendered metaphor is attested also in the London MS, 180a; Oxford MS, 212a; Parma MS, 48; Vatican MS 31, 79; the Venetia ed. princ. which has the variants שתהא משמשת עד שעה שתלמוד בתה.

¹⁶⁰ On this expression see more below in section 2.3. and 3.1.

The parable, “A princess was married as a minor” matches the case point by point, as the articulation of matters makes explicit. I cannot think of what the parable as articulated here can mean outside of this particular context. What we see is how the exegetical parable constructs a situation, rather than tells a tale of what was said or done in sequences. There are no stages of activity, no initiative with its consequences, just the construction of a situation, — a woman married under such-and-such stipulation — deemed to illuminate Aaron’s situation in the priesthood.¹⁶¹

For Neusner, the parable has no self-evident meaning aside from the exegetical context, meaning it was created ad hoc by the rabbis to explain the biblical text, its statement and the view contained in it, more than its law. This, however, does not explain why the feminine was necessary within this exegetical, metaphorical construction.

A daughter was married, like Aaron was invested with the priesthood – namely of taking care of the Temple sacrificial service –, whereby priesthood is like a marriage to G-d, the male partner. Priesthood/the sacrificial service are compared to a marriage/being married for a woman, the Temple to the house. The priesthood tasks highlighted here are slaughtering, dealing with blood, sprinkling it, cutting the pieces of meat and burning them on the altar, activities that are generally gendered as male tasks within the household of Antiquity and Late Antiquity. The verb [ה]משמשת for the mother parallels תשמם for Moses slaughtering. Sifra *shemini mekhilta de-milu'im* 1:5 (Vatican MS 66) describes the reconciliation after the sin of the golden calf as a reconciliation between a husband and wife after the wife was sent away. Then the service in the Temple is compared to the wife serving her household. Lev 9:5 speaks of the congregation who drew near G-d (ויקרבו כל) (העדה), whereby the root קרב is connected to the sacrificial service (*qorbanot*). This is depicted as the wife in the parable: “Immediately, she girded her loins, braced her shoulders and **served** it exceedingly. So Israel...” (מִיד חֲגֵרָה מִתְנִיָּה, וְקִישְׁרָה כִּתְפִיָּה וְהִיתָה) (משמשתו יתיר מדאי. אף כן ישראל). We see a parallel being established between the service in the Temple/the sacrificial worship and the upkeep and work of a woman. As in the case of jewelry (see section 3.4.), the work of the wife is here understood as figuratively describing the commandments/*mitsvot* and the precepts about the sacrifices. Moreover, G-d is also depicted as serving Israel, meaning as guiding, sustaining and helping them (see the images of G-d serving Israel in Goshen-Gottstein’s thesis.)

The second point is that Aaron is not ready for the task, he is like a minor girl who still has to learn. Learning is provided by the mother, and by example. The mother (Moses) slaughters, sprinkles the blood and the daughter (Aaron) learns from her butcher mother, doing her training.

A similar image about Moses and Aaron is developed in CantR 4:12, although with the more classical image of breastfeeding:

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים רַבֵּה ד' יב

"שני שדיך, אלו משה ואהרן" (שיר ד ה) [...] מה השדים הללו מלאים חלב, כך משה ואהרן ממלאים ישראל מן התורה. ומה השדים הללו כל מה שהאשה אוכלת התינוק אוכל ויונק מהן, כך כל תורה שלמד משה רבינו לימדה לאהרן, הה"ד "ויגד משה לאהרן את כל דברי ה'" (שמות ד כח)

CantR 4:12

Your breasts [are like two fawns] (Song 4:5) – these are Moses and Aaron. [...] Just as these breasts are full of milk, so, too, do Moses and Aaron fill Israel with the Torah. And just as from whatever the woman

¹⁶¹ Jacob NEUSNER, *How not to study Judaism: examples and counter-examples – Parables, rabbinic narratives, rabbis' biographies, rabbis' disputes* (vol.1, Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, 2004), 24.

eats the infant eats and is nourished from these breasts, so, too, all the Torah that our master Moses learned, he taught to Aaron, for it is written, *Moses told Aaron all the words of* ה' (Ex 4:28).

Moses transmits the Torah he has “suckled” from G-d by breastfeeding Aaron as well. Later scholars suckle from Moses and Aaron, as in a mother-daughter situation. Breastfeeding is understood as teaching-capability. Similarly, the biblical verse “we have **a little sister**, and she has no breasts” (Song of Songs 8:8) (אחות לנו קטנה ושדים אין לה) is interpreted in bPes 87a, bQid 49b, bSan 24a as referring to the Jews of Elam, “who studied Torah, but who [still] cannot teach,” like a little girl who breastfeeds from her mother, but has still not breastfed. While Torah scholars or *batei midrashim* are “breasts like towers” (Song 8:10) (ושדי כמגדלות), breastfeeding the people. What is parallel between our text and these passages about breastfeeding is that women often learn breastfeeding from their mothers, or from other women, as an embodied activity learned when experienced and shared through experience. This idea is created in the mother-daughter transmission expressed in the Moses-Aaron image in Sifra. Moreover, an agreement is established between mother and daughter, creating the image of a bond based on a shared understanding and solidarity.

The Sifra image chooses sacrifices and slaughtering for the household as the shared experience, bringing an additional, welcomed novelty to this metaphorical idea.

2.3. Moses as a woman defending herself (SifNum, SifDeut, MekhDv)

This fascinating parable in its different versions has drawn much scholarly attention – whereby, once again (as in the section 1.3., and see also section 4.1.), gender so far has not been a main point of the analysis. The gendered image has not been seen as it is, namely the main point of the entire parable. These texts interpret midrashically Deut 3:23, preceding the text in Deut 3:26 analyzed in section 1.2. The biblical text deals with the refusal from G-d to accept Moses plea to enter the Land. The already discussed SifDeut 29 on Deut 3:26 focuses on G-d as a woman (“like a woman”) and SifDeut 26 on Deut 3:23 (and its parallels) focuses on Moses as a woman, creating a connection between the two figures in this exchange as female figures. G-d in Deut 3:26 is defined as being angry and Moses in this context as being angry at the people, whereby both moments of anger are defined by the rabbinic interpretation through the female images as righteous:

מכילתא דברים ג כג¹⁶⁴ ספרי דברים כג¹⁶³ ספרי במדבר קלז¹⁶²
 "ואתחנן אל ה' [בעת "ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא" (דברים ג כג)
 ההיא]" (דברים ג כג) – זהו שאמר הכתוב (משלי יח כג):
 הוא שאמ' הכתוב (משלי " (ב)תחנונים ידבר רש."

¹⁶² Hebrew text according to KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 463, commentary 1162-3. HOROWITZ edition, 183-184. The gendered text appears in Vatican MS ebr. 32,2, 183-184, Berlin MS Or. Qu. 1594, 59, London MS Add. 16406, 311, Oxford MS Bodl. Or. 150, 362a (with the version: תלו [תלה] לה הפגים) – “she puts the figs on herself by herself”).

¹⁶³ The Hebrew text is from KAHANA, *The Genizah Fragments*, 240-241, fragments 18 and 19. Until “תלו” the text comes from New York – JTS (Jewish Theological Seminary) MS Rab. 2392, FINKELSTEIN ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 36-37.

¹⁶⁴ The Hebrew text is from KAHANA, *The Genizah Fragments*, 339-340, fragment 3, according to the fragment Cambridge, CUL: T-S C2.181. HOFFMANN edition, *Midrash Tannaim*, 12-13, with great differences in the textual transmission.

שני פרנסין עמדו [לישראל]:	שני פרנסים טובים עמדו לישראל:	יח (ג): " (בתחנונים ידבר רש ועשיר יענה עזות." שני פרנסים גדולים עמדו להם לישראל:
א' א' [אחד אמר]: יכתב סורחני, ואחד א' [אמר]: לא יכתב סירחוני. דוד א': לא יכתב סירחוני, שני: " [לדוד משכיל] אשרי נשוי פשע כסוי חטאה" (תהלים לב א). משה א': יכתב סורחני,	אמר משה לפני הקב"ה: רבוננו של עולם, עבירה שעברתי תיכתב אחרי,	משה ודוד מלך ישראל, והיו יכולים לתלות לעולם במעש[יה]ם הטובים.
שני: "על אשר מריתם פי [במדבר סין במריבת העדה להקדישני]" (במדבר כז יד).	שלא יהו בריות אומרות עליו, דומה שזייף משה בתורה או אמר דבר שלא נצטווה.	לאחר, שלא יהו ישראל אומ[רים], דומה שמא זייף משה בתורה או {שלא} שאמר דבר שלא נצטווה.
משל, למ' הד' דו' לשתי נשים שהיו לוקות בבית דין, אחת לוקה על מה שקילקלה, ואחת לוקה על שגנבה פגי שביעית.	משל למלך שגזר ואמר: כל מי שאכל פגי שביעית, יהו מחזירין אותו בקיפון [בקפון] = קמפון. ¹⁶⁵ הלכה אשה אחת בת טובים, ליקטה ואכלה פגי שביעית, והיו מחזירין אותו בקיפון.	מ[ן]ש[ל]ין משל, ל[מה]הד[בר] דומ[ה]? למלך שגזר ואמ[ר]: כל מי שילקוט מפגי שביעי ויאכל יהיו מחזירין אותו. והלכה אשה אחת בת טובים וגדולים ולקטה מפגי שביעי[ן] ואכלה והיו מחזירין אותה למקפון.
זו שגנבה פגי שביעית אומרת: בבקשה [מכם], הודיעו סורחני! שלא יהיו העומדין סבורין לומר כשם שזו קילקלה כך זו קילקלה.	אמרה לה: בבקשה ממך המלך! הודיע סורחני, שלא יהו בני המדינה אומרים, דומה שנמצא בה ניאוף או דבר כשפים.	אמרה: בבקשה ממך אדוני המלך! תלי את הפגים הללו בצוארי, שלא יהו עמא דין סבורים לומ[ר], דומה שמא נמצא בי דבר ניאוף או שמא נמצא[ן] בי דבר כשפים,
תלו את הפגין בצוארה,	מה עשו? תלו לה פגי שביעית בצוארה,	אילא תלי את הפגים הללו בצוארי,
והיה כרוז מכריז לפניו על הפגין זו לוקה.	¹⁶⁶ ורואין ויודעין שבשבילן היא מתחזרת.	ויהו יודעים שבשבילן אני מתחזרת.
	כך אמר משה לפני הקב"ה: עבירה שעברתי תיכתב אחרי. אמר לו הקב"ה: הריני כותבה, שלא היה אלא על המים, שנאמר [במדבר כ כד]: "על אשר מריתם [את] פי" (במדבר כ כד).	כך אמר משה לפני המק[ום]: ריבוני, עבירה שעברתי תיכתב אחרי, שלא יהו ישראל אומ[רים], דומה שזייף משה את התורה או שמא אמר דבר שלא נצטווה. אמר לו הקב"ה: חייך, שאני כותבה ואינה אילא במים, שנ[אמר]: "על אש[ן]ר מריתם את פי" (במדבר כ

¹⁶⁵ The reading קיפון is also found in the Vatican MS ebr. 32, 2, but it reasonably seems a corruption of קנפון – qanpon. "The word is clearly a loanword from the Latin *campus* (Greek, *kampos*), a plain or field for exercise and amusement." Steven D. FRAADE, "Sifre Deuteronomy 26 (ad Deut. 3:23): How Conscious the Composition?" Hebrew Union College Annual 54 (1983): 261, n. 33. See JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1386: "קמפון, קמפון, קמפון" m. (campus, κάμπος, accus.)." KRAUSS, *Lehnwörter* 2, 510.

¹⁶⁶ From here the text is according to FINKELSTEIN ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 37.

"המה מי מריבה"
(במדבר כ"ג).

SifNum 137

SifDeut 26

Mekhilta Devarim
(Midrash Tannaim) 3:23

And I pleaded [’ethanan] with ה at that time (Deut 3:23)¹⁶⁷ – this is what Scripture has said (Prov 18 23): Imploringly [be-tahanunim] speaks the poor person.¹⁶⁸

And I pleaded [’ethanan] with ה at that time (Deut 3:23) – this is what Scripture has said (Prov 18 23): Imploringly [be-tahanunim] speaks the poor person, and the rich person answers harshly.¹⁶⁹

Two providers [parnassim] stood [for Israel]:

Two good providers [parnassim] stood for Israel.¹⁷⁰

Two great providers [parnassim] stood for them, for Israel:

Moses and David, king of Israel.

Moses and David, king of Israel. And they could forever rely on their good deeds.

One said: let my transgression be written, and one said: let my transgression remain unwritten.

David said: let my transgression remain unwritten, as it is said: [*Of David. A Maskil.*] *Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over (Ps 32:1).* Moses said: let my transgression be written,

Moses said before the Holy One blessed be He: Master of the World! Let the transgression I have transgressed be written after me,

He said before HaMaqom: My Master! Let the transgression I have transgressed be written after me,

as it is said: *Since you rebelled against My word [in the Wilderness of Zin in the community’s dispute, to sanctify Me] (Num 27:14).*

so that people will not say about me, it seems Moses has forged/falsified [the text of] the Torah, or, he said something he was not commanded.

so that Israel will not say, it seems Moses has forged/falsified [the text of] the Torah, or, he said something he was not commanded.

A parable [mashal]: To what is the matter comparable? To two women who were punished with lashes in the court, one is punished with lashes because she acted disgracefully [*qilqelah*], and the other one is punished because she

A parable [*mashal*] to a king who decreed and said: anyone who eats unripe figs of the seventh year [*pagei shevi’it*] they shall make him go around in the *campus* [for public shaming]. **One woman, daughter of decent people [bat tovim]**, went,

A parable was made [lit., he has made a parable, *moshlo mashal*]: To what is the matter comparable? To a king who decreed and said: anyone who picks unripe

¹⁶⁷ Translation based on ALTER, *The Five Books*, 895.

¹⁶⁸ Translation based on ALTER, *The Wisdom Books*, 273.

¹⁶⁹ “The contrast between the hapless poor man and the rich man who has power over him is pointedly expressed in a tight antithetical chiasm [...]: imploringly / poor man // rich man / harshly.” ALTER, *The Wisdom Books*, 273.

¹⁷⁰ JAFFEE, *Sifre Dvarim* (<https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/book/sifre-devarim/>), translates: “Two able providers arose on behalf of Israel.” For the translation I have consulted his translation, as well those of HAMMER, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, 46-47 (who renders *parnassim* with “leaders”) and NEUSNER, *Sifre to Deuteronomy*, vol. 1, 69.

stole unripe figs of the seventh year [pagei shevi 'it].

gathered and ate unripe figs of the seventh year. And they were making him [read 'her'] go around in the campus [for public shaming].

figs of the seventh year [pagei shevi 'it] and eats, they shall make him go around in the *campus* [for public shaming].
One woman, daughter of great, decent people [bat tovim], went, gathered of unripe figs of the seventh year and ate. And they were making her go around in the campus [for public shaming].

The one who stole unripe figs of the seventh year says: **I beg** [of you (pl.)] [*bevaqashah*], let my transgression be known! So that those who stand would not think to say, just as that one *qilqelah*, also that one *qilqelah*.

She said to them: I beg you [*bevaqashah*], oh King! Let my transgression be known, so that the people of the country [*bnei ha-medinah*] would not say, it seems that adultery or a matter of sorcery was found in her.

She said: I beg you [*bevaqashah*], my lord, the king! Hang these unripe figs on my neck, so that “that people” [Aramaic] would not think to say, it seems that maybe a matter of adultery was found in me, or maybe a matter of sorcery was found in me, but rather hang these unripe figs on my neck, and they will know that it is because of them [the figs] that I am made go around.

They hung the unripe figs on her neck. And the herald [*karoz*] announced before her: “On the account of the unripe figs this (f.) is punished.”

What did they do? They hung unripe figs of the seventh year on her neck. And they would see and know that it is because of them that she was made go around.

So Moses said before the Holy One blessed be He: Let the transgression I transgressed be written after me. The Holy One blessed be He said to him: behold, for I will write it, for it was only about the water, as it is said (Num 20:24): *Since you have rebelled against My word.*

So Moses said before HaMaqom: My Master! Let the transgression I transgressed be written after me, so that Israel will not say, it seems Moses has forged/falsified [the text of] the Torah, or, maybe he said something he was not commanded. The Holy One blessed be He said to him: By your life! That I am writing it, and it is only about the water, as it said (Num 20:24): *since you have rebelled against My word*, Num 20:13: *These are waters of Merivah (rebellious struggling).*

The imagery of the story is impressive in its complexity and figurative force. Sifre on Numbers 137 interprets Num 27:14, where G-d recalls Moses' transgression at the waters of Merivah and connects it to Moses not entering the Land (a fact already mentioned in Num 20:1-13, 23-24). Num 20:1-13 is vague, leaving unclear what exactly the sin of

Moses was; this passage is indeed one of the most challenging and difficult to understand in the entire text of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, its harsh punishment that Moses should die on the threshold of the Land of Israel without entering it seems disproportionate to his fault – a one (difficult to define) mistake.¹⁷¹ And this disproportion is already perceived as such inner-biblically, in Moses' eyes, who challenges G-d's judgement, according to all biblical versions of the story (see Deut 32:48-52; Deut 1:37, 3:23-26 and 4:21, the last three Deuteronomic texts charging the lack of faith of the people of Israel for Moses stumbling).¹⁷² Moses is clearly angry at the people. SifNum 136¹⁷³ points out that numerous heavy transgressions were forgiven by G-d to Israel, when they only gave a sign of repentance. But this one sin of Moses, despite his many supplications, was not:

ספרי במדבר קלו
"ונשב בגיא" (דב' ג כט) – אמר להן: ראו אי זו עבירה עברתי וכמה בקשות ביקשתי ולא נסלח לי, וראו כמה עבירות עברתם ואמר לכם המקום עשו תשובה ואני אקבל.

SifNum 136

He [Moses] said to them: Look what transgression I transgressed and **how many requests [baqashot] I have requested [biqashiti]**, and I was not forgiven. And look how many transgressions you transgressed and *HaMaqom* said to you: repent and I will accept.

The fact that the most serious offenses of G-d's people were treated less harshly or more proportionally to their dimension is the next point of the halakhic midrash. King David's double crime of Uriah's murder and adultery with the latter's wife Bat-Sheva has its commensurate retribution (according to 2 Sam 12:9-20). However, David who – SifNum remarks – was a *parnas* (leader, or sustainer, provider) for Israel, thus with more responsibility and culpability than usual people, asks, according to the rabbinic exegete, reprehensibly to cover up his sin. As a proof-text Ps 32:1 is brought: "Of David. A Maskil. Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over." David is brought by SifNum just to highlight the righteousness of Moses and the unfairness of his treatment. Indeed, after this quote, David is discarded by SifNum not to be mentioned anymore by name in this context. The Bible anyway uncovers for the reader his misconduct, and his request to hide his crimes is not fulfilled, which underlies how the midrashist considers reproachable such an entreaty by a leader.

Contrary to King David – the midrash goes on in building its narrative –, the only transgression of Moses is so fastidiously and insistently repeated by the Torah, because Moses himself asked so. This is not only due to his honesty; it is a defensive strategy, rooted in the disproportion and inequality of his treatment. Then a rabbinic parable

¹⁷¹ G-d requires to bring forth water out of a rock for the thirsty Israelites, and this is what Moses does. Explanations about his transgression include relatively minor matters as Moses being doubtful (which is rather a recurrent position of him); striking the rock instead of speaking to it (Num 20:11); or saying "Can we [G-d and I] [not] bring you forth water out of this rock?" (Num 20:10), instead of "Can *He* [G-d] not bring...?" whereby Moses could see himself as an instrument of the Divine; or losing his nerve and defaming the people, addressing them as "rebels" (Num 20:10), against the fact that G-d had recognized their request for water in the desert as founded; or as giving for granted that his exasperation with the people is shared by G-d, although G-d has not given signs of irritation. See Jacob MILGROM, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 448-456.

¹⁷² Ps 106:32-33 conciliates the two biblical versions of the people exasperating Moses (as attenuating circumstances) and thus Moses speaking in anger. The punishment has puzzled as being incommensurate rabbinic, medieval and modern commentators.

¹⁷³ KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 461.

(*mashal*) is introduced.¹⁷⁴ The *mashal* itself and its comparison, in this case, entail the gendered image. To explain why Moses would ask to have his fault recorded, the case is mentioned of two women being punished with lashes (לוקות) in court (*bet din*). They are subjected to the same punishment. However, one has committed a serious transgression, she ‘acted disgracefully’ (קילקלה, lit. to damage, spoil, ruin, disarrange), which Lieberman understands as meaning “having committed adultery”¹⁷⁵ – recalling David’s adultery. While the other “stole unripe figs of the seventh year [*pagei shevi ‘it*],” a minor, trivial infraction. The last woman asks to let her transgression be known, “so that those who stand would not think to say, just as that one *qilqelah*, also that one *qilqelah*.” In other words, she asks to make her crime public “so as to differentiate herself from the worse sinner with whom she is coupled”¹⁷⁶ (But why are the two women coupled in the first place, and subjected to the same penalty for infractions of much different degree?). In the same vein, Moses would have asked to have his sin publicized, so that people would not think his sin was serious as much as that of “the generation of the desert, who died in the desert because they believed the spies” (Rashi on bYom 86b, which quotes our parable). Moses would have asked to underline that he is going to die in the desert like them (and that he is punished like them) *not* because he had committed their same sort of crime. However, the text of SifNum has the construction of the two providers/two women that should be taken into consideration.

SifNum seems to depict a rather unlawful situation in the parable, where crimes of two different degrees and natures are equally punished. The crime of the second woman in the parable (גנבה פגי שביעית) – *ganvah pagei shevi ‘it* “she stole unripe figs of the seventh year”) is marked by the text as negligible and of little consequence. The rabbinic term

¹⁷⁴ The parable is commented briefly by STERN, *Parables in Midrash*, 91-93 in its SifDeut version. For Stern, the *mashal* describes “the protagonist’s attempt to forestall a misinterpretation” whereby “a picture of an implied misinterpretation [is] being anticipated and avoided.”

¹⁷⁵ Saul LIEBERMAN (*Greek in Jewish Palestine/Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* [New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1994], 162), similarly to Rashi (on bYom 86b), who explains the term in this parable with: “זנתה – she committed adultery.” Note however that for rabbinic, tannaitic law, adultery is not punished by lashes, but by strangulation (חנק) – mSan 11:1, Sifra *qedoshim* 10:9). The verb קלקל – *qilqel* is often used to indicate heretical practices, cf. mBer 9:5 (and its parallel tBer 6:21) according to which heretics ‘corrupted’ early custom (התקינו ... התקינו); mRS 2:1 (ממשקלקלו המינין התקינו); mRS 2:2 (ממשקלקלו הכותים התקינו); tSot 14:3 about rabbinic laws being perverted (נתקלקלו הדינין ופסקה); In tDem 5:24 the verb stays for Samaritan disregard of rabbinic law. In tDem 2:14 it similarly indicates a *haver* not following the obligations of *haverut* (אין דומה חבר שקלקל לבן חבר שקלקל). In tSan 4:5: “the ‘amei ha-‘arets went and acted disgracefully, as it is said: *That we also may be like all nations* (1 Sam 8:20)” (“והיינו גם אנחנו ככל הגוים”). tAZ 6:7 employs the term for both worshipping of idols and having sexual relations with a married woman. The root קלקל is also used to indicate the sin of the golden calf (tMeg 3:36-37). Sifra *shemini* 1:39 defines with this verb the transgression of Adam, Eve and the snake. mSan 8:4 refers by it to the ‘rebellious son’ going back to precedent misdeeds. Sifra *aharei mot* 9:13 commenting on the biblical injunction not to follow the practices of Egypt and Canaan describes their deeds as ‘*mequlqalim*,’ and these are listed as idolatry, sexual transgressions and murder (שמעשיהם של מצריים מקולקלים מכל עממין [...]שמעשיהם של כנעניים מקולקלים מכל עמים). On the verb in the feminine as indicating sexual transgression see mYev 10:2 (a woman marrying someone forbidden to her); mNed 11:12 (ומקלקלת על בעלה). The term is also employed for male and female rape in mHor 3:7 (עומדים לקלקלה האיש קודם לאשה). In tSot 2:2 the verb stays for a woman committing adultery. In tSot 3:15 it refers to Samson engaging in intercourse with a prostitute (תחלת קלקלתו בעזה). tBQ 7:3 refers to female sexual transgression (למה הדבר דומה לאשה שקלקלה על בעלה) and tBQ 7:3-4 uses it in a figurative image (see below analysis of these texts). SifNum 19 uses the term for adultery, SifNum 131 for ‘harlotry with the daughters of Moav in Shittim.’

¹⁷⁶ BERKOWITZ, *Execution and Invention*, 81.

פגה – *pagah* (in the feminine) means “hard, undeveloped, unripe berry”¹⁷⁷ like “fig, date, or grape.” It refers to the Biblical *hapax legomenon* in the Song of Songs 2:13, פג – *pag* (in the masculine), indicating a green, early fig.¹⁷⁸ During the seventh year, the Sabbatical year, when land is to lie fallow, only fruits that grow on their own may be eaten. According to rabbinic (not biblical) law, when unripe figs (*pagim*) begin to ripen and redden, they may be eaten with bread in the field, since this is the usual way they are eaten.¹⁷⁹ However, only when they are fully ripe, one may take them home, in that usually at this time figs are gathered into one’s home (mShev 4:7, on *pagei shevi’it* see also mShev 2:5, tShev 1:8, 3:21, 7:14). The midrash halakhah (Sifra *behar* 1:10) derives this rabbinic ruling that figs must be fully ripe before they can be eaten at home or gathered from Lev 25:7 “all the produce [of the field] shall be for food,” interpreting that only when a fruit is defined as ‘food’ it can be eaten during the seventh year. ‘Food’ is defined in the way people generally eat a product. SifNum has it that the woman “stole” (גנבה – *ganvah*) the unripe figs in all its textual variants (beside London MS אכלה “she ate”). SifDeut speaks of “gathered and ate” (ליקטה ואכלה), which is in line with the transgression of the rabbinic law on unripe figs. Lieberman thus suggests to emend גנבה with גבבה “heaped, gathered.”¹⁸⁰ The version of SifNum, theft “is somewhat strange here, since the crime is then ambiguous: Is it that she stole someone else’s possession or that she ate something forbidden? I read this ambiguity as intentional, as an attempt on the part of the midrash to trivialize her sin: She stole something that no one could eat anyway!”¹⁸¹ MSan 3:3 prohibits to sell product of the seventh year, whereby to gather it to give it for taxes is permitted, “after the oppressors grew many” (משרבו האנסין), with

¹⁷⁷ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1133.

¹⁷⁸ The biblical verse is laden with erotic expectation: התאנה חקטה פגיה – “The fig tree has put forth its green fruit” (Song 2:13, ALTER, *Strong As Death Is Love*, 17). From here, the rabbinic term *pagah* is used metaphorically to indicate a young girl (mNid 5:7) or her sexual unavailability (bSan 107a: “Batsheva daughter of ‘Eli‘am was fit for David from the six days of Creation [...] but he ate her *pagah* (אלא שאכלה) [before the right time].”) According to this Babylonian justification, David’s transgression was nothing more than impatience. On the basis of this talmudic passage, LIEBERMAN (*Greek*, 163) decides that in our passage in SifNum the rabbis used “a figurative expression, implying by פגי שביעית the favors of an unmarried woman or even the connubium of the betrothed with her own bridegroom before they were fully married.” In this way, he explains why the two women are associated, they indeed committed two similar crimes: the first adultery, the second sex as unmarried or betrothed (‘she ate the fig prematurely’) – a transgression just a little less flagrant than the first. Transforming both *qilqelah* and *pagei shevi’it* into sexual transgressions is Lieberman’s interpretation, whereby to understand *pagei shevi’it* as a metaphor for sexual intercourse is rather not straightforward. Moreover, the midrash presumes two crimes “very far apart in scale,” while “Lieberman’s reading makes the sins seem quite similar” (BERKOWITZ, *Execution and Invention*, 246, n. 98), flattening the tension created by the midrashist. I think that the sexual imagery set up by Lieberman is not quite the main point of SifNum, which is rather interested in the injustice inflicted to Moses. The entire story seems to point to the fact that Moses was not betraying his mission, just did a false step. Although one must consider that impatience is generally attributed to him by rabbinic interpreters. Sexual transgressions committed by women are rather heavily judged in the rabbinic socio-cultural environment; on the contrary, the midrash is entirely directed to show that the woman in the *mashal* (Moses) did rather something trivial, insignificant and is afraid of unjust slander (see below).

¹⁷⁹ “The Mishnah makes clear the relative insignificance of the woman’s transgression, since the *pagim* that she took are partially permitted.” BERKOWITZ, *Execution and Invention*, 245, n. 97. See FRAADE, “Sifre Deuteronomy 26,” 264, n. 45.

¹⁸⁰ LIEBERMAN, *Greek*, 162, n. 5.

¹⁸¹ BERKOWITZ, *Execution and Invention*, 245, n. 94.

'oppressors' as a code term for 'Roman taxations.'¹⁸² So the term "stole" could also allude to some attenuating circumstances, such as socio-economic strains.

Daniel Sperber has suggested that the midrashic text alludes to the scapegoat *pharmakoi* ritual practiced in ancient Greece, and especially in Athens, to atone for the public. This involved putting around the neck of two innocent victims a string of figs – the person representing the women of the city being draped with a necklace of unripe white/green figs –, letting them around in procession, and then beating or stoning them to death. The figs hanging on the woman's neck would thus symbolize for the midrashist the complete innocence of the woman/Moses and her being executed as a scapegoat and identify Moses with a woman. The custom is mentioned in later Roman sources, which testimonies for the impression it left in the collective memory.¹⁸³ Menahem Kister¹⁸⁴ connects the mashal to the Greek terms *συκοφαντία* (meaning, false accusation, calumny, libel, "vexatious or dishonest prosecution,"¹⁸⁵ informing, extortion) and *συκοφάντης* "informer, denouncer, lat. *delator*." These expressions derive from *σῦκον* "fig" *φαίειν* "to show," lit. "to show the fig." The Latin author Festus (1st cent CE) relates for such a peculiar etymology a legend of Ithaca's young people breaking into gardens and stealing figs, and being put to death therefore, "so we call those who denounce for things of little value *sycophantae*." According to Kister, the small crime of the young Ithacans, stealing some figs, fits the midrash, "the woman is being punished for stealing figs and Moses is being punished for a transgression of little value," and also "the special element in the story of the midrash, the accused woman's demand to let her transgression be known and to show through the hanging of figs that her sin is of little value – derives from the element *φαίειν* (to show, to let know)."

SifDeut 349 uses the very term *סקיפנטיים* – *sqifantim* (clearly derived from *σῦκοφαντία*¹⁸⁶) in relation to the waters of Merivah: "תריבהו על מי מריבה" (דבר לג ח): "And you quarrelled with him at the waters of Merivah (Deut 33:8): You have lodged false accusations against him (Aaron)." For Kister, "the Holy One blessed be He is here strongly accused to be *σῦκοφάντης*, in that He is falsely accusing Aaron, and from this we learn that is doubtful whether Moses died for this sin of such a small value."¹⁸⁷ This a very daring positioning of critique taken by the midrashist.

¹⁸² As noted by FRAADE, "Sifre Deuteronomy 26," 277, n. 87: "economic pressures made the gathering of seventh year fruits *excusable*." See bSan 26a related to this mishnah: "Go and sow during the Sabbatical year because of *arnona*."

¹⁸³ Daniel SPERBER, "פגי שביעית – Pagei Shevi'it" (Sidra: A Journal for the Study of Rabbinic Literature 7 [1991]), 158. See also Daniel SPERBER, *Greek in Talmudic Palestine*, (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2012), 205-207.

¹⁸⁴ Menahem KISTER, "עוללות לאוצר המילים והביטויים של הספרות התלמודית, – "Items of Vocabulary and Expressions of the Talmudic Literature," in: *Mehqarim be-Talmud u-ve-Midrash: Sefer Zikaron le-Tirtsah Lifshits* (eds. Moshe Bar-Asher, Joshua Levinson, Berachyahu Lifshits; Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 2005), 528-531.

¹⁸⁵ The Online LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ) – Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), online version released by *The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG): A Digital Library of Greek Literature* (University of California, Irvine, 2011, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=1&context=lsj>), 1671.

¹⁸⁶ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1020: "סקיפנטיים f. (σῦκοφαντία) false accusation."

¹⁸⁷ KISTER, "Items," p. 531, n. 58. FINKELSTEIN ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 408.

Moses's statement in SifNum 136: וכמה בקשות ביקשתי "and how many requests [*baqashot*] I have requested [*biqashti*] [to G-d]" is connected via association to the woman's imploring in the mashal saying: [מכח] בבקשה "I beg [*bevaqashah*] [of you (pl.).]" The request or petition to publish one's misconduct has the function to highlight the position of the woman and of Moses as just. This move reverts the Roman practice of public shaming through a herald (a loanword in the midrash, כרוז מכריז – *karo*z *makhriz*, from the Greek κῆρυξ¹⁸⁸) and the lesson to the public. This turns the march around the public in a sort of defying act. Its reversal seems to be central to the midrashic construction. Moreover, the woman advocates for herself, representing a re-appropriation of the self. "The herald's announcement of her sin [...] works [paradoxically] to preserve her honor. The sinning woman ultimately earns a place next to Moses, with whom the parable compares her."¹⁸⁹ Maybe at play here is also a rabbinic reflection in the woman/Moses being paraded with the herald announcing her humiliation, with images being evoked as the Divine punishment of the Roman conquest, the public shame, the maltreatment transformed in resistance and sort of heroic resilience, the disproportion of the sanction inflicted. SifDeut and MekhDv have the Latin *campus* and Greek κάμπος, the place for large trials,¹⁹⁰ speaking in favor of a place symbolically significant for the rabbinic authors. Moses's supplication mentioned in the commentaries on Deuteronomy, although it goes completely unanswered, is chosen enigmatically as the ultimate model of rabbinic petitionary prayer.

So why women? Why are two women chosen as literary tropes and plot catalysts? Leaving aside the sexual imagery brought up by Lieberman, transgression can be advanced as an explanation, whereby transgression would be associated with female figures more easily. However, the text is constructed to attenuate Moses' mistake and rather nullify or deescalate his transgression. What emerges even more strongly from

¹⁸⁸ KRAUSS, *Lehnwörter* 2, 296 (cf. Dan 3:4, where the Aramaic *karoza*' is probably a loanword from the Old Persian *xrausa*, see Louis F. HARTMAN and Alexander A. DI LELLA (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* [The Anchor Bible, vol. 23, New York: Doubleday, 1978], 157). BERKOWITZ (*Execution and Invention*, 81-82) speaks of the Roman Empire growing practice to deliver a message with the publicizing of execution, quotes in relation to our text in SifNum the image of publicly bearing the object of the crime in 2 Macc 6:10: "two women were brought up for having circumcised their children, they were paraded round the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then flung from the top of the wall" and (p. 246, n. 100) 4 Macc 6:1-5: "They scourged him [Eleazar], a herald (κῆρυξ) standing and shouting out over against him, Obey the orders of the king." Cf. also bAZ 11b about the scalp of R. Yishma'el being paraded in Rome in a theatrical enactment having a healthy man (symbolizing Esau) riding (staying for ruling) over a cripple one (probably representing Jacob, walking with a limp after a mysterious fight, Gen 32:25-33), preceded by an herald announcing "the brother of our master is a forger, his accounts fraudulent" (again an allusion to Jacob tricking Esau). The entire ritual's allusions are rather obscure, but it emerges the image of a rabbinic self-depiction as being symbolically brought around by the Roman rulers in public shame and punishment.

¹⁸⁹ BERKOWITZ, *Execution and Invention*, 82.

¹⁹⁰ "A *campus* was an open area or plaza, often on the edge of a city, but occasionally within the city walls. [...] Because of their great size, plazas could accommodate large crowds, which is why the Campus Martius in Rome and perhaps certain plazas in other cities were the place for political debate and election as well as large trials. As an adjunct to this activity, they were also the location for honorary statues. [...] A *campus* could also be the location for temporary theatres and other entertainment." Alan KAISER, *Roman Urban Street Networks: Streets and the Organization of Space in Four Cities* (London and New York: Routledge Studies in Archeology, 2011), 29.

the SifDeut and the MekhDv versions of the story, is the preoccupation with slander. Already SifNum 137, immediately after the parable, states:¹⁹¹

ספרי במדבר קלז
בא וראה כמה חביבין צדיקים לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם, שבכל מקום שמזכיר מיתתן כך מזכיר סירחונן. וכל
כך למה, כדי שלא ליתן פתחון פה לבאי העולם לומר מעשים מקולקלין היה להם לכך מתו. כך בד' מקומות מזכיר
מיתתן של [של בני אהרן, ובכל מקום שמזכיר מיתתן] מזכיר סירחונן שם. להודיעך שלא היתה בהן אלא זו בלבד.

SifNum 137

Come and see how beloved are the righteous before the One who said and there was the world, for in very place that mentions their deaths, there it mentions their sins. And why all this? **So that there will not be to the creatures of the world a cause for gossip [pithon peh], to say: they secretly had in them disgraceful deeds [ma'asim mequlqalim] and that is why they died.** Thus in four places it mentions the deaths of the sons of Aaron and in each place it mentions their deaths, it mentions their sins, to tell you that they had in them only this sin.

Note that here the term מקולקלין – *mequlqalim*, which nicely loops back to the קילקלה – *qilqelah* in the parable, has not a specifically sexual connotation. The expression “שלא ליתן פתחון פה ל” is used generally against heretics (מינין – *minin*), as in Sifra *nedava* 2:2 (“in order not to give heretics occasion for rebellion”), or MdRY *yithro bahodesh* 5 (שלא ליתן פתחון פה לאומות העולם), or MdRY *beshallah shira* 4 (שלא ליתן פתחון פה לאומות העולם לומר שתי רשיות הן). The expression פתחון פה, lit., “opening of the mouth” (Ez 16:63, Ez 29:21), staying for “point of attack, fault-finding, excuse for wrong-doing,” thus connotes here gossip or slander as no less than pure defamation.¹⁹²

SifDeut 26 explicitly adds the preoccupation of Moses and the woman:

Moses

שלא יהו בריות אומרות עליי, דומה שזייף משה בתורה
או אמר דבר שלא נצטווה.

So that people will not say about me, it seems Moses has forged/falsified [the text of] the Torah, or, he said something he was not commanded.

Woman (metaphor)

שלא יהו בני המדינה אומרים, דומה שנמצא בה ניאוף
או דבר כשפים.

So that the people of the country [*bnei hamedinah*] would not say, it seems that adultery or a matter of sorcery was found in her.

The verb זייף – *ziyef* “to adulterate, to make thick” (in the *qal* “to drip”)¹⁹³ for the accusation against Moses of falsifying the Torah is put in relation with the most pervasive gendered accusations, charged particularly against women, namely ניאוף – *ni'uf* “adultery” (Exod 20:14, Deut 5:18, Num 5:11-31 about the *sotah*, the *suspected* adulteress) and כשפים – *kshafim* “sorcery” (also in the conceptual mapping of adulterating food, see Exod 22:18: מְכַשְׁפָּה לֹא תִחְיֶה, for tannaitic texts see, e.g.,

¹⁹¹ KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 464.

¹⁹² On gossip cf. yKet 2:10, 26d (quoted by LIEBERMAN, *Greek*, 163-164): “Are they believed when they say: ‘we are going out to gather unripe figs of the Sabbatical year [*pagei shevi'it*],’ or ‘we heard that man gossiping about his wife’ (i.e., of her bad behavior), or ‘[we heard] that woman gossiping about her children.’”

¹⁹³ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 389, on SifDeut 26: it seems as Moses was “smoothing over his own shortcomings.”

SifDeut 52: אשה בכשפיה,¹⁹⁴ or mAv 2:7 מרבה נשים מרבה כשפים – “the more women, the more sorcery”). By the juxtaposition with Moses, these stereotypical accusations against women acquire a different color, and the impression is gained that they are unjust.

For a rabbinic audience, the suggestion that Moses would have by his own initiative falsified some part of the Torah is no less than pure blasphemy. Accusing Moses of doing so is a way to mark nonsense in the text, and through the comparison, the prejudiced accusations toward women are put on the same level, as ridiculous. The parable operates a demystification in both directions of source and target, or, at least, it creates the perception of some sort of injustice hanging on in women’s particular exposition, slander, and indiscriminate charge of wrongdoing.

The element of the public bias is crucial. As noted by Michael Satlow about SifDeut, “[a]dultery and public shaming of the woman were so linked that the woman in this parable simply assumes that when people saw her being publicly shamed, they would assume that it was for adultery.”¹⁹⁵ In SifDeut there is indeed no comparison or any reason for the allegations put on the woman by the assumption of the public.

The implicit criticism and parallel between Moses and the woman’s situations is quite strong in SifDeut. The SifDeut innovations count the expression שלא יהו עמא [ר] “so that *“that people”* [Aramaic] would not think to say” giving with the Aramaic in the mouth of the woman a realistic touch; and G-d being described as a rich person answering harshly to a poor one in imploration (Prov 18:23) and also swearing an oath “by your life” – both pictures highlighting how unjust was the treatment reserved to the woman and to Moses.

The most important addition of SifDeut is the description of the woman as בת טובים – *bat tovim* “daughter of decent/distinguished/good people” (MekhDv has it בת טובים (וגדולים). The version of LevR 31:4 has בת טובים ובת גניסים “daughter of good people and daughter of nobles.”¹⁹⁶ This aspect is significant, in that the woman is inscribed in a genealogy, a pedigree, a familiar line of transmission, which gives her stance, whereby she is seen as representing that nobility. Legitimacy comes from her noble lineage and her being of noble descent, but she is also depicted as an active carrier and perpetuator of that heritage. The use of the plural is used to refer to the ancestors of Israel. We have seen how Sifra *tsav mekhilta demilu'im* 1:14 (section 2.2.) as described similarly Aaron as ‘daughter’ of Moses (genealogy) as a בת מלכים – *bat melakhim* “daughter of kings” (cf. Ps 45:10: בנות מלכים – “kings’ daughters”). We find some recurring topics among the metaphorical images with women as source domain and Israel or its leaders as target: in the defense of these figures, it often appears the term *bat melakhim/tovim* (for Moses here in section 2.3., for Aaron in section 2.2., for Israel in section 3.1.). The midrash uses the term *bnot melakhim* also for the daughters of Tselofhad – real Jewish women, not metaphorical ones – in a context of marriage suitability, ancestry and boldness in defending women’s rights to

¹⁹⁴ FINKELSTEIN ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 118. Attested in Vatican MS ebr. 32,2, 52, London MS Add. 16406, 336, Oxford MS Bodl. Or. 150, 150.

¹⁹⁵ Michael SATLOW, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 174; cf. also 173 about the *sotah* ritual becoming in rabbinic literature from a private event a public one.

¹⁹⁶ British Library Add. 27,169 [340] London. FRAADE, “Sifre Deuteronomy 26,” 274, n. 76 translates “a woman of nobility.” The term is from Greek γένος “gens, family, gentry, nobles” (JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 260). Josephus, *Vita* 4.27, speaks of his wife as “a Jewess by birth [*genos*] [...] of noble parents (lit., of good descent)” (γυναῖκα [...] τὸ δὲ γένος Ἰουδαίαν, γονέων εὐγενεστάτων).

inheritance within the Jewish people. “The Rabbis rain many praises on the daughters of Zelophehad: they are wise, exegetes and virtuous (BT Bava Batra 119b); they are like the daughters of kings, fine and worthy (Sifrei Zuta 15:32)”¹⁹⁷:

ספרי זוטא טו לב, כז ג
בנות צלפחד בנות מלכים נאות וכשרות¹⁹⁸

Sifre Zuta on Numbers 15:32, 27:3

the daughters of Tselofhad are daughters of kings (*bnot melakhim*), beautiful and *kesherot*/fitting.

The woman in the tradition in SifNum, SifDeut and MekhDv is advocating for herself, trying to defend herself from injustice, translated by the midrash so did Moses, so Israel, so the rabbis – this topic is a recurring thread (sections 2.3 on Moses, section 3.3. on Israel as people, section 4.1. on the rabbis). In SifDeut she is also inscribed in a line of transmission, whereby familiar and cultural heritage is seen as passing through women from generation to generation. The female gender is used to express a sense of abuse, violence and unfairness, but also to represent the resistance and reversion of such inequity.

3. Israel the people and its priestly role as a woman’s role

3.1. *Bat melakhim/melekh* – Israel the daughter and her singularity (MdRY, MdRSbY, SifDeut)

Israel’s identity role envisions an entire people which serves in a priestly role (Exod 19:6: *mamlehet kohanim* “a kingdom of priests”). The traditions analyzed here focus on the origins of Israel as its distinctive mark – its descendance from its ancestors, its land, and from its G-d. However, they never use the masculine term *ben* “son” for Israel, but rather always *bat* “daughter,” although both terms express equally the idea of “belonging to.” The choice of the feminine gender could depend from the fact that a daughter is strongly associated, biblically and halakhically, as “coming from her father’s house/mother’s house,” as “being part of that house,” of “that originating crucible” (until she moves to her husband’s house), as directly dependent and not autonomous. In the case of the metaphors around Israel, they serve to express how Israel actually originates from some source of authority, like its ancestral history. The term “daughter” could be used to reinforce legitimacy about the origin of Israel, its interconnection to G-d, and to the biblical forebears, as well as interdependence. Another aspect of the figure of a daughter is the security of continuity and perpetuation of the familiar and cultural line – according to tannaitic halakha, if she bears children, they will be Jewish – and thus the identification with the origins.

The first midrash reflecting on Israel as a people as a daughter starts from the key biblical verse Exod 15:2, interpreting its second part: זָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, אֶל־הִי אָבִי וְאֶרְמָמְנֶהּ – “This is *my G-d*, and I will glorify Him; *the G-d of my father*, and I will exalt Him.” This follows immediately after the text about G-d as mother, Israel as daughter and the Temple as

¹⁹⁷Tamar KADARI, “Daughters of Zelophehad: Midrash and Aggadah” (*Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 27 February 2009, Jewish Women’s Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/daughters-of-zelophehad-midrash-and-aggadah>).

¹⁹⁸ Hebrew text according to MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, b.6 (2637), p. 287, *Yalqut Shim‘oni* (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=47001&page=17>).

mother's house analyzed in section 1.4. The context – already seen above and here summarized – is a sequence of figurative images with a lot of switches to the female gender, reflecting on the destiny of Israel (underlined text highlights images in the feminine):

Exod 15:2 A: זָה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֶנְהוּ – “This is *my G-d*, and I will glorify Him”

1.) The hapax אָנְוָה is from נָוָה / נָאָה “make beautiful”

- The Temple beautifies G-d in front of the world.
- Israel: I will speak of the *beauties* of G-d...before all the nations of the world.”
- Nations of the world: G-d has left Israel (Song 6:1: “*most beautiful of women* (expressing Israel's unicity), where is your beloved?”)
- Answer: G-d has never left Israel

Parable: father accompanying son everywhere (inversion of familiar hierarchy)

Female Shekhinah (G-d) accompanying Israel everywhere (In Egypt, in the exile)

2.) אָנְוָה [א-לי ו] means אליונו “I [Israel] will accompany Him [G-d] (always)”

Play on the root לָוָה “to be connected” as the main concept

- Female Israel has never left G-d in the exile (Song 3:4: “I held him fast”)
- Until she was back to her Mother's house / the Temple (נָוָה)
- Mother: G-d in the Temple (Final image).

Exod 15:2 B: וְאֶרְמְמָנָהּ – “*the G-d of my father*, and I will exalt Him.”

Israel: I am a queen, daughter of kings

It follows an interpretation about Israel before all the nations of the world, highlighting again the role of Israel as the topic at the core of this midrashic section on the Song at the Sea in Exod 15, when the people of Israel were formed as a people, and saw it as coming from G-d (“This is my G-d”). The image of Israel as a queen, daughters of kings (the ancestors) is expressed in the following manner:

מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל בשלח דשירה ג
 "אל-הי אבי וארוממנהו, "אני מלכה בת מלכים אהובה
 בת אהובים קדושה בת קדושים טהורה בת טהורים.¹⁹⁹

מכילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי פרק טו
 ד"א "אל-הי א[ב]י ו[א]רוממ": אני אהובה בת אהובין מלכה
 בת מלכים טהורה בת טהורים קדושה בת קדושים.²⁰⁰

MdRY *beshallah shirah* 3

The G-d of my father, and I will exalt Him (Exod 15:2): **I am a queen, daughter of kings**, beloved, the daughter of beloved ones, holy, the daughter of holy ones, pure, the daughter of pure ones.

MdRSbY 15

Another word: *the G-d of my father, and I will exalt Him* (Exod 15:2): I am beloved, the daughter of beloved ones, **a queen, daughter of kings** (*malkah bat melakhim*), pure, the daughter of pure ones, holy, the daughter of holy ones.

¹⁹⁹ Hebrew text according to Oxford MS - Bodleian Library Or. 150, Uri Hebr 119, Neubauer 151:2, Marshall Or. 24, p. 128, cf. MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary* (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=6000&page=40>). HOROWITZ-RABIN ed., 128, LAUTERBACH ed., 186. The gender text is present in MS Munich, MS Vatican, MS Rome-Cassanata, editio princeps Constantinople, and the Genizah Fragment St. Petersburg Antonin 215 (Yevr. II B 215), 2a.

²⁰⁰ Hebrew text according to Paris Alliance Isr. XI 126.7a + John Rylands A. 1708.1 (F1) (The University of Manchester Library), see KAHANA, *Fragments*, 171. EPSTEIN-MELAMED ed., 80. The gendered image, is found also in the fragment T-S Misc. 36.132, 1a (F10) (KAHANA, *Catalogue*, 51, 52, 53.)

The focus of the tradition is “on the woman or the queen.”²⁰¹ The first point is that the woman Israel is like her ancestors. It follows a parable where a king (in MdRSbY, in MdRY the figure is simply a “man”) marries a woman (למלך בשר ודם שנשא אשה). The parable highlights the discrepancy between royalty (the king) and a normal person, a commoner. For her being a commoner, the king would be sometimes ashamed by her, by her family, by her forefathers (פועמים בוש בה [פעמים] בוש במשפחתה פעמים בוש). This alludes to the metaphorical marriage between G-d (the king) and Israel (just a human group), as being an impossible and incomparable match. The answer to the absurdity of the match, and to the shame it would bring to the Divinity, is particularly brazen and overly bold, even shameless. The midrashist states that also Israel, like G-d – also the woman, like the man – is royalty, the daughter of kings, by herself already a queen. This connects the Divine royalty to humans, Israel, also seen as royalty (whereby her ancestors and Israel the *bat* are seen as stemming from the Divine themselves, with the element of exclusivity marking Israel in relation to G-d).

In a version of MdRSbY which is found only in the Midrash haGadol, the woman is the important / noble figure and the husband the ordinary man:

מכילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי פרק כ
 וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר אמר להם דין אני נוהג ביניכם ובין כל הדברים שאלו לא קיבלתם
 עליכם לא הייתי נפרע מכם אינו דומה מקבל לשאינו מקבל. ר' יהודה הנשיא מושלו משל למה הדבר דומה לאחד
 שנשא אשה <חשובה> אמרו לה התלקחת ליה פיסו עמריה. כך אתם ישראל נמשכתם לי נתמשכתם לי נקוי
 שתעשו לי רצוני.²⁰²

MdRSbY 20

G-d spoke all these words, saying (Exod 20:1):

He said to them, I shall apply the law to you in all matters. For if you had not accepted [My law] upon yourselves, I would not exact punishment among you. One who accepts is not the same as one who does not accept.

R. Judah the Patriarch told a parable: To what is the matter alike? **To one who married an [important] woman. They said to her: You married him, now work with his wool.**

Likewise [G-d said], You, Israel, you were drawn to Me and pledged to Me, now let's hope that you will do My will.

The midrashic text comments the introduction of the “ten words/commandments.” The superfluous “all” is understood as Israel having committed themselves to accept the entire Torah and all its commandments. The commandments are compared to working wool for a married woman, a task which is not enforced upon a rich woman who can delegate it to her servants (mKet 5:5: “if she brought three household slaves she does not work in wool”). Israel is compared to a noble, rich or important woman who decides to give up her privilege to marry an ordinary / poor man (G-d!) and thus becoming bound in this way to the load/burden of domestic chores – exemplified by working wool – meaning the commandments. The Law is seen as a hard work of house upkeeping and servitude which Israel has taken upon itself out of love for G-d, renouncing to a life of leisure. This topic appears often in aggadic midrashim about a daughter of kings or of noble origins who renounced to her standing to join Israel and marry there (for instance, Ruth as daughter of the king of Moav in RuthR 2:9). The expression “they said to her: you married him, now work wool” is “rendered in Aramaic, which is rather rare in the tannaitic meshalim.

²⁰¹ TEUGELS, *The Meshalim*, 275.

²⁰² Hebrew text according to Mordechai MARGULIES, *Midrash Haggadol on the Pentateuch: Exodus* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1975). The term “important” is added by EPSTEIN-MELAMED ed., 145; David W. NELSON, *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2006), 234.

Possibly, a popular saying is involved here. The Aramaic expression פּיסי עמריה is the equivalent of the Hebrew עשה בצמר.²⁰³

Either ways there is an attempt to highlight Israel's singularity, unicity and outstanding or noble stance, connected to her origins' history and declined in the image of a "daughter." Because of her ancestral precedents Israel is fitting for her partnership with the Divine. In her lineage history, Israel is seen as being a daughter of the forebearers, and of the Divine. She is seen as renouncing her importance in the world, and instead to trace her nobility to her clinging to G-d's commandments. This is a privilege, an inheritance from her ancestors, but also a heavy task which she continues to upkeep (see section 2.2. on the idea of the Temple upkeep and service as connected to the domestic upkeep by a wife). In LevR 4:2 the soul is defined as a *bat melakhim* married to the body – an ordinary man (משל לעירוני שהיה נשוי בת מלכים). The soul, as the *bat melakhim*, is from "above" and it has a Divine spark.

In SifDeut 37 the Land of Israel is represented as the father/ancestors of Israel who is her daughter. The land (or possibly G-d) is defined as a king, and Israel as a king's daughter (*bat melekh*). The Land of Assyria (or Sennacheriv) is compared to a man who want to marry Israel, becoming her husband, and translated, her husband's house:

ספרי דברים לז
"לקחתי אתכם אל ארץ כארצכם" אל ארץ יפה מארצכם אין כתוב כן... והרי דברים קל וחומר, אם מי שבא לומר
שבחה של ארצו לא אמר גנייה של ארץ ישראל קל וחומר לשבחה של ארץ ישראל... משל לאדם שהלך לישא
אשה, אמר לה, אביך מלך ואני מלך, אביך עשיר ואני עשיר, אביך מאכילך... אין זה פתוי, כיצד אומר לה, אביך
הדיוט ואני מלך אביך עני ואני עשיר.²⁰⁴

SifDeut 37

I take you to a land like your Land (2 Ki 18:31-32). We don't find it written: "To a land lovelier than your Land." ... If a person coming to praise his own land does not denigrate the Land of Israel, isn't it only logical (that Moses praises the Land over Egypt). An analogy— a certain person went to **betroth a woman**. He said to her: **your father is a king** and I am a king; your father is rich, and I am rich; your father feeds you.... This is no seduction! How should he win her favor? By saying to her: your father is a commoner, but I am a king; your father is a pauper, but I am rich ...

The father / Land (or G-d) is feeding the daughter / Israel. In all these images, the *bat melekh* Israel is of G-d or of the Land or of the patriarchs (*bat melakhim*) and this singles her out. The difference of Israel is rooted in her origins in and connection with G-d. A later, amoraic text, LevR 23:7 defines Israel as the only daughter (*bat yehidah*) of G-d (משל למלך שהיה לו בת יחידה):

In [this] mashal, the only daughter of a king (*bat yehidah*, evoking Gen. 22:2's description of Isaac, *et binekha et yehidekha*) provides a parallel to the people Israel. The king's curious decision to strand his daughter not once but twice in alleys filled with pervers and magicians seems to match G[-]d's plan for Israel in Egypt and Canaan (and perhaps also to echo the binding of Isaac?).²⁰⁵

²⁰³ TEUGELS, *The Meshalim*, 419.

²⁰⁴ Hebrew text according to Vatican MS ebr. 32:2, p. 71 (cf. MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*, <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21002&mm15=000000037000>). For the English translation see JAFFEE, *Sifre Dvarim* (<https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/book/sifre-devarim/chapter/pisqa-37/>).

²⁰⁵ Beth A. BERKOWITZ, "A Short History of the People Israel from the Patriarchs to the Messiah: Constructions of Jewish Difference in Leviticus Rabbah 23" (New York: NYU School of Law, The Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization 2014), 27.

G-d asks his daughter to *resist* the corrupted ways around her: “Her father said to her, My daughter, give it your attention (בתי תני דעתך) so that you will not practice like the practice of these or like the practice of those.” The same text compares Israel to Rebecca “a rose among thorns” – who outshone the men of her family around her (LevR 23:1). The responsibility of Israel is depicted as that of an only daughter, a daughter with a particular origin. Her being a female descendant contributes to the image and to Israel sense of self, maybe as being particularly exposed, and maybe also as being particular in general, in respect to normal hierarchical pattern and gendered pattern, whereby the female gender creates as sense of being particular and unique in a male-centred world.

3.2. Israel as mother of G-d (Sifra)

The gendered image here analyzed is found in *mekhilta demilu'im* – commenting on the biblical dedication of the Tabernacle –, and more specifically, in its second cycle of exposition on the very beginning of *parashat shemini* (Lev 9:1ff., ‘on the eight day’), describing the inaugural sacrificial service. This exegesis opens calculating the time of the Tabernacle dedication. It then moves on to the use of the expression וַיְהִי “and it was” in וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי “and it was on the eight day” (Lev 9:1). This is interpreted as evocating the וַיְהִי “and it was” in וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר “and it was evening and it was morning” (Gen 1:5) within the creation’s account, establishing a parallel between the two accounts. For the midrashist this means that the day of the dedication of the Tabernacle was as joyous for G-d as the day of the creation of heaven and earth. The exposition then moves to the moment before the inaugural sacrificial service (Lev 9), namely “when Israel finished the work of the erection of the Tabernacle, and Moses blessed them.” At this point, about the time of the blessing for Israel’s work of erecting the Tabernacle, on the day of its dedication and of the beginning of the sacrificial service, the midrash inserts a word-by-word exegesis of the verse Song of Songs 3:11, meant to describe this moment (and the importance of the sacrificial service). This legal midrash about the dedication of the Tabernacle and the centrality of sacrifices is interestingly expressing a rabbinic peculiar vision with gendered figurative language.

Sifra *shemini mekhilta de-milu'im* 1:15-16 reproduces an old homily on Song 3:11 phrase-by-phrase, which ends with Israel being described as the mother of G-d, crowning Him with the Tabernacle (“a bold identification of Israel as mother”²⁰⁶):

"במלך שלמה" (שיר השירים ג אי): המלך שהשלום שלו,
 "בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו" (שיר השירים ג אי): [העטרה] זה אהל מועד, שהוא מצויר בתכלת וארגמן ובשש,
 "אמו" (שיר השירים ג אי): אין "אמו" אילא ישראל, שנאמר, "ולאומי[ם] אלי האזינו" (ישעיהו נא ד).²⁰⁷

“King Solomon” (Song 3:11): [this is G-d] the King Who owns wholeness [*shalom*, referring to *Shlomo*];
 “in the crown with which his mother crowned him” (Song 3:11): **this** [the crown] **is the Tabernacle** [*ohel mo'ed*] which is colored with blue and purple wool, and linen;

²⁰⁶ Michael FISHBANE, *Shir HaShirim, The JPS Bible Commentary – Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 257, cf. Michael FISHBANE, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181.

²⁰⁷ Hebrew text according to the best textual witness Vatican MS - Biblioteca Apostolica ebr. 66, Codex Assemani (WEISS ed., 44c), cf. MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary* (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=18000&mm15=004001002163%2004&mismilla=40>.) The gendered metaphor is also attested in Parma MS - Biblioteca Palatina Cod. Parm. 3259, 138.

“his mother:” His [G-d’s] mother is none other than Israel, as it is said: “And My nation [*le’umi*], give ear to Me (Isa 51:4) [*le’umi = le’imi* “My mother”].

In this passage, the Tabernacle is compared, rather than to the mother’s house of the Song (cf. section 1.4.), to the crown in the mother’s hands (זה אהל מועד). The Tabernacle decorated with blue, purple and linen resembles the jewelry on a crown, representing the outward symbol of G-d’s presence and manifestation on earth, achieved through Israel’s work.

The designation of Israel as G-d’s mother reverses gendered hierarchical structures, identifying female Israel as the principal partner in the relationship, namely the mother, and positioning G-d in filial dependence. The image of the mother Israel who is crowning G-d – with the Divine being nurtured and sustained by His people – indicates G-d’s reliance on Israel.

Israel fulfils the tending and caring task of bringing the Divine to the world, as in the case of the Tabernacle, establishing a place for the Divine on earth. The figure of the mother represents the stature of Israel and its status as caretaker and custodian of the Divine. A tannaitic theological posture is thus expressed in maternal terms. Israel as mother puts a spotlight on intense mothering work and on the figure of a mother as someone who shapes, develops and sustains other people/her offspring, as well as someone who has a decisive imprinting on them. The rabbis attempt to depict Israel as a crucial element when thinking of the Divine-human relationship and its expression in this world, and for such a significance they use the image of a mother.

In the midrash of SongR 3:11 (and almost identical in ExodR 52:5), a longer version is found where Israel is described as daughter and mother of G-d and G-d as mother and daughter of Israel (concluding with “R. Shimon bar Yohai [upon hearing this] kissed R. Eleazar on the brow, and said: Had I come into the world only to hear this interpretation from you, it would have been enough for me,” indicating an odd image as defining the rabbinic self):

שאל רשב"י את רבי אלעזר ברבי יוסי: אמר לו אפשר ששמעת מאביך מהו "בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו"? (שיר ג יא) [...] חיבב הקדוש ברוך הוא את ישראל וקראן "בתי", ה"ה"ד: "שמעי בת וראי" (תהלים מה יא). [...] ולא זז מחבבן עד שקראן "אימה". שנא: "הקשיבו אלי עמי ולא[נמי] [אלי האזינו]" [ולאמי].²⁰⁸

R. Shimon bar Yohai asked R. Eleazar the son of R. Yose: Have you perhaps heard from your father an interpretation of the verse the crown with which his mother crowned him? (Song 3:11). [...]

At first, in His endearment of Israel, the Holy One called Israel “My daughter,” as it is written: “Listen, daughter, and give attention” (Ps 45:11). [...]

And He did not move from His endearment until He called her “**Mother**,” as it is said: “Pay attention to Me, My people, and **My nation [*le’umi*], [give ear to Me]” (Isa 51:4), “**My mother**” [*le’imi*].**

The maternal body and risk are recurring topics in gendered metaphors used for tannaitic innovations and self-defining moments. The figure of the mother, giving life at her own risk and giving her imprinting and teaching to her offspring, represents the stature of Israel and its status, and it serves rabbinic identity. The tabernacle and the sacrificial service were like a crown for G-d, given to him by Israel, who in her act of externalization, is like a mother to the Divine.

²⁰⁸ Hebrew text according to MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica ebr., 76, cf. MA’AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary* (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=638000&page=47>).

3.3. Israel's claim as women's claim (TBQ)

The two texts analyzed in this section²⁰⁹ represent the opening questions in a list of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai *homer* (metaphorical/figurative) interpretations. The expression *כמן חומר* – *ke-min homer* “as a jewel” seems to indicate a figurative, metaphorical interpretation which adorns the words of Torah, done with a “measure-for-measure” hermeneutical method:

ת' בבא קמא ז ג
 חמשה דברים היה רבן יוחנן בן זכאי אומרן כמן חומר:
 א. מפני מה גלו ישראל לבבל יותר מכל הארצות כולם? מפני שבית אברהם אבין משם.
 משלו משל: למה הדבר דומה? לאשה שקלקלה על בעלה. להיכן משלחה? לבית אביה.

ת' בבא קמא ז ד
 ב. בלוחות הראשנים הוא אומ': "והלוחות מעשה אלים המה וגו'" (שמות לב טז).
 ובשניות: והלוחות מעשה משה "והמכתב מכתב אלים" (שמות לב טז).
 משלו משל: למה הדבר דומה? למלך בשר ודם שקידש את האשה: הוא מביא את הלבבל ואת הקולמוס ואת הדיו
 ואת השטר ואת העדים.
 קלקלה: היא מביאה את הכל. דייה שיתן לה המלך כתב הכר יד שלו.²¹⁰

tBQ 7:3

Five things Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said as a *homer*:

a.) Why were Israel exiled to Babylonia more than to all the other countries? Because **the house of Abraham our father** [*beit 'Avraham 'avinu*] is from there.

A parable was made [lit., he has made a parable, *moshlo mashal*]: **To what is the matter comparable? To a woman who acted disgracefully** [*qilqelah*] behind her husband [*'al ba 'alah*]. **Where does he send her? To her father's house** [*le-veit 'aviah*].

tBQ 7:4

b.) Of the first tablets he [the biblical text/G-d] says, *And the tablets were the work of G-d* (Exod 32:16).

But regarding the second, the tablets were the work of Moses, *and the writing was the writing of G-d* (Exod 32:16).

A parable was made [lit., he has made a parable, *moshlo mashal*]: **To what is the matter comparable?** To a king of flesh and blood **who betroths** [*qidesh*] **the woman. He brings the scribe, quill, ink, document and witnesses.**

She acted disgracefully [*qilqelah*]: **She brings everything** [for the writ of betrothal].

It is enough for her if the king gives her [only] **a writing of recognition/signature by his own hand.**

A first consideration is that in the structure of this chapter much material has parallels in other tannaitic texts. However, the two gendered texts do not have a parallel, and are recorded only in the Tosefta:

<i>homer</i>	Tosefta	Tannaitic parallel
	tBQ 7:1 thief and robber – ruling	mBQ 7:1 MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 13 MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 15

²⁰⁹ A first draft of this material was presented at the Tosefta workshop organized by Adiel Schremer and Binyamin Katzoff: “Tosefta - New Perspectives,” 2019 at Bar Ilan University.

²¹⁰ Text according to the Vienna MS. LIEBERMAN ed., *Neziqin Bavot*, 29, lines 12-19; LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah* 9, *Neziqin*, 65-66, lines 12-18/19. ZUCKERMANDEL ed., 357 (lines 30-32)-358 (lines 1-4). The only manuscript variant relevant for this inquiry is: Vienna אברהם אבין; Erfurt אברהם; ed. *princ.* בית אברהם אביהם.

		Sifra <i>vayiqra' dibbura' de-hovah</i> 13:2
	tBQ 7:2 why thief stricter than robber? why four/fivefold restitution?	MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 15 MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 12
1.	tBQ 7:3 why exile to Babylonia?	
2.	tBQ 7:4 why writing of G-d on the second tablets?	
3.	tBQ 7:5 why ' <i>asher</i> about the prince?	MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 2
4.	why piercing ear of a slave?	Sifra <i>vayiqra' dibbura' de-hovah</i> 5:1
5.	tBQ 7:6 why no iron on the altar? tBQ 7:7 why whole stones for the altar?	mMid 3:4 MdRY, <i>bahodesh</i> 11 Sifra <i>qiddushin</i> 10:8
	tBQ 7:8 seven kinds of thieves	MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 13
	tBQ 7:9 Israel sought to deceive G-d	MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 13
	tBQ 7:10 ox/sheep <i>homer</i>	MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 12
	tBQ 7:11 classifications of theft	MdRY, <i>neziqin</i> 13

The two gendered texts acquire a particular relevance also for their embedding in this toseftan context, between the other topics. I argue that tBQ 7:3-4 can be seen as challenging prophetic gendered images of Divine violence and abandonment. Within the context of the other toseftot in the chapter, the passages create gendered images of the relationship between Israel and the Divine which, unlike such images in the prophets, completely discard rape, violation, destruction and total abandonment of feminine Israel, thus not backing them as justified acts for a betrayed husband. Rather, it suggests alternative solutions for reconciliation which consider the vulnerability, exposure and integrity of the female subject/Israel. The rabbis inherit from the prophetic texts the idea of Israel as a wife who acted disgracefully. They advocate for Israel, inaugurating a narrative of restoration, whereby in this move they maintain the female image.

tBQ 7:3 has Israel in Bavel as a woman sent back to her father's (namely Abraham's) house. This figurative comparison bases on Gen 11:27-28 where it is said that Abraham is originally from Babylonia and 2 Kings 25 about the exile of Judah to Babylonia (and the prophetic texts). The source domain is represented by "a woman back to her father's house" and the target domain by the people of Israel in exile. Abraham represents "the father of Israel" and Babylonia "a father's house," "a parents' home." Thus, the exile is not depicted by an image of suffering in an unfamiliar country, but by a familiar depiction of refuge and shelter. The exile is actually a good place. The 'she'-subject is protected in Babylonia, the 'he'-subject does not expose her to violence, there is no breaking of the relationship, and Israel is not repudiated. The 'return home' is a powerful image, whereby the familiar link remains in place. In Exod 18:27 Moses sends Tsippora to her father's house for the duration of his mission in Egypt because of the potential dangers. SongR 8:10:2 elaborates:

שהיו אומות העולם מונין לישראל ואומרים להם: א"כ למה הגלה אתכם מארצו, ולמה החריב למקדשו? וישראל היו משיבין להם: אנו דומים לבת מלכים שהלכה לעשות רגל רדופים בבית אביה. סוף שחזרת לביתה לשלום.²¹¹
The nations of the world would taunt Israel saying to them: Why did G-d exile you from His land and why did He lay waste His Sanctuary? Israel responded to them: We are like a king's daughter (bat

²¹¹ Hebrew text according to Vatican MS Biblioteca Apostolica ebr. 76 (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=638000&mm15=008009000000>)

melakhim) who went to do *regel redufim* (maybe from the Latin *regale repudium*, based on mutual consent of the couple) in her father's house. In the end she will return to her own home in peace/

tBQ 7:4 has Israel as a woman obtaining her betrothal writ signed. The husband has the obligation to provide the contract for his wife (see mBB 10:4: "And the bridegroom pays the (scribe's) fee"). However, "[a]fter Israel sinned with the golden calf, [...] it is she who brought the betrothal contract to her groom, asking only that he sign it clearly."²¹² Her effort is recognized as significant. Lieberman comments that "she wants to reconcile thus she brings everything and she provides for the husband."²¹³ Lieberman understands the bringing of the contract by the woman as her initiative of reconciliation, and regretting. She asks him to fulfill/maintain the promise and he does so by signing with his very hand. The Torah itself / the second tablets represent the contract. The encounter at Mount Sinai is the two instances of betrothal / *qiddushin*: the first promise with the first tablets and the second confirmation with the second ones. The signed betrothal writ represents a guarantee for the defense of Israel from vulnerability/exposure, like the ketubah or betrothal writ represent an insurance.

The two texts express the two signs of reparation/*tiqqun* of the relationship: first, Babylonia represents a protection (the husband does not expose his wife to violence) and a commitment to maintain the marital bond; second, the signature on the second tablets confirms that He will not abandon her / they still have a contract, a bond.

As I go on to explain, it emerges that the interest of the rabbinic author is to defend Israel/the female subject. This can be evinced also by the context of the chapter's first part, especially tBQ 7:1-7, whose main topic represents a reinterpretation of Israel's relationship with the Divine after a sin/ clash in terms of non-violent atonement.

The tannaim inherit the image of the woman transgressing a bond of fidelity, but in creating a restorative / defensive image of repentance and reconciliation they reproduce a female figure. In the moment of justifying Israel's behavior, switching to a male subjectivity for Israel is much easier, more empowering and more commonly adopted. But the Tosefta maintains the female subjectivity in its positive evaluation of Israel as worthy, repenting, deserving respect and integrity. The Tosefta creates a new narrative of marriage solutions, innovative in that it skips the part of rape, violation and abandonment. Blame and violence are not associated with one another, in a complete shifting of prophetic gendered metaphors for Israel's punishment. The two texts in the Tosefta represent an answer to Jer 3:8: "I have sent her away and give her a divorce writ" (שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ, וְאַתָּן אֶת-סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֶיהָ אֵלֶיהָ) about the northern kingdom of Israel and as threat for Judah.

The co-texts of the gendered figures strongly speak in this direction. In tBQ 7:9 it is pleaded "forgive the iniquity, and do not destroy them [Israel]" (Ps 78:38). In tBQ 7:8 G-d is said to be great, in that He was the victim of thievery but kept silent.²¹⁴ TBQ 7:7 speaks about the stones of the altar which make whole the bond between Israel and G-d and therefore must be whole. Then it adds that children of Torah, who bring peace to the

²¹² Michael SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 50.

²¹³ LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah* 9, *Neziqin*, 66, line 18. And this takes place before the *qiddushin*, since Moses still did not transmit to her/Israel the tablets/the contract. Lieberman brings also mBB 5:8: "If there was a middleman between them, and the jar broke, it is broken to [the loss of] the middleman."

²¹⁴ Abraham GOLDBERG, פירוש מבני ואנליטי, תוספתא בבא קמא: תוספתא בבא קמא – *Tosefta Bava Kamma A Structural and Analytic Commentary with a Mishna-Tosefta Synopsis* (Magnes Press, Hebrew University, Jerusalem: 2001), 143.

world, all the more so should remain whole. This can be read as a commandment to be upright, but more likely as a blessing of physical integrity and protection against violence, whereby the woman and Israel are again compared and associated as bodily exposed. The parallel version in the MDRY indeed renders “that punishment should not come upon them.”

In the same way, tBQ 7:6 about the iron which must not be lifted on the altar – since “the sword is a sign of punishment, and the altar is a sign of atonement” (החרב סימן) (פורענות והמזבח סימן כפרה) – makes a strong argument for the physical integrity and defense of Israel: “Stones, which do not see, hear, or speak - because they bring atonement between Israel and their Father in Heaven, Scripture says, You shall not lift up iron over them – children of Torah who are an atonement for the world, how much the more should any one of all those forces of injury [which are in the world] not come near unto them!” (שלא יגע בהן אחד מן המזיקין כולן). That the sword and iron or other forces of injury should not be lifted on Israel parallels again the woman of the prophets: no hand should be lifted on her. TBQ 7:5, through its interpretation of the prince who brings a sin offering, exalts those doing repentance, thus casting a positive light on the repentance of Israel/the female subject. Even a prince can sin, and thus Israel/the female subject are compared to a prince, a leader.

The rabbinic interest is first and foremost to defend themselves / Israel, and to negate the divorce between Israel and G-d, as claimed in Christian polemics, especially by Origen (Origen Homilies on Jeremiah 3: *may she still go back to him?* Origen: G-d has given to the congregation of Israel a writ of divorce”).²¹⁵ However, they maintain that in order to defend their interest the feminine figure is still a valid metaphorical image, empowering and valuable enough for such a delicate task of self-defense, self-consolation. The force of imaginative narrative and female embodied experience is referred to as positively constructing, enforcing rabbinic identity and idea of self.

Atonement is achieved innovatively, without violent punishment or destruction, whereby in the prophets the restorative moment usually follows a rape and a high price. While the prophets give expression to the pain and humiliation endured (also in a disturbing way), the rabbis create a vocabulary of self-empowerment. It is possible to see the personal involvement and intimate vicinity of the rabbinic authors to the figurative scene (e.g., the use of the term *'avinu*, consider also EccR 12:5 quoting this passage “They were from Babylon and they returned to Babylon.”) It is interesting that Babylonia/exile is described in such positive terms in a tannaitic text originated from the Land of Israel, without appearing first in a Babylonian source. The paying back, measure for measure aspect of *homer*-interpretation does not contain any more rape or violence as a parameter. The collective idea of exposure and fragility of Israel leads to an identification of Israel with the feminine, as exposed, accused of betrayal; the polemic accusation and the defensive response led to empathy with the destiny of women.²¹⁶

Tannaitic parallels for the entire tBQ 7 exist, but no real parallel is found for the two gendered texts. Nevertheless, similar or derivative images are found in other traditions.

²¹⁵ Reuven KIMELMAN, “Rabbi Yokhanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third-Century Jewish-Christian Disputation,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 73, n. 3/4 (1980): 567-595. See also Steven D. FRAADE, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 267-8, n. 35.

²¹⁶ The tales in Bavli Gittin for instance “place the blame squarely on the sexual aggressor,” refusing to blame women for their violation (Julia WATTS BELSER, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem* [Oxford: Oxford University Press], 61).

SifDeut 43 describes a “king who sent his wife out/back into her father’s house” (וטרפה (בבית אביה). This text presupposes our text in the Tosefta, but it is not really a parallel to it. It does not explain why the exile is a ‘father’s house’ (on this text see next section). Sifra *shemini mekhilta de-milu'im* 1:5 refers to the sin of the golden calf and the following reconciliation through the tabernacle as “a man sent his wife away and afterward he became reconciled to her” (אשתו והוציאה, לאחר זמן ניתרצה לה), whereby the tabernacle functions as a restorative house (for this text see section 2.2.).

For the image of G-d signing the tablets after the request and initiative of Israel there is a related image in SifNum 131, where the doubling of the ketubbah is a compensation for the wife’s suffering:

"כי אתם לא עמי" (הושע א ט) "ואומר והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים אשר לא ימד ולא יספר והיה במקום אשר יאמר להם לא עמי אתם" (הושע ב א). וכי מה ענין זה לזה? משל למלך שכעס על אשתו שלח אחר סופר לבוא ולכתוב לה גט. עד שלא בא הסופר, נתרצה המלך לאשתו. אמר המלך: אפשר שיצא סופר זה מיכן חלוק? אלא אומר לו: בוא כתוב שאני כופל לה כתובתה, לכך נאמ': "כי אתם לא עמי" ואו' "והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים."

You are not my people (Hos 1:9) *And the number of the people of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or counted, and in place of their being told 'You are not My people'* (Hos 2:1). What does one verse have to do with the other? A parable: A king gets angry with **his wife and sends for a scribe to write her a divorce**. But before the scribe arrives, the king **is reconciled with his wife**, whereupon the king says: ‘Shall the scribe leave here empty-handed? Tell him to come and write that **I am doubling her ketubbah**.’ This is why it is said, *For you are not My people*, and then it says, *The number of the people of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea*.²¹⁷

Our toseftot inaugurate a narrative that is much used and developed in later rabbinic texts. These metaphorical images are picked up by several amoraic sources and by Rashi, giving them a place in the canonical reception history of rabbinic literature (see for instance ExodR 43:1, DeutR 3:17, SongR 8:10, ARN B 2, Yalkut Shimoni 318, PesiqtaR Kahana 19:4, Midrash Tanhuma 3:9:30).

In the reception of the image of Babylonia as “a father’s house” in the Babylonian Talmud, this metaphoric idea becomes a central node for the elaboration of issues of Diaspora and identity, specifically through gendered female images. BPes 87b quotes our Tosefta presenting the version “back to her *mother’s* house.” Here at the same time Babylonia is seen as the former home of the matriarchs and Abraham is depicted as mother. The biblical “mother’s house” also evokes always a context of preparation for a marriage.

Bavli Pesahim 87a-88a presents a long reflection on the Babylonian Diaspora in particular and the meaning of Diaspora in general, employing the metaphor of Israel who is sent back to “her mother’s house.” It opens commenting on the mishnah about a woman moving between a “father’s house” and a “father-in-law’s house” on Pesah. The same passage contains a midrashic interpretation of Song of Songs 8:10: “She [Israel] is like a bride who was found perfect in her father-in-law’s house,” as well as a quote from Hosea 2:18 about an eschatological non-hierarchical marital relationship: “you shall call Me no more: My Master (*ba'al*).” The image of “father’s house” is used to depict the Diaspora, and the one of “father-in-law’s house” is used to depict the land of Israel. A compelling story in the image of a marital couple is constructed to demonstrate how the exile and Diaspora were a positive and necessary separation between the Divine and Israel. The

²¹⁷ KAHANA, *Sifre on Numbers: an annotated edition*, vol. 4, 428-29 and 1089.

Diaspora is transformed into a “house,” a “father’s/mother’s house.” Babylonia is described as a place of origin and return, the diaspora as a blessing. It is explained why the diaspora was an act of kindness toward Israel: “G-d exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them and allow Israel to grow; and He scattered them among the nations so that they could not be destroyed all at once;” and why Babylonia was chosen: “He knew that the Jewish people are unable to withstand the harsh decrees of the Romans. Therefore, He exiled them to Babylonia; and it is due to the fact that their language, [Aramaic,] is similar to the language of the Torah.” The sugyah then culminates:

רבי יוחנן אמר: מפני ששיגרו ל**בית אמן**, משל לאדם שכעס על אשתו, להיכן משגרה - **לבית אמה**.
 Rabbi Yohanan said: [Babylonia was chosen as place of Israel’s exile] because [G-d decided] to send them back to **their mother’s house**, [i.e., the birthplace of the forebearers of the Jewish people, who lived in Aram in Babylonia]. [This is] comparable to a man who is angry at his wife; to where does he send her? [He sends her] to **her mother’s house**.

והיינו דרבי אלכסנדר, דאמר: שלשה חזרו למטעתן, אלו הן: ישראל, כסף מצרים, וכתב לוחות. ישראל - הא דאמרן... כתב הלוחות - דכתיב "ואשברם לעיניכם." תנא: לוחות נשברו ואותיות פורחות.
 And this is [expressed by] Rabbi Alexandri, who said: [There are] three [that] returned to their [points of] origin, and these are they: The Jewish people, the money of Egypt, and the writing on the Tablets. The Jewish people [returned to their source]: as we just said, [to Babylonia.] ... The writing on the Tablets as it is written: [*And I took hold of the two tablets, and cast them out of my two hands, and broke them before your eyes* (Deut 9:17)]. And it was taught [in the Tosefta:] The tablets were broken and the letters are flying [and returning to their point of origin, their source in Heaven.]

The sugyah concludes connecting the two gendered images of Tosefta Bava Qamma: the mother’s house and the tablets being broken. In Bavli Megillah (an entire tractate reflecting on Israel’s diasporic identity and gendered images) Esther is mentioned regarding her Jewish identity in relation to her ‘father’s house,’ as the father’s house would be a symbolic image to maintain identity. Tamar is said to have mothered kings and prophets, as well as the line of the Messiah, thanks to her being modest and veiled in her ‘father-in-law’s house.’

Finally, in Bavli Yoma 54a we find the same metaphor, but here *G-d is the wife* of Israel, the modest bride in her father’s house (in the Diaspora, before entering the Land in the desert), but not in her father-in-law’s house (in the land of Israel), establishing also a new connotation of the female subject (משל לכלה כל זמן שהיא בבית אביה צנועה מבעלה כיון) (שבאתה לבית חמיה אינה צנועה מבעלה).

3.4. Women’s jewels and *mitsvot* (SifDeut)

The commandments / *mitsvot* are a central idea of the rabbinic self, whereby the target domain influences our perception of the female image in the source domain. The ancient rabbis correlate the rituals they uphold to women’s jewels or adornments in numerous passages in the midrash of Sifre Deuteronomy of the school of R. ‘Aqiva’. SifDeut 36 discusses Deut 6:4-9, which is one of the passages forming a main part of the rabbinic prayer service, the Shema’ (cf. mBer 2:2). G-d is described in this prayer as being the G-d of Israel and as being “One” and Israel as being obligated to serve Him. These concepts are connected with the obligation to “bind these words as a sign on your arm, affix them as frontlets between your eyes, and inscribe them on the doorposts of your houses and

your cities gates,” as well as to affix fringes on the corners of the garments. These commandments are read by the rabbis (vs. other interpretations) as expressing physical objects to be put on the body, and not abstract concepts or words. Thus, speaking of Israel as being surrounded by the commandments (חביבים ישראל שסבבם הכתוב במצות) – “beloved is Israel, for Scripture [*ha-katuv*] has surrounded them with *mitsvot*”), meaning with *tefillin*, *mezuzah* and *tsitsit* mentioned in the Shema’, SifDeut 36 creates the following gendered parable:

ספרי דברים לו

משל למלך בשר ודם שאמ' לאשת[ו]: הוי מתקשטת בכל תכשיטיה, כדי שתהא רצויה לי, כך אמ' להן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: בני, ה'ו מצויינין במצות, כדי שתהיו רצוין לי, וכן הוא אומר: "יפה את רעיתי כתרצה" (שה"ש וד): יפה את שאת רצויה לי.²¹⁸

SifDeut 36

A parable [*mashal*] to a king of flesh and blood who once said to **his wife: adorn yourself in all her/your adornments/finery**, so that you shall become **desirable [retsuyah] to me**. Thus said the Holy One to Israel: my children, **adorn [metsuyanin] yourselves with the commandments [mitsvot]**, so that you shall become **desirable [restsuyin] to me**. And so he says, *You are beautiful [yafah], my love, as Tirtsah, [lovely as Jerusalem, daunting as what looms on high]* (Song 6:4): you are lovely when you are desirable [*retsuyah*] to me.

In this *mashal lemelekh*, king parable, Israel adorns herself with the material commandments to make herself desirable for G-d. The root קשט “to shoot” in the *hitpa’el* “to dress, adorn one’s self” is the key term. The text describes metaphorically the מצות – *mitsvot* “commandments” through which Israel are “distinguished” (מצויינין – *metsuyanim*) as a woman’s jewelry /ornaments/finery (תכשיט – *takhshit*) through which she is adorned (מתקשטת – *mitqashetet*).

The word *Tirtsah* is built on the root *r.ts.h*, which is understood by the interpreter as meaning “to desire.” Adorned with these material commandments, Israel becomes “desirable” (*retsuyah*) and beautiful to her husband. In this interpretation, Song of Songs provides a figuration of Israel’s ideal state through the commandments. Its use here further reinforces rabbinic commitment to the commandments of *tefillin*, *mezuzah*, *tsitsit*.²¹⁹

The verse quoted by SifDeut 36, Song 6:4, speaks of the desired woman in her fairness as *’ayumah* “inspiring awe, trepidation” “daunting as something grand and lofty,” like the two cities of Tirtsah and Jerusalem set on promontories.²²⁰ Israel are “distinguished” through the *mitsvot* (their source of power, as in the verbal root of *metsuyanim*, צין “mark, sign, distinguish”). The idea and image of women’s jewelry is not from the Song, but produced by the tannaitic interpretation. The correlation between ornaments/finery (including perfumes, see SifNum 89) and desire is found also in SifNum 99: “How did Miriam know that Moses had stopped sexual relations? Seeing that Tsipporah [his wife] did not adorn herself with women’s ornaments (מתקשטת בתכשיטי נשים). She asked her: What’s up with you that you don’t adorn yourself with women’s ornaments? She [Tsipporah] answered: Your brother is not particular about the thing (מקפיד בדבר). Thus,

²¹⁸ Hebrew text according to Vatican MS, Biblioteca Apostolica, ebr. 32:2, 68 (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21002&page=14>). FINKELSTEIN ed., Sifre on Deuteronomy, 67-68.

²¹⁹ KAPLAN, *My Perfect One*, 114.

²²⁰ ALTER, *Strong as Death*, 37.

Miriam knew” (see also tQid 1:11). Israel adorned with the commandments is called “beautiful.”

A second tradition about G-d sending Israel in exile as a king sending his wife back to her father’s house after a conflict, describes the husband as telling the wife to maintain her adornments / the commandments, so that upon her return they will not be unfamiliar to her, meaning she maintains her status of being beloved and of nobility:

ספרי דברים מג

דבר אחר: "ואבדתם מהרה, ושמתם את דברי אלה וגו'", "אף על פי שאני מגלה אתכם מן הארץ לחוצה לארץ היו מצויינין במצות שכשתחזרו לא יהו עליכם חדשים. משל למלך בשר ודם שכנס על אשתו וטרפה בבית אביה אמר לה היו מקושטת בתכשיטך שכשתחזרי לא יהו עלייך חדשים. כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: בני היו מצויינין במצוות שכשתחזרו לא יהו עליכם חדשים. הוא שירמיהו אומר: "הציבי לך ציונים וגו'" (ירמיה לא כ) אלו המצות שישראל מצויינין בהן²²¹.

SifDeut 43

Another word: *And you will quickly perish . . . and place these words* (Deut 11:17-18)— even though I am expelling you from the Land itself to beyond the Land, may you excel in the commandments, so that upon your return, they will not be unfamiliar to you.

A *mashal*/parable to a king of flesh who grew angry at his wife, and sent her back [*tarfah*] to her father’s house. He said to her: **keep being adorned [*mequshetet*] with your jewelry/ornaments [*takhshit*], so that upon your return it will not be unfamiliar to you.**

Just this did the Blessed Holy One say to Israel: My children, **may you excel [*metsuyanim*] in the commandments [*mitsvot*] so that upon your return, they will not be unfamiliar to you.**

This is the point of what Jeremiah said, *Erect for yourself milestones [*tsiyyunim*]* (Jer 31:20) – these are the commandments [*mitsvot*] by which Israel is singled out [*metsuyanim*].

This tradition also comments on one text of the Shema‘ prayer and connects its phrase “place these words (on your arm and on your forehead)” to the general upkeep of the commandments distinguishing Israel as indicating a woman’s adornments on her body. The rabbis depict the commandments, kept by Israel, as a woman’s jewels that she wears in her father’s house as a sign for her love, marriage and familiarity with the marital interplay.

In Jeremiah 2:32 it is stated: **הַתִּשְׁכַּח בְּתוֹלָה עֲדֵיָה כֹּלָה קִשְׁרֵיהָ וְעַמִּי שִׁכְחוּנִי יָמִים אֵין מִסְפָּר** – “Can a young woman forget her jewels, a bride her adornments [*qishureyah*]? Yet My people have forgotten Me – days without number.” The adornments / jewelry which identifies her as a married woman are not forgotten by a bride, in that she uses them to express her social status. Yet G-d is Israel’s adornments, or His words, in the form of the *tefillin* on their bodies (and these are connected with “not forgetting” and are referred to as *qesher*: **וְקִשְׁרֵתָם**). Isa 49:18 picks this imagery in a restorative image: **קָעַדִי תִלְבְּשִׁי** – “you will wear them all (the returnees to Zion) ornaments; you will bind them on you (*teqashrim*), like a bride.” G-d promises that Jerusalem will have children with which to adorn herself – namely it will be inhabited by numerous inhabitants. This prophetic imagery plays in the background of the rabbinic ideas of *mitsvot* as jewels – their use to express a particular status (Israel are singled out as a married woman) being seen by everyone, the idea of remembering and not forgetting, and the anticipation of a restorative moment (like when you dress up for an evening out).

Israel distinguishing themselves through the commandments / *mitsvot* are compared to a woman adorning herself with finery, dress, jewelry, make-up and perfumes, in their

²²¹ Hebrew text according to Vatican MS, Biblioteca Apostolica, ebr. 32:2, 102 (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21002&page=20>).

sexual desirability for a male partner, in this case the Divine. *Mitsvot* are pivotal to the rabbinic self and self-understanding, and these are understood as a symbol of nobility, fairness, beauty, strength and unicity. Divine desire is wired toward them. The comparison to bodily enjoyments as perfumes, cosmetics and jewelry is based on the bodily/embodied/physical nature of *mitsvot*, as well as the shared rituality between the two experiences (*tefillin* on the arm and head, *tallit* as dress, *mezuzah* as adornment, head coverings). *Tefillin* especially recalls women's jewelry on the head (cf. mShab 6:5 *totefet* for a woman's head adornment and *tefillin* as *totafot* in the Bible) and as bracelets on the arm. Another parallel is established through the idea of attractiveness: both are seen, external signs, *made to be noticed by others* [G-d, or other people]. Appearance and *exteriority* are a common feature, considered positively in the rabbinic understanding, a pursuit for external accessories (as *mitsvot* or jewelry) is a showcase for cultural identity, personal pleasure, and self-worth or expression. Female adornments are indeed a way to interact with others and express one self.²²²

Connecting to the next section, this process of elaboration shapes voluntary subjugation to G-d as resistance to subjugation to the Roman Empire. Rabbinic, commandment-focused practice sustains Israel, is significant and meaningful and its offerings of religious life are precious, a work of self-construction in relation to others.

In the midrashic unit MdRY beshallah shirah 3 (already analyzed in sections 1.4. and 3.1.), the interpretation of R. Yishmael on the term אנוהו as indicating "beauty, ornamentation" is based on the question of how a human being can adorn G-d or the Divine body. The answer is:

מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל בשלח דשירה ג
 "ואנוהו": ר' ישמעאל אומר: וכי אפשר לבשר ודם להנות לקוניו? אלא אנוה לו במצוות. אעשה לפניו לולב נאה
 סוכה נאה ציצית נאה תפילה נאה.²²³

ואנוהו – *anvehu* "I will beautify Him" (Exod 15:2): R. Yishmael says: Is it possible for a human being to make his Master beautiful/pleasant? Rather I will beautify Him with mitsvot. I will do in front of Him a beautiful lulav, a beautiful sukkah, beautiful tsitsit, beautiful prayer.

"In which way the preparation of objects of mitsvah is a form of jewelry/adornment for G-d?"²²⁴ In the same midrashic section it is stated how the Temple "beautifies G-d" and in Sifra *shemini mekhilta de-milu'im* 1:15-16 (section 3.2.) we have seen how Israel beautifies G-d with the Tabernacle which is compared to a crown / jewelry on the head of a spouse. Exod 35:22 describes how the women (and men) offer their jewelry (gold earrings, rings, pendants, brooches) to build the Tabernacle, whereby the women's jewelry become the jewelry of G-d. An imitation between the Divine and Israel in the externalization of mitsvot is expressed through women's jewels and practices of adornment. Theology, externalization, aesthetics and gender are interestingly mixed.

"Regulation of the performative body" and "combating any imputations of effeminacy" are conceptual structures of Cicero's imagery about oratorical style and written composition, whereby Cicero states that decoration and "make up" in words must be avoided "like a woman renouncing her jewels (Nam ut **mulieres** esse dicuntur non nullae

²²² Cf. Dror YINON and Ishay ROSEN-ZVI, מבט חדש על מעמדה הדתי, תכשיטים נשיים, תכשיטים גבריים: "Women's Adornments and Men's Adornments: A New Perspective on the Religious Status of Women in the Rabbinic Mishnah," *Reshit* 2 (2010): 1–24.

²²³ Hebrew text from MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, 151:2, 127 (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=6000&page=40>).

²²⁴ YINON and ROSEN-ZVI, "Women's Adornments," 62.

inornatae, quasi id ipsum deceat, sic haec subtilis oratio etiam incompta delectat; fit enim quiddam in utroque, quo sit venustius, sed non ut appareat. Tum **removebitur omnis insignis ornatus quasi margaritarum** ... fucati vero medicamenta candoris et ruboris omnia repellentur) (Orat. 23:78-79).²²⁵ While the *metaphor of women's jewels* is used by the tannaim to describe their embodied practices and *mitsvot*, the same image is used by Roman rhetoric to describe what must be avoided in its main way of expression – political and rhetorical *words* and speech-performance, with a restriction on bodily expressivity –, the exact opposite of the tannaitic image.

4. Rabbinic leadership and Torah study through female images

4.1. Rabbis as old, wise mother (MTBer)

Among the many ways with which the tannaitic corpora conceptualize Torah study, metaphoric and figurative language has a prominent role. In it, several female images appear and stand out in the description of the activity of Torah learning and instruction. Graeco-Roman metaphorical language for education, of the same period, typically concentrates on themes like agriculture or athletics. But it does not seem to have women images that use the female body or female activities to speak about the learning/educational process or education ideals.²²⁶ Thus, this seems to represent a particular tannaitic usage that expresses a particular and distinctive cultural view. These have as *target domain* or image recipient (the object described by the metaphor) the *activity* of Torah study, that is, the central national heritage as well as the main rabbinic cultural, educational and life goal, in which the highest symbolic and ideological value resides

The first of the images relating to the rabbinic movement and Torah study is found at the very opening of the tannaitic corpora, at the end of the first tractate, Berakhot.²²⁷ The gender in the image has been ignored in the numerous analyses of this tradition. Here it is argued that the gendered image originated in the Tosefta and it is maintained in the Mishnah. The contexts of Mishnah and Tosefta are slightly different, but the gendered image is used in a parallel way. I will focus on the Tosefta, and mention mBer 9:5 (cf. bBer 63a) only in its variations, significance in its canonical reception and underpinning of the rabbinic enterprise about blessings in everyday life.

²²⁵ Nancy WORMAN, *Landscape and the Spaces of Metaphor in Ancient Literary Theory and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 278-279.

²²⁶ Robert A. KASTER, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Teresa MORGAN, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The male athlete boxing is, e.g., compared to the mind of the student boxing with complex matters; or the struggle of teaching is associated to the struggle of the farmer seeding and ploughing. The student is compared to soil, wool, pottery, marble, a vine, a bird, a bee, sailors, field-pickers, and citizens (MORGAN, *Literate Education*, 267).

²²⁷ Preliminary reflections on this material were presented under the title “‘Do Not Despise Your Mother’: Rabbinic Leadership and Defensive Strategies in Gendered Terms,” within the panel on “Religious Competition in Late Antiquity / History and Literature of Early Rabbinic Judaism,” at: Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Diego, California, 2019. I am thankful to Malka Z. SIMKOVICH and the audience for their feedback and remarks, which have been elaborated in this paper. The material in this and the next section has been published in the form of an article in the volume “Rabbinic Education in Context.”

This analysis proposes that Tosefta Berakhot 6:23 describes the rabbis (*zqenim*) engaging in Torah study, with their choices in the aftermath of catastrophe, as an old wise mother (*zaqnah 'imekha*). They thus reverse the gendered image of Iudaea Capta and Roman metaphorical language for conquered Palestine,²²⁸ whereby the feminine is used by Roman rhetoric for subordination, and by this tannaitic passage for empowering the rabbinic project and for restoration of power. For this text, “when the Torah was being forgotten by Israel” (*mishtakahat mi-Yisrael*), in a period of crisis, the rabbis preserved it by hiding and studying it – a defensive depiction in which they describe themselves as taking a risk and a controversial decision for the sake of Israel’s survival. Based on the image of the mother from Proverbs 23:22, rather than that of the father from the same verse (*vs. Philo, Spec. Leg. 4.149-50*), they depict the rabbinic movement as a mother who gave life at high risk and who should be honored for that. Indeed, at a time when maternal mortality was high, SifDeut 319 interprets Deut 32:18 “you forgot the Divine who created you” as meaning “who gave you birth, who suffered over you,” using again the image of a woman in the context of Torah study and forgetting. The risk in birth thus seems to be, based on tannaitic usage, the key overlapping point between the two figurative domains.

I will now analyze in detail the text itself and based on it, break down the argument step by step:²²⁹

t. Berakhot 6:23

At the beginning, when the **Torah** was being **forgotten** by Israel, **the elders** [*zqenim*] would swallow it up among themselves,

ת' ברכות ו כג
בראשונה כשהיתה תורה משתכחת מישראל, היו זקנים מבליעין אותה ביניהן,

a.) as it is said, *And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem etc. [and he said to the reapers, 'ה' is with you!'] and they answered, 'ה' bless you']* (Ruth 2:4).

א. שני: "והנה בעז בא מבית לחם וגו' [ויאמר לקוצרים: ה' עמכם. ויאמרו לו: יברכך ה']" (רות ב ד).

b.) And it says, *'ה' is with you, you mighty man of valor* (Judg 6:12).

ב. ואו': "ה' עמך גבור החיל" (שופטים ו יב).

c.) And it says, ***Do not despise your mother when she is old*** [*zaqnah 'imekha*] (Prov 23:22).

ג. ואו': "אל תבוז כי זקנה אמך" (משלי כג כב).

d.) *It is the time to act for 'ה' [for Your law/Torah has been broken]* (Ps 119:126).

ד. "עת לעשות לה' [הפרו תורתך]" (תהלים קיט קכו).²³⁰

In defining and defending the rabbinic movement after the destruction of the Temple, this tradition employs a figurative expression that compares the rabbis to a “mother one should not despise” (Prov 23:22). The mother of Proverbs is old (כי זקנה) and the Tosefta has for protagonists “the elders” (זקנים), clearly marked as the rabbis, in that they engage in Torah study. The phonetic association is a strong hint both for an oral and a written transmission, linking the two subjects.

²²⁸ Cf. Anthony G. KEDDIE, “Iudaea Capta vs. Mother Zion: The Flavian Discourse on Judaeans and Its Delegitimation in 4 Ezra,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49:4-5 (2018): 498–550.

²²⁹ Metaphor and gender related parts of rabbinic quotations are underlined in Hebrew and emboldened in the accompanying English translation.

²³⁰ This text is according to the Vienna MS (LIEBERMAN ed., *Zera'im* 1:39-40, lines 105-108). The text “ואו': אל תבוז כי זקנה אמך. עת לעשות לה'” is absent in the Erfurt MS and the *ed. princ.*

According to Lieberman,²³¹ the sages are swallowing the Torah (based on the fact that the pronoun *אוֹתָהּ* is in the feminine) between them – meaning without publicly teaching it in all the details, but rather hiding it among themselves. The literary context is that the people of Israel are forgetting the Torah’s value and content, and the rabbinic strategy to preserve them by way of concealment could be an object of criticism. Indeed, the Torah itself explicitly commands (Deut 6:7, 11:19, 17:9-11) that its content should be taught to others, and this should be the primary role of the sages in their self-understanding. Therefore, biblical verses are brought to sustain such a questionable decision.

The verse from Psalm 119:126 is generally read as “It is the time for ה' to act, for Your law/Torah has been broken,” but here it is read midrashically as “it is time to act for ה'” in order to signalize this rabbinic move as a resolution taken in times of emergency, when the Torah “has been broken.”

The verse from Ruth could indicate that, since at the time of Boaz, the time of the Judges, the Torah was also forsaken in Israel, Boaz and his farmers exchanged few words of piety between them, like the rabbinic sages muttered some words of Torah among themselves. Thus, a biblical example (Boaz) is brought to reinforce authoritatively the actions of the ‘elders.’

The verse about Gideon (Judg 6:12) refers to a similar context, meaning a period in which the Jewish people strayed, a time of crisis, and the angel comes to sustain the prophet with the words “ה' is with you.” It seems that the rabbis use this literal device to demonstrate that their position was justified, and the Divine was on their side. This reinforces the justness of the action of Boaz and the elders. The preceding verse indeed states that “Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, *to hide it* from the Midianites” (וַיִּגְדְּעוֹן חֲבֵט חֲטִיִּם בַּגֶּת לְהַיִּים מִפְּנֵי מִדְיָן). In the following verse, the angel sustains this decision of hiding wheat because of the enemies, thus offering a pictorial parallel for the rabbinic situation and their decision to hide the Torah. With the verses about Gideon we have an indirect reference to war, maybe a rabbinic allusion to the persecution of the Hadrianic period, around the Bar Kokhba Revolt of the years 132-135 CE, and the coercion and pressure to abandon Torah laws by the Roman government.

Then, a verse is brought urging not to despise the ‘elders’ for their choice. This verse entails a gendered element, the image of a mother. This element is not casual within this construction, which is very carefully crafted from a poetical (for an oral tradition) and literary/redactional point of view. The proposed analysis discusses this key element for the first time, aiming to point out how gender is central, salient and deliberate here. The Tosefta solicits the reader and its audience to avoid despising the elders, namely the rabbis, for swallowing the Torah and hiding it in a particular period of crisis, while their task should be to spread it to the Jewish people and the world.²³² The third verse, וְאַל תִּבְזֶה אִמְךָ אֲמָרָה – “Do not despise your mother when she is old” (Prov 23:22), seems to compare Boaz – representing the previous, older, biblical generation and one of the elders of Israel – to “your mother when she grows old.” Note that a wordplay could be at work

²³¹ LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Zera'im 1, 1:124, line 106.

²³² Saul LIEBERMAN (*Tosefet Rishonim*, Zera'im [Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1937-1939], 1:31, lines 15-16) points out to the connection between our tosefta (זְקֵנָה – *zaqnah* / זְקֵנִים – *zqenim*) and the following one (tBer 6:24), which mentions Hillel the Elder (הַלֵּל הַזָּקֵן – *ha-zaqen*): “Hillel the Elder says: At a time when you see that the Torah is forgotten by Israel, and not everyone cares for it (f.), [then] gather it (f.) inwards [i.e., preserve it among yourselves], as Scripture states: *It is the time to act for ה'* (Ps 119:126).” Hillel the Elder states the same principle, with the same biblical support, like the elders in the previous tosefta, thus representing the position of the rabbis.

between the name בעוז – Boaz and the verb תבוז – *tavuz* “despise,”²³³ which is particularly apt for oral instruction and study as speech or loud reading, with a musical, rhythmic and mnemonic form. The imperative crafted with this metaphor sounds like “do not shame the elders of Israel/Boaz/the older generation (your mother) by refusing to rely on their practices.” This is a reproach to those who might have thought that the verse with Boaz – his example and practice – was not a sufficient proof for the rabbinic decision. One should learn from the actions of the previous righteous, which serve as valid precedents and are based on Scripture. The greeting of Boaz has indeed a valid Scriptural source itself, stemming directly from an angel. By association, those who are not to shame are the rabbis themselves, ‘your elders and teachers,’ and this verse is used as general exhortations to heed the decisions of the sages, their way to study and teach Torah by hiding it.

The verse of Proverbs recalls Prov 1:8, which “speaks, in an otherwise similar passage, of not leaving the ‘Torah of your mother’”²³⁴ (וְאַל-תִּטַּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ). The element of practice is surely a reason for the choice of the figure of the mother, creating echoing associations in the text.

It is interesting how Rashi comments on bBer 63a, which in turn comments on mBer 9:5. The latter is a parallel textual tradition derived from our tosefta, whereby most probably the Tosefta represents the older, original tannaitic layer, in that it contains the shorter and more cryptic version (on the basis of the principle *lectio difficilior potior*). Rashi summarizes clearly the imaginative connection:

תא שמע, "אל תבוז כי זקנה אמך": אל תבוז את בעוז לאמר מדעתו עשה, אלא למוד מזקני ישראל, כי יש לו על מי שישמוך, שנאמר: "עת לעשות לה" (תהלים קיט קכו).²³⁵

Come and hear [a proof from the verse,] **Do not despise your mother when she is old: Do not despise Boaz** saying that he acted on his own decision, but rather **learn [lomed] from the elders of Israel**, because he had someone on which to rely, as it says: *A time to act for* ה' (Psalms 119:126).

Rashi connects ‘despising’ (תבוז) with Boaz and introduces the term ‘elders of Israel’ (זקני ישראל) in connection with the mother growing old (זקנה), like in the Tosefta:

do not despise your mother	do not despise Boaz
she is old	this practice is from the elders of Israel

It thus seems that the tannaitic identification of the rabbis as female, the elders as the old mother, continues to surface in all the canonical textual layers (Mishnah, Babylonian Talmud, Rashi). This rabbinic image in the feminine occurs not only in a self-definition, but also when the rabbis affirm their new way to do/study Torah, their own identity as movement (especially in the context of tractate Berakhot, a rabbinic main innovation and pillar of their post-destruction religious system). This claim of authority and the solicitation to rely on rabbinic, previous practice remain relevant for later texts, keeping

²³³ As suggested by Alberdina HOUTMAN, *Mishnah and Tosefta: A Synoptic Comparison of the Tractates Berakhot and Shebiit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 89, n. 115.

²³⁴ Alexander SAMELY, “Database of Midrashic Units in the Mishnah,” (Manchester: The University of Manchester, 2018, <http://mishnah.llc.manchester.ac.uk/search.aspx>), analysis on text reference mBer 9:5 VIII (9). The condemnation of despising one’s mother recurs in two other places in Proverbs, in Proverbs 15:20 “a foolish person despises [*boze*] his mother” (בּוֹזֵה אִמוֹ) and Prov 30:17 “the eye that despises [*tavuz*] to obey his mother” (וְתִבְזֵ לִיקְהֶת-אִם).

²³⁵ The Rashi Hebrew text is from BAR ILAN University, פרוייקט השו"ת – *The Global Jewish Database, The Responsa Project: Version 20* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1972-2012), Vilna edition.

its feminine inflection. It seems that the use of gender is not merely incidental for several reasons. The content of the tannaitic passage coheres in its different parts through the juxtaposition of the rabbis, the main subject, with the mother. Their reception history picks up this association. Moreover, the use of the biblical verse from Proverbs indicates decisively in this direction as well. This verse is brought not only because its figure requires respect (“do not despise”) and embodies authority (as “elderly”). Prov 23:22 has indeed two parts:

שְׁמַע לְאָבִיךָ, זֶה יִלְדֶּךָ,
וְאַל-תִּבְזֶז כִּי-זָקְנָה אִמְךָ.

Listen to your father who begot you,
nor despise your mother when she grows old.²³⁶

Of the two parts of the verse, the rabbis decide to quote only the passage with the mother, not the one with the father. Generally, when rabbinic texts cite only half a verse, referring actually to the part which is not mentioned as association for the point they want to make, they use only the beginning of the verse, abbreviating it and relying on the fact that the reader knows the second part. However, here, they mention and make use only of the second section of the verse, which means that this is the part they are actually interested in highlighting. The first segment of Prov 23:22 has the term *שמע* / *shema* ‘ which establishes a connection with the opening topic of tractate Berakhot, the *shema* ‘ prayer, which is mentioned again at its end. Both elements of ‘listening to the father’ and ‘the father’s begetting capacity’ fit rabbinic teaching metaphors. The tannaim nevertheless intentionally discard the part of the verse with the male gender (the father) and choose the part marked in the feminine.

Crucially, there are numerous other verses, declined in male terms that could have been chosen in as much as they refer to elderly or to the topic of ‘not despising.’ An example of the former is Deut 28:50 “an arrogant people that shall not regard the old person (*zaqen*),”²³⁷ and of the latter is Prov 23:9 “*speak not* in the ears of a fool: for he will despise (*yavuz*) the wisdom of your words,” which would have justified the tannaim for maintaining the Torah among themselves.²³⁸ The main point of the tannaitic text rotates around the concept of *zaqen*/elder, and there is no shortage of biblical verses in male language for it. Moreover, the term “father” could serve the same function, as well as the expression “elder.” It emerges that there is no convenient point in mentioning the verse with the old mother, as compared to other verses, if not the additional element of the gendered mark “mother.”

Another crucial factor is that the rabbinic *despise not your mother* “quotation stands in functional parallel to Philo, De Spec. Leg. 4.149-50 using the *remove not the landmark* quotation Deut. 19:14 [also Prov. 23:10!] for a similar purpose – defending the loyalty to the ancestral law (and practice rather than theory).”²³⁹ This

²³⁶ The translation of the Biblical verse is from ALTER, *The Wisdom Books*, 294.

²³⁷ The tannaitic midrashic exegesis systematically interprets the biblical term *zaqen* as meaning a rabbinic sage, like for instance Sifra *qedoshim* 3 (according to its best textual witness, MS Vatican ebr. 66): “*show respect for the elderly (zaqen)* (Lev 19:32): *zaqen* means only a *hakham* (rabbinic sage) [...] what is to “show respect” [...] not to contradict his decisions.” This verse (וְהִדַּרְתָּ פָּנֵי זָקֵן) could also have perfectly fit into the tosefta, instead of the verse on the old mother.

²³⁸ The injunction in the verse not to speak is connected to the rabbis who hide the Torah, “swallowing” it among themselves.

²³⁹ SAMELY, “Database”: <http://mishnah.llc.manchester.ac.uk/search.aspx>, analysis on text reference *mBer* 9:5 VIII (9).

vicinity with Philo's textual construction and aim underlines the rabbinic hermeneutical choice, with a different gendered mark. The text of Philo speaks of the customs of fathers, and refers to a biblical verse with fathers (Prov 22:28), plus another verse, Prov 23:10, in close proximity with the mother of Prov 23:22 chosen by the rabbis (parallels to the tosefta are emboldened):

Another commandment of general value is *You shall not remove your neighbours' landmarks which your forerunners have set up* (μη μετακινειν ορια του πλησιον, α εστησαν οι προτεροι σου) (Deut 19:14, Prov 22:28, Prov 23:10). Now this law, we may consider, applies not merely to allotments and boundaries of land in order to eliminate covetousness but also to **the safeguarding of ancient customs** (των αρχαιων εθων). For customs are unwritten laws, the decisions approved by **men of old** (δωγματα παλαιων ανδρων), not inscribed on monuments nor on leaves of paper which the moth destroys, but on the souls of those who are partners in the same citizenship. **For children ought to inherit from their father**,²⁴⁰ beside property, **ancestral**²⁴¹ **customs** (οφειλουσι γαρ παιδες παρα γονεων κληρονομειν εθη πατρια) in which they were reared, and with which they have lived from the cradle, and **not despise them** (καταφρονειν) because they have been handed down without being written.²⁴²

Prov 23:10, the closest passage to the old mother, continues “speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of your words” (Prov 23:9) with “remove not the ancient landmark.” The practice of the forefathers of Philo is the practice of the old mother of the rabbis. In closely parallel texts, the feminine element is present only in the rabbinic one, pointing to its being a conscious exegetical choice.

The use of the mother's image for rabbinic defensive strategies is not obvious. The parallel text in Philo, quite close to the rabbinic one, is indeed inflected in empowering 'father'-terms. To challenge those despising them, the rabbis use the potent discourse against disrespect for elders, which should speak to Greco-Roman *mores* or whatever listener of Late Antiquity. However, they also compare themselves to the 'mother' of Proverbs, rather than to the 'father' appearing in the same verse, or elders/fathers from other verses. The rabbis' self-depiction as being subject to unjust disparagement, their protest for the unfairness of such devaluation, is thus accentuated by the use of a female figure: the mother who gave you life at high risk.

The biblical text functions as support for the creation of an original, rabbinic feminine image that evokes broad considerations on the rabbinic enterprise itself. The figure of the mother is chosen over that of the father in the biblical verse for an aspect inherent and unique to her parenting experience. When the source domain “woman/mother” is combined with the target domain “Torah study/Torah hiding in a crisis situation,” both domains are limited to the overlapping associated commonplaces. In this case, the vast domain of motherhood seems to be limited to the idea of risk, namely, to giving birth and life as a highly dangerous experience. This tannaitic passage has as central concern the danger and therefore the courage or daring inherent to the steps taken by the rabbis. To depict such characteristics, rabbinic expressivity picks up motherhood, with birthing acknowledged – especially in the context of the ancient world – as a much rockier way than fathering. Motherhood here does not represent simply the strains, but the capability and nerve

²⁴⁰ The Greek term is γονεός “begetter, father.” See The Online LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ), 365.

²⁴¹ The Greek term is πατριος “of or belonging to one's father” (online LSJ, 1348).

²⁴² Greek text and adapted English translation from Francis H. COLSON (trans.), *Philo volume VIII, Loeb Classical Library 341* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939, repr. 1999), 100-101.

to deal with them and to win over some hardship, in that the figure of the mother is used as a defensive device to justify the rabbis themselves.

The relation between not doing/forgetting the Torah/forgetting the Divine and a mother giving birth through risk and suffering is made by the tannaim in another passage, showing how this is a recurring figurative construction that has a common conceptual denominator despite its variations. The association between Torah forgetting, birth and risk is illuminated by SifDeut 319:

SifDeut 319

You forgot the Divine who created you (Deut 32:18):

R. Meir says, The Divine **who gave you birth** [or who travailed with you], who suffered over you, as it is said, *Writhing like a woman in labor* (Ps 48:7).²⁴³

ספרי דברים שיט
 "ותשכח אל מחוליקך" (דברים לביח):
 ר' מאיר אומר: אל שהחיל בך, שנצטער בך,
 כעינין שנאמר: "חיל כילודה" (תהלים מח
 ז).²⁴⁴

This passage continues saying that to forget the Divine means to forget, or not to do the Torah (בשעה שאי אתה עושה את התורה). Moreover, the passage says that when Israel do not do the commandments, the Divine is weakened. Thus, here the Divine is the One who takes pain, risk and suffering in giving birth to Israel, and forgetting is connected to disregarding this maternal effort, which is like the mother/the Divine dying or being obliterated while giving birth to Israel.²⁴⁵ So we see how birth and risk are connected in the imaginative construction of the rabbis. They highlight how the Divine took a risk of Israel. The counterpoint to this image is that the mother who gave you life/the Divine will never forget her child/Israel (Isa 49: 15 מרחם בן-בטנה עולה, הַתְּשַׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוֹלָה), highlighting the ingratitude of the side of those who forget.

In the conceptual mapping of Tosefta Berakhot, the female image is connected to three different aspects crucial to rabbinic Torah study: a response to Roman female metaphorical images about sovereignty and defeat; the idea of Torah learning as a practice to inherit from previous generations through the female image of Proverbs; the interconnected elements of giving birth through risk and Torah learning/forgetting. It is probably because of these three aspects that the image of the mother was seen as metaphorically more effective than other source domains declined in the masculine.

The first aspect is political and related to Roman metaphorical uses of femininity for defeated leadership, whereby the tannaitic tradition offers a reversal of Roman metaphorical language in the feminine for conquered Palestine. The rabbinic self-promoting mother-image can be traced back to this Roman discourse, situating it as a response on gendered lines. The mother thus functions as a “counter-image” for the

²⁴³ *Hil* can be seen as representing “the pain caused by the embryo in its mother’s womb. Thus, the embryo’s connection to the mother is analogous to” the connection of Israel to G-d. “Just as the “embryo is its mother’s thigh” (*ubar yerakh imo*), so too man [sic] is inseparable from G[-]d, like one of His limbs” Yair LORBERBAUM, *In G[-]d’s Image: Myth, Theology and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 159.

²⁴⁴ Hebrew text from London MS Add. 16406, 377, selected as best witness for this passage by MA’AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary* (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21002&mm15=000000319000>).

²⁴⁵ For a thorough analysis of this daring figurative idea in this passage, see Michael FISHBANE, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 25, and FISHBANE, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking*, 363.

Roman “Judea captured” mourning woman,²⁴⁶ in the aftermath of war and defeat. Rabbinic Torah study is a response to the defeat, and it is represented as a mother winning hardship and giving life to a post-war Judaism. Introducing the rabbinic enterprise in Berakhot in face of Roman power, sovereignty and the control grip of the Empire after the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt, rabbinic authors thought of the feminine as imaginatively powerful and significant enough to empower themselves and to reverse defeat; or better, they considered it as possessing the most potent markers of significance in this context. This is an unusual trope in the context of war metaphorical discourse, religious competition and gender.²⁴⁷ Nonetheless, such intrinsic significance is mirrored by the target domain “rabbis/elders.”

The second aspect for which the mother image was employed is connected to the idea of practice. The term “elders” refers back to the biblical “elders of Israel,” a recurring image in the narrative of Torah giving at Sinai, creating a background for Torah learning. The image of the mother serves also this second layer of meaning, where the rabbinic way of learning is emphasized as requiring learning from the practice of previous generations. The practice of the mother of Proverbs echoes this concept (“don’t leave the Torah of your mother”).

The third aspect is the most significant. The tannaitic connection between the two topics of Torah study/forgetting and a mother giving birth through risk and suffering seems to represent here the main figurative point. In Tosefta Berakhot, the rabbis studying Torah by way of hiding it are represented as a mother who gives birth to post-war Judaism, with the risk either of the rabbis/mother or of rabbinic Judaism/the new-born to die along the process of studying the Torah by hiding it/giving birth. Rabbinic Torah study is connected to giving birth, risk and to the role of a mother. When the Torah is forgotten and forsaken in its entirety by the people of Israel, it is metaphorically represented in Tosefta Berakhot as the absence of children and generational continuation. The choice of the rabbis to hide the Torah and to study Torah is related to the risk of giving birth and its potential deadly outcome, but also to the possibility of survival and continuation. The next tradition we will analyze describes forgetting the Torah one has already learned as akin to losing a child after birth. In Tosefta Berakhot, the rabbis are parallel to the mother who gives birth and the newborn is parallel to the new, rabbinic form of Judaism rotating around Torah study. In the next tradition, the singular Torah scholar/student is compared to the mother who gives birth, whereby the child born alive is compared to studying, remembering and repeating Torah and halakhot.

A last comment goes to the context of this image within the Mishnah. Here, the same four biblical verses mentioned in the Tosefta are brought, but in this case, in order to defend a rabbinic decree and innovation (התקינו), namely the requirement to greet others by using the divine Name. The verse about Boaz greeting his reapers with the Name of G-d (Ruth 2:4) is a proof-text for the rabbinic enactment. To refute the argument that he

²⁴⁶ KEDDIE, “Judaea Capta vs. Mother Zion.”

²⁴⁷ Kraemer has suggested that in Antiquity, war language and religious competition were “gendered as masculine,” as stressed particularly in its metaphors, which are about power, authority, prestige and domination. “[T]o inflict violence ... was to exercise masculinity: to be subject to the violence of others entailed passivity, subordination, and femininity” (Ross S. KRAEMER, “Gendering (the) Competition: Religious Competition in the Third Century: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World,” in: *Religious Competition in the Third Century CE: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World* [Jordan D. Rosenblum, Nathaniel P. DesRosiers, Lily C. Vuong (eds.); Göttingen and Bristol: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2014], 204-205).

might have acted improperly by pronouncing G-d's Name when greeting his workers, which would entail that his actions cannot serve as basis for the rabbinic *taqqanah*, the Mishnah then quotes Judges 6:12 where the angel of G-d himself greets using G-d's Name, when instructing Gideon to wage war against Midian.

The third verse, וְאַל תִּבְזֶז כִּי זָקְנָה אִמֶּךָ – “Do not despise your mother when she is old” (Prov 23:22), compares Boaz (older generation, one of the elders of Israel) to the old mother. MBer 9:5 is the last mishnah of the tractate Mishnah Berakhot. As is commonly the case at the end of tractates within the Mishnah, this mishnah is amply aggadic in character, offering a general reflection on the entire tractate, and thus sealing its message. According to Adiel Schremer, what is at stake here is “perhaps even a reflection on the entire rabbinic institution of blessings.”²⁴⁸ The recitation of many blessings throughout the day – the entire rabbinic system of blessing – and the decree to greet one another with the Name of G-d are rabbinic innovations, which indeed can be seen as violating the biblical prohibition to pronounce G-d's Name in vain (אִשָּׁל דַּשׁ, Exod 20:7). The context of the Mishnah (which speaks of *taqqanah*, *minim*, how they corrupted, *gilqelu*, Jewish practice) is highly polemical and situated in a context declaring or refracting religious competition.

Both the mishnaic and toseftan passages clearly defend the rabbinic movement and rabbinic decisions. This is the central point of both texts. The Mishnah has the same aim of the Tosefta, namely to justify the steps the rabbis undertook to defend, empower and allow the survival of their worldview and movement. In the Mishnah, the authors say Boaz and the rabbis should not be despised for their use of the Name of G-d in everyday activities as blessings and greetings, a central rabbinic tenant and innovation.

4.2. Torah learning as child bearing and risk-taking (TAh, TPar)

A parallel tradition in Tosefta Ahilot 16:8 and Tosefta Parah 4:7 (cf. bSan 99a-b) brings an exchange between R. Yohanan ben Zakkai, or Hillel ha-Zaqen (cf. the already mentioned tBer 6:24, where Hillel ha-Zaqen is connected to the same statement of tBer 6:23 about hiding Torah when it is forgotten by Israel), and his students about forgetting Torah. The central idea is that it is harder, and therefore more significant, to forget “something done with one's hands,” through direct physical experience, as compared to something simply received and learned as a transmitted tradition. A statement then follows: “One who repeats without working on it, is like a man who sows and does not harvest. One who learns Torah and forgets it (*lomed ve-shokheah*), is like a woman who gives birth and buries [the child] (*'ishah she-yoledet ve-qoveret*).” The context of these two images is once about impurity and graves, often referring to war and corpses found in the fields (Ahilot), and once about purification after contact with the dead (Parah). A double meaning about loss emerges. On the one hand, losing a child, although common at those times, is marked as a deep trauma, like losing the Torah, the main marker of significance for the tannaim. On the other hand, a single teaching, even about cryptic laws of (im)purity, acquires such a meaning like losing a child after having carried her in one's own body

²⁴⁸ SCHREMER, *Brothers Estranged*, 37. Cf. also the literary analysis of Avraham WALFISH, “Approaching the text and approaching G[-]d: the redaction of Mishnah and Tosefta Berakhot,” *Jewish Studies* 43 (2005-2006): 21-79.

throughout pregnancy. This expresses the sense that something is lost forever, along with a part of the self, without intergenerational transmission.

<p>ת' אהלות טז ח הבודק אוכל בדמעו. מפקיח הגל אין אוכל בדמעו.</p> <p>שאלו תלמידיו את רבן יוחנן בן זכיי: בודק מהו שיאכל? אמ' להן: אינו אוכל. אמרו לו: לימדתנו שיאכל. אמ' להן: יפה אמרתם. מעשה שעשו ידי וראו עיני ושכחתי כששמעו אזני על אחת כמה וכמה! ולא שלא היה יודע, אלא שהיה מבקש לזרז את התלמידים. ויש אומ' את הלל הזקן שאלו. ולא שלא היה יודע, אלא שהיה מבקש לזרז את התלמידים. ר' יהושע אומר: השונה ואינו עמיל כאיש זורע ולא קוצר. והלמד תורה ושכח דומה לאשה שילדת וקוברת. ר' עקיבא אומר: זמר בי תדירה זמר.²⁴⁹</p>	<p>ת' פרה ד ו [...] מצותה בארבעה בגדי לבן של כהן הדיוט. עשאה בבגדי זהב ובבגדי חול – פסולה. ת' פרה ד ז שאלו תלמידיו את רבן יוחנן בן זכיי: פרה במה נעשית? אמ' להם: בבגדי זהב. אמ' לו: למדתנו בבגדי [לבן]. אמ' להם: יפה אמרתם. ומעשה שעשו ידי וראו עיני ושכחתי כששמעו אזני על אחת כמה וכמה! לא ש[לא] היה יודע, אלא שהיה מבקש לזרז את התלמידים. ויש אומ' הלל הזקן שאלו. לא שלא היה יודע, אלא שהיה מבקש לזרז את התלמידים. שהיה ר' יהושע אומר: השונה ואינו עמיל כאיש זורע ולא קוצר. והלמד תורה ושכח דומה לאשה שילדת וקוברת. ר' עקיבא אומר: זמר בי תדירה זמר.²⁵⁰</p>
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tAhilot 16:8

One [a priest] who searches²⁵¹ [an area to determine the extension of a burial ground] eats his *dema* ' [lit., "fruits," indicating "the priest's share of the produces, *terumah*, priestly share,"²⁵² which must be eaten in a status of ritual purity]. One [a priest] who digs a heap [of debris],²⁵³ does not eat his *dema* ' [cf. mOh16:4].

His disciples asked Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai:
One [a priest] who searches – what is [the rule] about him eating [his *dema*]?
He said to them: He does not eat.

They said to him: You have taught us that he eats.

He said to them: You have spoken well. A deed which my own hands have done and my own eyes have seen, yet I forgot [it/the law] [*shakhahti*] – [then] when only my ears have heard [the law], how much the more so!

And it was not that he did not know, but he wished to urge²⁵⁴ the students [to remember by themselves].

tPara 4:6

[...] [The red cow] – her mitsvah/rite [is done] with the four white garments of an ordinary priest. If one did it in the golden garments [of the high priest] or in profane garments, it is unfit [cf. mPar 4:1].

tPara 4:7

His disciples asked Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai:
The [red] cow – in what [garments] is [the rite] carried out?

He said to them: In the golden garments [of the high priest].

They said to him: You have taught us, in [white] garments.

He said to them: You have spoken well. A deed which my own hands have done and my own eyes have seen, yet I forgot [it/the law] [*shakhahti*] – [then] when only my ears have heard [the law], how much the more so!

And it was not that he did [not] know, but he wished to urge the students [to remember by themselves].

²⁴⁹ Hebrew text according to the Vienna MS (ZUCKERMANDEL ed., 614, lines 19-25). See LIEBERMAN, *Tosefet Rishonim*, Seder Tohorot, 3:146, lines 19-25.

²⁵⁰ Hebrew text according to the Vienna MS (ZUCKERMANDEL ed., 633 lines 22-28). See LIEBERMAN, *Tosefet Rishonim*, Seder Tohorot, 3:225-227, lines 22/23-26/27.

²⁵¹ *Bodeq* is Mishnaic Hebrew, lit. "an examiner, inspector."

²⁵² JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 314.

²⁵³ "To attempt to rescue a person supposed to be buried" in there (JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1208).

²⁵⁴ Lit., "to make strong, quick, to strengthen, to hurry, to instigate" (JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 412).

And some say it was Hillel the Elder/ha-Zaqen whom they asked. And it was not that he did not know, but he wished to urge the students [to remember by themselves].

R. Yehoshua says:

One who repeats [a tradition] [*ha-shoneh*] but does not work [*'amel*]²⁵⁵ [on it / at remembering the tradition] is like a man who sows but does not harvest.

One who learns Torah [*ha-lamed Torah*] and forgets [*shakhah*] is like a woman who gives birth and buries [the child] [*'ishah she-yoledet ve-qoveret*].

R. Aqiva says: A song [*zemer*] is in me,²⁵⁶ a song always.

And some say it was Hillel the Elder/ha-Zaqen whom they asked. And it was not that he did not know, but he wished to urge the students [to remember by themselves].

When R. Yehoshua used to say:

One who repeats [a tradition] [*ha-shoneh*] but does not work [*'amel*] [on it / at remembering the tradition] is like a man who sows but does not harvest.

One who learns Torah [*ha-lamed Torah*] and forgets [*shakhah*] is like a woman who gives birth and buries [the child] [*'ishah she-yoledet ve-qoveret*].

R. Aqiva says: A song is in me, a song always.

In the Genizah fragment Cambridge, CUL: T-S NS 162.164 (*zo hi 'she-ne'emrah be-ruah ha-qodesh*)²⁵⁷ the verse “the generations of heaven and earth” (Genesis 2:4) is opposed to “the generations of 'Adam” (Genesis 5:1), as representing respectively the eternity of Heaven, the Divine, the Torah on the one hand, and the generations of human history that will be buried, on the other hand. This is expressed then through an analogy or parable about two women who live in the same courtyard: one “gives birth and buries” (*yoledet ve-qoveret*), the other one “[gives birth] and breastfeeds” (*meneqet*) (משל לשתי [נשים]). Those investing in Torah will bear fruits to the next world, while those occupied with worldly matters invest in something which will not live on. Again, the rabbinic production makes a particular hermeneutical choice, using a very physical, embodied experience, like maternal breastfeeding, to describe Torah study and heavenly matters.

Cambridge, University Library, Taylor-Schechter,
New Series T-S NS 162.164 – 1v

זו היא שנאמרה ברוח הקודש

6 *book of the generations of*
7 *Adam* (Gen 5:1). What [is it that] “*toldot*”
[generations] [is mentioned] prior to this verse?
these are the generations of heaven
8 *and earth in their creation* (Gen 2:4). These are
generations and these are generations.

6 "ספר תולדות
7 אדם" (בראשית ה א). מה [ת' למעלה מן הענין?
"אלה תולדות השמים
8 והארץ בהבראם" (בראשית ב ד). אילו תולדות ואילו
תולדות

9 similar [...] ... A parable [*mashal*] to two
[women]²⁵⁸ [...]

9 שוים אמ' ר' \$ [...] מעליו. משל לשתי [נשים] ...]

10 in one courtyard. One gives birth and buries
[the child] (*yoledet ve-qoveret*), and the other
[gives birth] [...]

10 בחצר אחת. אחת יולדת וקוברת ואחת [יולדת] ...]

²⁵⁵ Lit., “to labor, take pains; to be wearied,” to work hard (JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1088).

²⁵⁶ Or the imperative *zamer* “sing in me, always sing in me” from the root meaning “to review a lesson in recitative chant,” or even “[the Law says] review me/sing me steadily” (JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 405).

²⁵⁷ Robert BRODY, *A Hand-list of Rabbinic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections Vol. 1, Taylor - Schechter New Series, Genizah series 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 47.

²⁵⁸ For the formulation “A parable to two women” compare Sifre Num. 137 (Vatican MS ebr. 32,2, 183) (משל, למ' הד' דו' לשתי נשים...).

11 **and breastfeeds [the child] (*meneqet*)**.²⁵⁹ So it is written regarding heaven and earth “*toldot*” and regarding [...]

12 “*toldot*.” The generations of heaven [*toldot ha-shamayim*] do not die, and the children of Adam²⁶⁰

13 go to the grave. As he says, *for you are dust and to dust shall you return* (Genesis 3:19).

11 ומנקת. כך כת' בשמים ובארץ "תולדות" וב[...]

12 "תולדות." תולדות השמים אינן מתים, ובני אדם

13 הולכין לקבר, כן הוא אומ': "כי עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב" (בראשית ג טי).²⁶¹

The focus is put on Torah study as an embodied experience. The idea that “you have to do it in order to really understand and remember it (namely study it)” and that Torah study is inscribed in a person’s body, inseparable from a personal lived reality, lurks in the background of this construction in Seder Tohorot. However, the image speaks specifically of a female experience and existence. It evokes the risk of childbearing, the pain of losing a child after pregnancy – after the feeling of carrying another existence in one’s own body – then feeding the child directly from one’s own body through breastfeeding (in the Genizah fragment), with the blurriness of boundaries between mother and infant in these early stages of life. Torah is represented as being carried in one’s body, as entailing danger, risk of death for the carrier and the carried, as requiring spirit, courage and daring.

Rather than representing a substitution, whereby cultural transmission/reproduction (Torah study) supersedes reproductive, maternal transmission, the two aspects are situated on the same level – of significance and imaginative power – and presented as being inextricably related. The elements of obligation, conquest and capability to deal with crucial trials and difficulties, to win over hardship, and the act of living an experience with a person’s entire body, let maternal experience and Torah study win legitimacy from one another in these images. The unique/different experience of a mother vs. a father is

²⁵⁹ Pesiqta Rabbati 43 (ed. M. FRIEDMAN [Ish-Shalom, Vienna 1880, repr. Tel Aviv 1962]; cf. Rashi on 1 Sam 2:5,4) states that Hannah, a biblical hero and righteous woman, would give birth to a child, and Peninnah, a wicked figure, would bury two children (חנה יולדת ... ופנינה קוברת), using the terminology of *yoladet* (righteous) and *qoveret* (wicked). Moreover, Hannah is the biblical famous *meneqet* (1 Samuel, 1:23: ותִּינֶק אֶת-בְּנֵיהָ).

²⁶⁰ The same fragment, a couple of lines before our text, discusses the same topic, comparing the first Adam to a woman to whom G-d gave as jewelry a neckless of ten pearls (משל למלך שנטל אשה העניקה לה) (שרשרת [של] עשר מרגליות). These ten pearls are described as ten baldachins (עשר חופנות) that the Divine put over the first Adam in the garden of Eden, which is based on a verse from Ezekiel 28:13 about ten gems as baldachins for the first Adam. This midrash is found also in b. Bava Batra 75a, where it continues that in the messianic future the righteous will have each seven baldachins of gems over them. The fragment also states that after the transgression of Adam, Adam was sent away from the garden of Eden like a woman who is sent away from her house ("ושלחה מבתו"). After sinning, the Divine took the ten pearls from Adam and gave them to someone else, whose identity is not revealed due to missing material in the fragment. However, this could possibly refer to Abraham. Indeed, there is another midrash (ExodR 44:4) that picks up the same topic, comparing Israel to a woman who was given ten pearls (עשרה מרגליות), namely the ten commandments, that she then lost. The parable continues telling that her husband wanted to send her away from his house, but he is convinced not to do so because the woman’s father had given him in the past ten pearls. This refers to Abraham, who went through ten trials for the sake of G-d. Given this background, *toldot ha-shamayim* here can be understood as referring not only to the angels, but also to the righteous who will have a place in heaven. The entire midrash is based on the contraposition between death and life. Namely, between the sinning of Adam, which results in death, or of Israel (*toldot adam / qoveret*), and Adam in the garden of Eden with the ten baldachins, the ten trials of Abraham, the ten commandments and the righteous in heaven, as connected to life (*toldot ha-shamayim / meneqet*). Thus, the breastfeeding woman and *toldot ha-shamayim* are connected with the righteous, Torah and the keeping of the commandments.

²⁶¹ Source of the transliteration: from Chaim MILIKOWSKY, *Head of FGP Aggadic Midrashim team*, as quoted in the FRIEDBERG Genizah Project Website (FGP), 2013 (<https://fgp.genizah.org>).

mirrored in the unique/different experience of Israel vs. the nations in their approach to Torah. Israel carries the Torah in their body and practice, like a mother. Moreover, broader than the paternal one, the maternal experience involves the creation of new resources and intellectual skills, a new perception of reality and its organization, as well as a new organization of knowledge as connected to one's body.

Different associations are created between the two domains by this figurative conceptualization. The process of knowledge, memorization and repetition is connected to breastfeeding (*meneqet*) as an ongoing act which repeats itself and requires continuity and constant effort to keep it going. Breastfeeding is considered as an act of achieving. The events of forgetting Torah study and losing a child are connected through a very narrow and specific analogy. The idea is that something was yours, in your possession, and then you lose it, it is not yours anymore and you are left without it. The tradition learned and memorized was already with/in the person learning Torah, and when that person forgets it, it is lost. In a similar way, a mother had the child inside her during pregnancy with the promise for life, but as soon as she gave birth to the child, she lost her. Note that also the father has the same expectation and he also loses the child, but the crucial point is that the mother had the child inside her body just as the person learning Torah had the tradition inside him/her. Torah learning is compared to pregnancy, the person learning Torah (target domain) to a pregnant woman (source domain), the person remembering the material that was learned is compared to a woman who gives birth and rears the child. Studying is compared to pregnancy, as entailing the risk of losing the child. Learning is thus a task entailing a risk. The metaphorical breastfeeding woman (*meneqet*, namely the Divine/the Heaven, the generations of heaven, the Torah, the scholar) feeds Torah ideas and studied matters, keeping them alive.

The struggle and the fight entailed in learning are not conveyed through a metaphor about athletics, but rather about a woman giving birth (*voledet*), an old wise mother who gave you life (*zaqnah 'imekha*), and, by inference, a mother rearing her child and breastfeeding (*meneqet*). Instead of soldiers or heroes boxing or fighting in an athletic competition, the image of a mother giving and losing life, dying or seeing her child die, represents the challenge and conquest of Torah learning. What is Torah study for the tannaim?

An interesting precedent to the tannaitic metaphor is found in the Greek classical canon not about learning, education and pedagogy or educational metaphors, but about philosophical discoveries, ideas and thinking. In Plato's *Theaetetus* 148e, Socrates metaphorically describes "the labor of the mind, to be in the throes or agonies of thought" as "having the pains of childbirth, be in travail" (ὠδινήσω)²⁶² and someone who elaborates philosophical ideas, trying to find an answer to a philosophical question, as being "pregnant" (ἐγκύμων),²⁶³ meaning "not being empty, but being full with something." The philosopher is pregnant with an idea, by thinking something new, and creating ideas. Socrates describes himself as a "midwife" (149a, μαῖα, original meaning "good mother, form of address to old women"²⁶⁴). A midwife (and Socrates) "is too old to conceive and bear a child," but has the knowledge to help others doing so (149b) – a metaphor for the Socratic method. The midwife knows who is pregnant and who is not, and Socrates is pregnant with an idea (149c); both help to ease labor or instigate labor

²⁶² LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ), 2030.

²⁶³ LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ), 474: "metaph., of the mind, Pl.Smp.209b, Ph. 1.651, etc."

²⁶⁴ LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ), 1072.

and “cause those who have difficulty in bearing to bear;” the midwife causes an abortion when necessary (ἀμβλίσκουσιν), and Socrates indicates when an idea should be aborted (149d).

The Platonic image of pregnancy, birth and maternity is not about educational metaphors, but about philosophical/thinking metaphors, while the rabbinic one is about Torah learning, memorization and forgetting. Torah study and rabbinic education through repetition and transmission are understood as a way of thinking and inquiring within reality, and the most important assent in the cultural knowledge system, parallel to Greek philosophy in its function.

However, the two works differ. Socrates states how “great is the importance of midwives; but their function is less important than mine” (150a), since “all that is true of their art of midwifery is true also of mine, but mine differs from theirs in being practised upon men, not women, and in tending their souls in labor, not their bodies” (150b). In Plato’s text the (male) mind substitutes and overtakes the (female) body, the philosophical supersedes the physical. Female procreative imagery used to depict philosophy and its knowledge construction is found also in the Symposium. There it is attributed to the female figure of Diotima who also states the superiority of philosophical conception, as well as that of pregnancy and birth of the mind over the female, physical ones (Symposium 208e-209e). Plato’s pairing of thinking and female procreation has forged Western language and culture, where creativity and thinking are still described in metaphorical female terms, using expressions like “concept, conception,” “conceive of an idea” or “to be pregnant with ideas / meaning.” The depiction of the spiritual/mind/thinking target domain as better than the physical and female source domain, with its hierarchy mind/body is not part of the tannaitic construction and represents a separate layer of meaning typical and peculiar to the Platonic philosophical vision.

In the tannaitic texts, the metaphor rotates around Torah study and knowledge as impressed and contained in a person’s body, as an embodied experience; like pregnancy is carried in a person’s body.

The feminist analysis of the metaphoric structure connecting the most important creative and knowledge-directed effort of a culture with pregnancy and childbirth is especially fitting for the tannaitic depiction of Torah study as an embodied act: “In contrast to the phallic analogy that implicitly excludes women from creativity, the childbirth metaphor validates women’s artistic effort by unifying their mental and physical labor into (pro)creativity.”²⁶⁵ For the link between women and the possibility of education/Torah study, consider, e.g., tBer 2:12 (Erfurt MS): והזבות והנידות והילדות מותרין לקרות בתורה – “*zavot, niddot, and women who gave birth [ha-yoldot]* are permitted [although they are ritual impure] to read the Torah and **to learn [lishnot]** Mishnah, Midrash, Halakhot, and ’Aggadot.”

There is another element which seems to take the perspective of real women’s experience – together with the element of embodiment, pro-creativity, maternal risk-taking and labor, the emotion and sense of loss, the ongoing effort of breastfeeding as the everyday ongoing effort of memorization and keeping the commandments –, namely the focus on the mother/student as the main actor of the process. The Socrates-image puts great emphasis on the midwife accompanying the birthing woman, and it speaks of the

²⁶⁵ Susan STANFORD FRIEDMAN, “Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse” *Feminist Studies* 13:1 (1987), 49-82.

older philosopher as the father sustaining the idea (the child) of the new philosopher (the mother laboring), whereby the pregnant and then birthing mother is hierarchically situated at the level of the young, inexpert philosopher. The tannaitic images of a mother, by contrast, have no accompanying figure who helps her to give birth or rear the child. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai or Hillel ha-Zaqen in the Tosefta are depicted as promoting a pedagogical method which urges the students to remember on their own. There is even an ironic hint to the teacher/the transmitter of the Torah-knowledge as being the one who forgets – the older person’s memory vacillating in front of younger minds who remember and absorb learning material much more easily. The student is alone and bears the responsibility of remembering, and the mother is *the one* giving birth, rather than an assisting figure. There is an element that ‘empowers’ the individual woman and the individual student as the ones sustaining and carrying on the process of pregnancy, birth and learning.

However, an additional element is present, that of a collective experience. The Torah student and the mother going through the experience and pain of birth, both enter a larger community with a mutual, internal, encoded understanding. There is something very concrete in the image of the two women living in the same courtyard, next to each other, seeing and hearing each other every day, whereby, in the same space and time, one loses a child and the other breastfeeds her newborn.

This brings forth the question of the individual reading on her/his own in these collective images/texts/oral traditions/transmitted lore, and to whom this material is speaking. “Because the comprehension of similes and metaphors relies on the audience’s ability to recognize and understand the reference [...] [a function] of this device grows out of this mutual understanding between speaker and listener: the cultivation of intimacy. Intimacy may develop between a speaker and his or her audience when the speaker chooses vehicles [source domains] for comparison which refer directly to the experience of the audience.”²⁶⁶ Here the source domains refer directly to the embodied experience of women and this could create a common, shared heritage which speaks to, and is spoken by, women. A female public could be hypothesized here. Female imagery is used for thinking about communal identity, whereby the woman-image is the subject and actor of the figurative construction. Transmission of knowledge could involve in this case women living in the rabbinic world. When in Western culture the metaphor the “mind’s eye” is used, the cultural assumption is that knowing is seeing. In the tannaitic imagery, knowing is breastfeeding. Knowing is giving birth. Breastfeeding is *toldot ha-shamayim*. Knowing of Torah is risky and, as such, worthy; like giving birth and being a mother is worthy. From a cognitive perspective, many connections are established, and many of them and their threads relate to women’s concrete reality. These metaphors in the feminine are like traces or threads entering into the rabbinic fabric and textual texture.

The prayer book and code of laws known as *Mahzor Vitry*, coming from the circle of Rashi (11th cent, HURWITZ ed.), and a popular text, reports this image, indicating its circulation and presence in the consciousness of those using it (*siman* 426, commentary on Pirqei ’Avot 3:9, British Museum MS):

"שחכמתו מרובה ממעשיו": שאינו מקיים מה שהוא לומד. ואין תורתו מתקיימת. שמתוך כך הולך וְשוכח אותה. וכדאמרי': כל הלומד ואינו מקיים דומה לאדם שזורע ואינו קוצר. וְלאשה שילדת וקוברת.

²⁶⁶ MINCHIN, “Similes in Homer,” 33.

*Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, [his wisdom is not enduring] (PA 3:9): because he does not fulfill what he learns. And his Torah does not come into being [live, survive, exist]. Because in this way, he goes and **forgets it [f., the Torah]**. Like we say: anyone who studies and does not fulfill/observe [the teachings] is similar to a person who sows but does not harvest. **And to a woman who gives birth and buries [the child]**.*

In this image, the Torah is the child who will not live. The person studying is the mother giving birth. The person observing the laws and teachings is the mother rearing her child. Like in Tosefta Peah²⁶⁷, in this text Torah study is an embodied activity for deeds. In speaking specifically of a woman and not of a parent burying a child, this tradition addresses specifically the emotions, feelings and body of a mother vs. those of a father. How is such a feeling of grief and bereavement communicable? Is the text communicating the worst sense of loss possible, felt in one's own body carrying the child? Torah study is described as being swallowed and absorbed in the bodies of Israel. This seems to be the connecting point of the image.

4.3. The Torah learner as a woman of strength and Torah as household

In the next tradition, Torah is compared to bread, which is also swallowed and absorbed in the body, and at the same time to the entire construction of the household. This image is found in SifDeut 48, which opens with the idea that one must “be careful so that his learning will not get lost” (להזהר בתלמודו שלא יאבד). The way not to lose the learning is “to repeat” (ישנה – *yishneh*). SifDeut 48 then compares someone studying Torah to a wise woman, or a woman of might/strength (*'eshet hayil*) (as described in Prov 31): “repeat traditions from whomever is in town with you, and afterward, spread it out to all places. And so [about the Torah scholar] He says, *She is like merchant ships, [from afar she brings her bread]* (Prov 31:14).” The association here is to the general activity of bread-providing, as relating to the specifically gendered labor of bread-making, with its rabbinic commandment of *hallah* separation, and to the capability of supplying specialties from afar. Women's general and ritual – not only maternal – experience is thus made significant for images of Torah study and Israel/rabbinic wisdom. The wisdom of a woman is constructed as sharing its structural characteristics with that of studying Torah.

SifDeut 48

R. Shimon b. Yohai says: So He says, *Drink water from your own cistern, ... [let your springs be dispersed abroad]* (Prov 5:15). [That is], **repeat traditions [shneh]** from whomever is in town with you, and afterward, spread it out to all places.

And so [about the Torah scholar] He says, ***She is like merchant ships, [from afar she brings her bread]*** (Prov 31:14)

ספרי דברים מח

רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר: הרי הוא אומר: "שתה מים מבורך וגו' [...] [יפוצו מעינתך חוצה] (משלי ה טו). **שנה** ממי שעמך בעיר ואחר כך היפרש בכל מקום. היתה כאניות סוחר" (משלי לא יד).²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Marc HIRSHMAN, “Learning as Speech: *Tosefta Peah* in Light of Plotinus and Origen,” in: *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought* (Howard Kreisel (ed.); 2 vols.; Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 1:49-64.

²⁶⁸ Hebrew text according to MS Vatican 32:2, 110. (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=21002&page=22>).

Immediately before the statement of R. Shimon b. Yohai, it is said that “A strong disciple is like a sponge that absorbs [*sofeg*] everything.” The student then also spreads out the teachings absorbed, bringing them to all places. The strong student is constructed as parallel to the *'eshet hayil*, the strong woman / woman of strength, who bring their bread/Torah from afar, and who construct / sustain her household. Coming from afar and going far away means taking a risk and daring to go out on potentially dangerous journeys. The woman of strength of Prov (as well as the beauty of the woman protagonist in Song) is described through military and war language (both women are described as going out alone). The process of Torah learning is compared to the process of guarding, constructing, accumulating storage and providing for the household; Torah knowledge is assimilated to the household, and its upkeep.

Although at different intersections, all the texts that contain the metaphors about Torah study employing female images address the topics of risk, danger, courage, capability and bringing life, as well as the issue of an embodied experience and practical existence. The tannaitic production seems to create the cognitive association that, like being a woman means facing more risks and conquests, so more risk, conquest and worth is posed within Torah study as the center of life and embodied act.

In conclusion, we find the creation of original, rabbinic feminine images that evoke broad considerations on Torah study and on the rabbinic enterprise itself. Rabbinic expressivity uses female images for the depiction of Torah study and loss, thus including in such figurative depictions women’s experience, which serve as the most potent markers of significance in this context.

4.4. Torah as Queen Esther and ruling woman (TBer)

This section deals with a well-known gendered image from later, amoraic and aggadic sources, that of the Torah itself (not only the Torah scholar, the rabbi or Torah learning) as a feminine figure. ‘Torah’ is a very broad category in rabbinic jargon, and famously the pericope opening GenR describes the Torah as the model of genesis: as the ‘nursling, nursed’ on the side of G-d during the creation, and as the ‘wet nurse’ of the world. The Torah precedes the creation of the universe, it represents its form and shape, it is paradigmatic of the rabbinic worldview and system: “[f]or the rabbis the Torah did assume a personality of its own.”²⁶⁹

In ExodR 33:1 the Torah is the *בת יחידה* – *bat yehidah*, only daughter, of the king/G-d, who cannot separate Himself from her and goes everywhere where she goes. In bSan 101a G-d consults His daughter, the Torah, in order to know what to do: “[The Holy One, Blessed be He,] says [to the Torah:] My daughter... (*אמר לה בתי*).”

The Torah is at the same time a general concept, a physical object, a practice of study and a way of behavior. In its peculiarity as a rabbinic idea, it finds expression with a peculiar female image, based on a female biblical character and an important imaginative personality, Queen Esther. The following tannaitic tradition is preserved in the Tosefta within the context of Shabbat practice, connected to eating and physical enjoyment (with a double meaning of Shabbat as queen, see section 6.1.):

²⁶⁹ Elliot R. WOLFSON, in the chapter “Female Imaging of the Torah,” within *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 2.

ת' ברכות ה ב²⁷⁰

מעשה ברבן שמעון בן גמליאל ור' יהודה ור' יוסה שהיו מסובין בעכו, וקדש עליהן היום.
אמ' לו רבן שמעון בן גמליאל לר' יוסי: ברבי רצונך נפסיק לשבת.
אמ' לו: בכל יום אתה מחבב דברי בפני יהודה, ועכשיו אתה מחבב דברי יהודה בפני?
"הגם לכבו' את המלכה עמי בבית" (אסתר ז ח).
אמ' לו: אם כן לא נפסיק, שמא תקבע הלכה לדורות.
אמרו: לא זזו משם עד שקבעו הלכה כר' יוסי.

tBer 5:2

An incident [*ma'aseh*]: Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el and R. Yehudah and R. Yoseh were reclining [meaning, they were guest as at dining party and eating] in Akko²⁷¹ and the day was sanctified upon them [namely, the Shabbat began].

Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el said to R. Yose: Rabbi, if it is your wish, we shall stop [eating] because of [beginning of the] Shabbat.

²⁷⁰ Hebrew text according Vienna MS. There are no relevant variants in the ed. princeps and the Erfurt MS for this analysis. LIEBERMAN ed., *Zera'im* 1:25, LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, *Zera'im* 1, 1:73-74, lines 3-8.

²⁷¹ "Akko was a well-known Hellenistic coastal city located on the outskirts of the Jewish population in Galilee. During the Second Temple period and afterwards, [...] it held a Jewish minority [...]. R. Judah ha-Nasi included only certain areas of the city as part of the halakhic boundaries of the Land of Israel. [On Akko's halakhic status, see the dispute in *m. Gittin* 1, 1:1-2, between R. Meir and R. Judah. In *j. Shevi'it* 6:4, 37a R. Judah ha-Nasi is said to have regarded Akko as the "border areas of the Land of Israel"]. [...] During R. Judah ha-Nasi's era, a sage named R. Mana, a disciple of R. Judah b. Ilai, was active in Akko. [...] Thus, even though Akko was an important city, it never developed into a Torah center that saw uninterrupted rabbinic activity, probably due to its pronounced pagan character and its problematic halakhic status in the eyes of the sages." Ben Tsiyon ROZENFELD, *Torah Centers and Rabbinic Activity in Palestine, 70-400 CE: History and Geographic Distribution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 143-144. The setting of our halakhic dispute at Akko, during a dining party and at the entrance of Shabbat, is interesting. The only rabbi recorded as active in this city is a disciple of R. Yehudah b. Ilai, possibly to be identified with the R. Yehudah of our tosefta. As setting, Akko appears in the Mishnah only in *mAZ* 3:4: "Proqlos ben Filosfos asked Rabban Gamli'el [a question] in Akko, while he was bathing in the bathhouse of Aphrodite..." In the Tosefta, besides our incident, we encounter Akko in *tShev* 5:2: "Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el said, In Akko I once saw Shime'on bar Kahana' drinking *terumah*-wine. He said, This is in my hands, it comes from Cilicia. They decreed about him that he drinks [the wine] in a boat;" in *tPes* 2:15: "An incident: Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el was going from Akko to Keziv. He found a *glusqin*-loaf bread on the road. He said to his slave Tavi, Take the *glusqin*. He saw one non-Jew and he said to him, Magebai, take this *glusqin*. R. Le'ii ran after him and said to him, What is your good? He said to him, I am from that travellers stations (*burgin*, from *πυργίον*, *πύργος*, *burgus*);" in *tMQ* 2:15: "An incident: Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el was sitting on the chair [*לספסו – safsal*] of non-Jews on the Shabbat in Akko. They said to him, They were not accustomed to sit on the chair of non-Jews on the Shabbat. He did not want to say, you are permitted to do so. So he got up and went away;" in *tKet* 5:9-10: "An incident about the daughter of Naqdimon b. Gurion that the sages decreed for her five hundred golden dinars every day for a *quppah* for spices, and she was only a *shomeret yavam* [a sister-in-law awaiting levirate marriage]. But she cursed [them] and said to them, So may you give to your own daughters. R. Le'azar bar Tsadoq said, May I [not] see comfort, if I did not see her picking [*melaqet*] barley from under the hoofs of horses in Akko. On her I have read this Scripture, *If you do not know, most beautiful among women* (Song 1:8);" and in *tAZ* 4:11: "An incident: they brought kegs of pieces of meat of one kind in the entire Akko, and a *siman* [a mark that is kosher] was found on only one of them..." These passages show how Akko is a clear literary setting in a story: a liminal place of non-Jews where liminal and unusual things happen, very often involving Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el, which generally acts disruptively. He acts disruptively also in this story. Moreover, unusually, the halakhah is established in our tosefta according to R. Yose, while generally it is in accordance with R. Yehudah. R. Yehudah is the rav most mentioned in the Mishnah (678 times). It is also to note that the rabbis are spending the Shabbat in some place which most probably is the house of none of them.

He [R. Yoseh] said to him: **Every day you love/cherish [mehabev]²⁷² my words [devirai] in front of Yehudah, and now you love/cherish [mehabev] Yehudah's words in front of me?**

Is it also to force²⁷³ the queen [malkah] with me in the house? (Esther 7:8)²⁷⁴

He [RSBG] said to him: If so, then let us not stop, lest the Halakhah be established permanently [lit., for the generations] (according to the opinion of R. Yehudah).

They said: They did not move from there until the Halakhah was established according to R. Yose.

The preceding tosefta (tBer 5:1) reports the ruling of R. Yehudah that a person should not eat on 'Erev Shabbat from the time of minhah onwards, in order to be hungry (תאוה – *ta'avah*, literally “[full of] craving, lust, desire”) when one enters Shabbat (כדי שיכנס – *ta'avah*, literally “[full of] craving, lust, desire”) when one enters Shabbat (לשבת כשהוא תאוה). This means that a person should be hungry enough to want to eat the festive meal of Friday night. On the contrary, R. Yose holds that one may continue to eat until it grows dark and it is time to sanctify the day (אוכל והולך עד שתחשך), meaning one may eat on 'Erev Shabbat as much as s/he pleases, without a time limit before Shabbat. Another separate argument between the two follows:

מפסיקין לשבתות דברי ר' יהודה	ר' יוסי אומר אין מפסיקין
R. Yehudah: (if someone started to eat) we stop (to eat) for the Shabbats (to say the qiddush/the sanctification of the day).	R. Yose: we do not stop (to eat).

This second argument between R. Yose and R. Yehudah regarding stopping or not to eat for the Shabbat, to say the qiddush/the sanctification of the day, is not present in either

²⁷² JASTROW (*Dictionary*, 415) understands the verb here, together with the expression בפני – *bi-fnei/ be-fanai* “in front of (me),” to mean “to prefer:” “Pes. 100a בפני ... היית מחבב ... thou didst always prefer my opinions to those of R. J., and now thou embracest his opinion in my presence.” NEUSNER ed. (*Tosefta*, vol. 1, 29) also translates with “prefer.” The choice of “embrace” is nice in that it maintains in English the Hebrew idea of physical love, whereby the verb חבב – *havav* in the *qal* means literally “to be arched, to bosom.” I have decided to maintain the meaning “love,” which is very direct and metaphorically significant, together with the expressions “in front of Yehudah” and “in front of me” because these are very central to the point made by this story or by R. Yose and especially to the metaphorical comparison/parallelism with the biblical verse from Esther and the biblical figures. The biblical עמי בבית – “with me in the house/in front of me,” namely “in front of the king” parallels very fittingly or precisely בפני – “in front of me,” namely “in front of R. Yose” in the Tosefta. Like the king says “are you forcing the queen in front of me?” so R. Yose says “are you preferring Yehudah's opinion in front of me / violating the Torah in front of me?” The biblical “in the house” meaning “in the house of the king” could indicate that the story is situated in R. Yose's house, however the Akko's setting creates a dissonant note in this sense.

²⁷³ The verb here לקבש – *likhbosh* is the infinitive construct in the *qal* of קבש – *kavash*, which most literally means “to press, to make a path, to tread with the feet, to trample under feet,” most often used in the sense of “conquer, subject, subdue, attack, assault” a country or land (Gen 1:28: פרו ורבו ומלאו את; Num 32:22, 29, Jos 18:1, 2 Sam 8:11, Zec 9:15, 1 Chr 22:18), and by extension “to suppress, oppress, to bring into bondage (Jer 34:11,16, Neh 5:5, 2 Chr 28:10); to force, violate, rape (Est 7:8).” The semantic field of war/conquest and rape/male sexuality are close one another. However, in the meaning of “to rape” the verb appears only in our passage in the entire Hebrew Bible (but cf. also Neh 5:5: ויש מבגדתינו – *u-yish mebgadetiynu*), so it is an open question if the verb here really means “to rape, force” or it is intended merely as “to assault, try to persuade.” Haman is trying to convince the Queen to spare his life, but the entire play is based on the jealous king seeing him falling on the queen, and thus suspecting (rather absurdly) that he is violating her. This is part of the *megillah* grotesque humor and strong overturning reversals. For the tannaim, the verb can mean to have sexual relation, see for example mYev 7:5 על השפחה – *al ha-shpaha* “the son went and had sexual relations with a maidservant” or the connection between conquest and rape in mKet 2:9 עיר שכבשה כרום כל כהנות שנמצאו בתוכה פסולות – *eiir shekibshah krum kol kahnoot she-nמצאו btokeha pasulot* “a town that a militia conquered it, all the priestesses that are found within it become disqualified [to marry priests].” One should keep in mind the possibility and level of meaning of verbal supplication, conviction and persuasion.

²⁷⁴ The biblical verse is translated according to ALTER, *Strong as Death*, 117.

the Erfurt or the Vienna MSS, but it is attached to the quote of this tosefta in Bavli Pesahim 100a and Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:1, 68b. Without this addition it is difficult to understand the sense of the story in our tosefta. The Rabban Shim'on b. Gamli'el, when asking R. Yose to stop eating when the Shabbat begins (at sunset), expresses his support for the opinion of R. Yehudah. Enraged, R. Yose answers lamenting how generally RSBG loves/cherishes (מחבב – *mehabev*, an expression from the pi'el חיבב – *hibev*, “to bosom, love, cherish”²⁷⁵) “his words” in front of R. Yehudah and now he loves R. Yehudah’s words in front of him. Then he brings a biblical verse to illustrate the situation, creating a metaphorical comparison with a source domain gendered in the feminine.

The verse from Esther 7:8 refers to Haman standing to plead for his life before Queen Esther, and then falling on the bed where Esther was or perhaps even on Esther herself, precisely when the king was re-entering the room. Hence the king’s burst of rage and death sentence to Haman: “Is it also to force the queen [Esther] with me in the house?” The verse continues “As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.” As noted by Alter,

“The sexual comedy of the Book of Esther becomes particularly acute at this moment. Ahasuerus, seeing Haman sprawled out on Esther’s couch, briefly imagines that his first minister is attempting to rape the queen, in the king’s very presence. The misapprehension may be sharpened by his own uneasy awareness that he has failed to invite the beautiful queen to his bedchamber for a month. One should also keep in mind that to sexually possess the king’s consort is to lay claim to the throne, as Absalom does in cohabiting with David’s concubines.”²⁷⁶

We have three figures in the verse (Esther, Haman and Ahasuerus) and three rabbis (Yose, Yehudah and RSBG). In this reading, R. Yose sees RSBG as assaulting/raping his Torah/words of Torah/halakhah/ruling in front of him by saying that R. Yehudah’s opinion should be followed. The element of usurpation and of taking the Torah/the Queen Esther from him is clear. There is also an aspect of suspicion of betrayal at the hand of his student RSBG.

The comparison between Queen Esther and the Torah is straightforward. Beyond Alter’s reading, a more updated gendered reading of Megillat Esther sees Queen Esther as the one instigating the entire situation depicted in the proof verse quoted here. Esther institutes private family parties only with the king and Haman, and according to the midrash (bMeg 15b and Rashi on Esther 5:4), she played greatly to instigate in the king the suspicion that Haman was seducing her. “Were it not for the king’s earlier suspicions of Haman, it would be difficult to understand how the king might have thought that Haman would dare take advantage of the situation to seduce the queen.”²⁷⁷ Moreover, according to an early midrash, Haman did not fall on Esther, but she pulled him onto herself:

קטעי מדרש, אסתר (ורטהימר שמו רבינוביץ 155)
(שנה: לפני שנת 600)

²⁷⁵ Cf. SifNum 78 according to which Yithro was called Hovav because “he loved the Torah:” חובר על שם שחיבב את התורה.

²⁷⁶ ALTER, *Strong as Death*, 117.

²⁷⁷ Haim GENIZI, “Esther and Realpolitik” Bar Ilan University 2005 (<https://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/vayikra/gen.html>). See also “Esther’s Stratagems” in Tamar MEIR, “Esther: Midrash and Aggadah,” (*Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 20 March 2009, Jewish Women’s Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/esther-midrash-and-aggadah>).

ר' ברכיה בשמיה דר' חיה אבוי: אסתר בעלת גבורה היית. הפילה אותו עליה. אמרה: נהרג אני והוא ותנצל אומה.²⁷⁸

Midrash from the Genizah fragments, on Esther (Wertheimer, Rabinowitz 155)

R. Berakhya said in the name of R. Hiyyah Abuy that Esther acted heroically [*ba'alat gevurah*], pulling him [Haman] down onto her and saying, 'We shall be killed, he and I, but my people will be saved.'

For EstherR 10:9 Esther tricked the king: "My lord the king, he is assaulting me in front of you" (אסתר והיתה מצעקת אדוני המלך הרי הוא כבשני לפניך, ויאמר המלך הגם) (לכבוש את המלכה עמי בבית).

This image fits with the idea of the Torah as queen and ruling woman – especially, highlighting the possibility of a ruling woman. The Torah rules the life of rabbinic Jews and lets the right interpreter win. Queen Esther is and is not in king Ahasuerus' possession, in that he acts as a sort of puppet, whose strings are pulled by the plan of the Queen. The Torah indeed masters the rabbi in their understanding and declaration, and of course, ambivalently the rabbi masters the Torah. R. Yehudah/RSBG figure as 'Haman,' an illegitimate taker, but the heroine is Esther who makes him fall. The truth of the Torah reveals itself by itself. The Torah makes fall those who err as Queen Esther makes Haman fall. One must remember that the hero of the story for the megillah and the rabbis is Esther, not the king, who is just an earthly, non-Jewish sovereign. The topic of possessions and gender is more complicated than at first sight. As the Torah is the instrument of revelation of G-d's plan in history so it is Queen Esther. This story states how the Halakhah is being fixed permanently independently of the rabbis' decision, it works by itself on the basis of the precedent of their acts. Queen Esther moves the actions of both Haman and Ahasuerus. If R. Yose is Ahasuerus in this image, Ahasuerus does not really have full power/domain on Esther, so R. Yose on the Torah, whereby the woman is the superior force in the story. The conceptual mappings work by moving from the verse and the gendered image. "With me in the house" (עמי בבית) of Esther 7:8 offers the parallel for "in front of me" (בפני) of Rabbi Yose. "Words of Torah" as being preferred, meaning as being established as halakhah and practice are the biblical queen. Generally, RSBG prefers R. Yose words in front of R. Yehudah. His reverting position is seen as an assault on the Torah itself. RSBG is the one who says where is the Torah, in that he has the political power of the *nasi*, to establish halakhic ideas as practical rules enforced in the community; the other two figures are Torah scholars producing halakhic discussion. R. Yose needs RSBG support to establish the halakhah and Torah as practice.

The point of R. Yose between tBer 5:1-2 is the importance of enjoyment in halakhic practice: one should eat before Shabbat without restraint, enjoying 'Erev Shabbat and the preparative for the holy day; on Shabbat one should enjoy the day, continuing eating, if s/he already started a meal and only when one is done eating, one moves on doing the sanctification of the day/the obligation of the qiddush. The obligation should not reduce the enjoyment of the day. A basic rabbinic principle is that the Torah is pleasant, or in rabbinic jargon *darkhei no'am* "ways of pleasantness" (דרכי נועם), based on the verse Prov 3:17, the Shabbat is joy and enjoyment, meaning the law and obligation relates to human nature and its need for pleasure, physical joy and pleasantness. *Darkhei no'am* is a factor in determining halakhah, and in this case

²⁷⁸ Hebrew text according to the Genizah fragment Cambridge, University Library, T-S Collection, C 2, 184, which is date before the year 600 (MA' AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*, <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=740000&page=2>).

R. Yose's attention for this principle makes his opinion the established halakhah. R. Yose seems to state: you are attacking the Shabbat, the joy of the Shabbat, its *darkhei no'am*. In this sense, the image of the Queen, of Queen Esther, is also associatively projected on the Shabbat (on this, see section 6.1.). He says to RSBG that to establish the halakhah according to R. Yehudah, to do according to his opinion, means to erode the basic idea of the Torah/the Queen, as being a way of physical pleasantness (the point of eating). R. Yose sees his opinion as the legitimate partner for the Queen / Torah, expressing her real characteristic and idea, like the kingdom of Ahasuerus allowing Esther to reign. The female image of Queen Esther serves the idea that the Torah is superior to all its actors: her political enabler, RSBG; her 'king' R. Yose who produces the right halakhic opinion about physical pleasantness, enjoyment and obligation, as the partner enabling her expression/rise to power; and his opponent, R. Yehudah, blocking her true meaning, assaulting her core, attacking her in front of her sustainer. She pulls all of them into action – moves them – and only their sum produces 'her plan' and her sovereignty.

Plato, in *Laws* 698b, describes "respect for the law" as a "queen": "We Athenians had an ancient constitution ...and we had **Reverence**, which acted as a kind of **queen (despotis)**,²⁷⁹ causing us to live as **the willing slaves of the existing laws (nomos)**" (καὶ δεσπότις ἐνῆν τις αἰδώς, δι' ἣν δουλεύοντες τοῖς τότε νόμοις ζῆν ἠθέλομεν). Reverence, as the capacity to respect what exceeds and circumscribes humans and as the basis of learning, is Plato's topic. This particular conceptualization goes beyond the depiction of abstractions as law and awe in female terms. The image of an absolute ruler and despot as being female – a queen, creates a sense of subjugation without violence, or of being "voluntarily enslaved," and of awe and respect acquired without the use of force (again the topic of being physically and generally pleasant). Moreover, the topic of the "house" connects the text of Plato to the tannaitic tradition. A "despotis" and a "despotes" are primarily terms to indicate the head of the house/household (the mistress and the master of the house). For Plato, the city of Athens is the house which was masterfully upkept. Consider how Paul in 1 Timothy 5:14 describes redundantly a woman as being *oikodespotin* "head of the household," and of its physical upkeep. In the rabbinic text, the Queen is assaulted in the house (בבית), whereby the Torah/halakhah is the Queen regulating the eating schedule and eating practices in the holy day and, more broadly, the entire building of the civic life. I think, these conceptual mappings are not coincidental and they might evoke a shared associative construction.

4.5. 'Amen yetomah and a female orphan (TMeg)

The biblical term אָמֵן – 'amen "truly, so may it be" carries the basic meaning of "firm, trustworthy, reliable, faithful." It is derived from the root אָמַן "to support, nourish, uphold, be faithful, in the sense of to support with the arm, to carry a child, to bear and care, to be a nurse (cf. Num 11:12, Isa 49:23, Ruth 4:16, 2 Sam 4:4)." It is used, inter alia, as an affirmation to a blessing. For instance, in Neh 8:6 Ezra stands before the entire people after reading the entire book of the Torah, and blesses "ה', the great G-d" to which the assembly respond "'Amen, 'Amen" (וַיִּבְרְכוּ עֲזָרָא אֶת ה' הַאֱלֹהִים הַגְּדוֹל וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל הָעָם אָמֵן)

²⁷⁹ The feminine of δεσπότης "despot, absolute ruler."

אמן). Translated, it is a way to say that G-d is the source of all blessings, whereby the answer sounds associatively as “this is a reliable and firm truth, He is trustworthy, supporting us as a nursing mother who holds her child in the arm and does not let it fall.” The child is an infant who cannot self-sustain. This is a pragmatic notion, elaborating a cognitive association based in a bodily experience. The person who speaks or the subject of the speech (G-d) are considered stable and reliable. The passage 1 Chr 16:36 has it as an answer of the people to the act of blessing by the priests in the Temple. Its form as a formal liturgical ending surfaces in the structuring of the Psalms (Ps 41:13, 72:19, 89:52). From these texts it emerges as the act of the assembly answering the priests or Levites. 'Amen is a response by a listener to a speaker who give the blessings, a commitment of agreement.

The Mishnah and the Tosefta (mBer 8:8, tBer 3:26), discussing the blessings on food and wine at the end of the meal, prohibit replying 'amen to a blessing recited by a non-Jew or a Samaritan, thus drawing an indentarian line (עונין אמן אחר המברך ואין עונין). 'Amen is an adverb, and although Jastrow defines it as being used by rabbinic literature as grammatically “masculine,”²⁸⁰ I have not found such a usage in the Mishnah, Tosefta and Midrashei Halakhah, meaning in the entire tannaitic literature. Jastrow then states as a second entry “fem., the response Amen.” This use of 'amen as a feminine noun is found in Tosefta Megillah 3:27 (and in Bavli Berakhot 47a and Yerushalmi Berakhot 8:8, 12c, quoting this tosefta):

ת' מגילה ג כז
 הפורס על הלחם, והמברך על הפירות, ועל המצות – הרי זה לא יענה אחר עצמו אמן.
 אם ענה – הרי זה דרך בורות.
 אין עונין אמן – לא יתומה ולא קטופה.

בן עזיי אומ': העונה אמן יתומה יהיו בניו יתומי', קטופה יתקטפו חייו, ארוכה יאריך ימים ושנים.²⁸¹

tMeg 3:27

One who spreads [a cloak] over bread, and one who blesses over fruits, and [one who blesses] over *mitsvot* – this should not answer 'amen' after her/himself.

If s/he answered – this is the way of the unlearned.

One does not answer 'amen': neither **an orphaned one** [*yetomah*, f.], nor **one cut off** [*qtufah*, f.].

Ben 'Azai says, One who answers **an orphaned 'amen** [*'amen yetomah*, f.], her/his children will be orphans [*yetomim*]; a **cut off** [*qtufah*, f.], her/his life will be cut off; a **long one** [*'arukah*], s/he will lengthen [her/his] days and years.

This passage opens stating that one who answers 'amen after his/her own blessing is an unlearned. We find in Tobit 8:8 someone responding 'amen to his own prayer. In the New Testament (Matthew 5:18, Luke 4:24, John 1:51), 'amen is used at the beginning of a sentence confirming one's own statement. The tannaitic text thus seems to polemicize with these positions.

An orphaned 'amen (יתומה – *yetomah*) is when the responder has not heard or is unaware of the blessing to which s/he is responding (cf. Yerushalmi Berakhot on this passage). The response 'amen must not be “orphaned” from the blessing to which it is the response by coming too soon or too late. The term *qtufah* “cut off” is also used to refer to premature, undeveloped grapes (עוללות) plucked off. The expression קיטף בעוללות “plucking the small grapes” is employed to mean “persecution with attempts to destroy the young generation” (EstherR 1:9, GenR 42, LevR 11), whereby we find in the expression *qtufah*

²⁸⁰ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 77.

²⁸¹ Hebrew text according Vienna MS. The gendered term is found also in the Erfurt MS, in the London MS and in the ed. Princeps. LIEBERMAN ed., *Mo'ed* 2:361, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, *Mo'ed* 5, 3:1208, line 95f.

also an allusion to young children, and to the 'amen as being a female child. In this figurative language, when someone does not wait until the end of the blessing and cuts the 'amen, the 'amen is cut off and dies; when someone waits too much, then the blessing “dies” and the 'amen is orphaned.

In the Hebrew Bible we find only the male יתום – *yatom* “orphan,” who is also always referred to as being without a father, fatherless (for instance, Exod 22:22), together with his widowed mother, whereby *yatom* is a generic term for children without a father.

The idea of the tannaitic text is that the berakhah (blessing, grammatically feminine in Hebrew) and the answer 'amen go always together. 'Amen becomes feminine through association with the term berakhah, but why? Moreover, to use the term “orphaned” for 'amen alone without berakhah establishes a quite dramatic language. The 'amen is the daughter of the berakhah, whereby a ‘death’ berakhah implies a female orphan 'amen. The figurative weight of the image is created through the strong expression: orphan, an orphaned girl. Possibly, a conceptual structure employing the relationship between mother and female offspring / mother and daughter is at play here, whereby female yetomah would be the orphan of a mother (the berakhah). A daughter as an answer to the blessing implies also a female figure for the blessing itself. The phrase 'amen is described in this tradition as giving or shortening life and as a female, whereby giving life is associated with women. A rabbinic halakhic principle in polemics with other groups is described through the figure of a female orphan.

In Plato's Republic (495c), “philosophy,” neglected by her students, is compared to “an orphan bereft of her kin” (ὥσπερ ὀρφανὴν συγγενῶν). Abandoned, she is accosted by different people who are unworthy of her and bring shame upon her. The rabbinic 'amen spelled by those who do not care (“abandoned,” “neglected”), or left in the hands of competing groups to the rabbinic one – as Christians and Samaritans – is similarly depicted as a female orphan. Philosophy, the rabbinic idea of 'amen (and in general of blessings and prayer) share with women a social and political vulnerability and anxiety about their stability and security. While in the case of Plato the main cultural value resides in philosophy, in the tannaitic tradition it resides in the ritual affirmation-speech of responding 'amen to a blessing and in the rabbinic prohibition to detach one from another, like it is prohibited to separate the offspring from her mother (“seven days it shall remain with its mother” Exod 22:28-29). In case the detachment between blessing and response takes place, this is compared to causing death. The dramatic language, the rabbinic injunction and polemic with other groups and the representative embodied practice mark this female image as defining an important moment of the rabbinic self.

4.6. 'Em la-miqra' — rabbinic reading of the Torah (Sifra)

The tannaitic tradition speaking of 'em la-miqra' or 'um la-miqra' has been the subject of intense scholarly investigation rotating around the question of the meaning of this expression in the tannaitic strata.²⁸² Again, gender and the female image were not the

²⁸² Shlomo NAEH, *Ein* – אין אם למסורת, או: האם דרשו התנאים את כתיב התורה שלא כקריאתו המקובלת?, *Ein 'Em la-Massoret: Did the Tannaim Interpret the Script of the Torah Differently from the Authorized Reading?* Tarbiz 61 (1992): 401-448, according to which “The widespread opinion is that many halakhic derashot expounded by the tannaim are based on a new reading of the script of the Torah, a reading which is a free innovation by the exponent for the sake of a specific derasha. Here it is contended that the tannaim themselves did not use this exegetical method in halakhic material. The suggested reading of *shiv'im*

focus of all these works and this is way this tradition is discussed here. The female image is clearly central to it, its expression and concept. Since it is present in all the tannaitic manuscript witnesses and since the female gender remains significant according to every interpretation of this tradition, it is relevant for this analysis.

ספרא תזריע ב ב

שאלו תלמידין את ר' יהודה בן רעץ: או שומעין אנו: "וטמאה
שבעים." יכול תהא טמאה שב[ו]עים כנדתה? אמר להם:
טימא וטיהר בזכר. טמא וטיהר בנקיבה. מה ימי טהרתה
כיפליים בזכר, אף ימי טומאתה כיפליים בזכר. מאחר
שניפטרו, יצא [ה]מחזיר אחריהם. אמר להם: לא הייתי
צריך להיזקק לכם, מפני שיש אום לדבר / אום למקרא.²⁸³

ב' סנהדרין ד ע"א
דתניא: שאלו תלמידים את רבי יהודה בן רעץ:
אקרא אני 'שבעים', יכול תהא יולדת נקבה טמאה
שבעים! - אמר להן: טימא וטיהר בזכר, וטימא
וטיהר בנקבה. מה כשטיהר בזכר - בנקבה כפלים,
אף כשטימא בזכר - בנקבה כפלים. לאחר שיצאו,
יצא ומחזיר אחריהם. אמר להן: אי אתם זקוקים
לכך, שבויעים קרינן, ויש אם למקרא.

Sifra *tazria* 2:2

The students asked to R. Yehudah b. Ro'ets: We hear "If she gives birth to a daughter] she will impure for two weeks" (Lev 12:5). Is it possible that she is impure for two weeks [*shvu'ayim*] (seventy days [*shiv'im*]?) like her menstrual impurity [*niddatah*]?) He said to them: *Tima'* (process of becoming impure) and *tither* (purification) [are mentioned in respect] to [the birth of] a male. *Tima'* (process of becoming impure) and *tither* (purification) [are mentioned in respect] to [the birth of] a female.

Just as the days of her *taharah* are double those for a male, so the days of her *tumah* (fourteen) are double those for a male. After they left, he went after them and said to them: What I told you was not really

bSanhedrin 4a

As it is taught in a baraita: The students asked to R. Yehudah b. Ro'ets: I can read [the amount of time she is impure as]: "Seventy [*shiv'im*] days," [and not as: "Two weeks [*shvu'ayim*]" (Lev 12:5)]. Is it possible that a woman who gives birth to a female should be impure for seventy days? He said to them: *Tima'* (process of becoming impure) and *tither* (purification) [are mentioned in respect] to [the birth of] a male. *Tima'* (process of becoming impure) and *tither* (purification) [are mentioned in respect] to [the birth of] a female.

What it deemed her pure for a male – for a female the double [amount of time]. So what it deemed her impure for a male – for a female the double [amount of time].

(=seventy) instead of the authorized reading *shvu'ayim* (=two weeks), in the case of כנדתה שבעים (‘...she shall be unclean two weeks as during her menstruation’: Lev. 12:5) ... is intimately connected with the ancient controversy between the Sages and the Boethusians concerning the exact date of the Pentecost and the meaning of the seven weeks that must be counted before it.” (online at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23598766?refreqid=excelsior%3A3704ef5c9e4a76768017a8528380f1b6&seq=1>); David HENSCHKE, "יש אם למקרא" – "On the Tannaitic Meaning of the Expression *yesh 'em la-miqra*" *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 433-446, according to which "this expression was meant to denote that we should understand a specific passage according to its meaning in other places where it occurs in Scripture. יש אם למקרא means that a clear explanation of the passage in question can be found elsewhere, from which its meaning should be discovered;" Brachyahu LIFSHITZ, "יש אם למסורת" – "One Has to Follow Tradition" *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 447-454, according to which "Sifra, Tazria, 2.2 should be interpreted according to the possible reading of the Biblical שבעים (*shiv'im*) as שבויעים (*shavu'im*), which appears in Daniel 9:24, and indicates an undefined period of time. Thus, שבעים כנדתה can be understood to be a period as long as the menstrual impurity period, e.g. two weeks. This interpretation is in accordance with the tradition of the Talmud and makes the text meaningful. It is also suggested that the verse in Genesis 22:11 contains the nucleus of the idea that a certain reading might preserve beneath it another reading which is as relevant to the interpretation of the text as the authorized reading itself;" Shlomo NAEH, "אין אם - פעם שנייה - למסורת - *En Em Lammasoret* – Second Time" *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 455-462 (online at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23597802>); Shamir YONA and Mayer GRUBER, "The Meaning of Masoret in Ezek. 20:37 and in Rabbinic Hebrew," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 10 (2007): 210-220; and Shraga ABRAMSON, "Yesh Em Lamiqra, Lamasoret," in *Leshonenu* 50 (1986): 31-36.

²⁸³. Hebrew text according to MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica ebr., 66, 58d, *sheratsim* 11:3 (see MA'AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*, <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=18000&page=81>).

necessary, for **there is 'em la-davar / 'em la-miqra' ('em la-miqra')**.²⁸⁴

After they left, he went after them and said to them: You do not need this [proof that I gave based on the comparison of the periods of impurity with the periods of purity.]

We read [the verse as]: “Two weeks,” **and there is 'em la-miqra'** [“a mother to the reading,” **the vocalization of the Torah is authoritative**].

I will present the different ways in which this tradition can be understood and I will discuss the role of the gendered image in each of them. According to the version in the Babylonian Talmud in tractate Sanhedrin, the interpretation of Scripture, namely of the *written* text of the Torah (תורה שבכתב), happens in the rabbinic *oral* Torah (תורה שבעל פה, bYom 28b) on two levels. One is based on how the text is written (כתיב – *ktiv*, the written spelling of Biblical words in the Masorah), the other is based on how the text is read (קרי – *qere*, the Masoretic reading instructions). The talmudic expression יש אם למסורת – *yesh 'em la-miqra' ve-yesh 'em la-massoret* indicates these two sources of authority for exegesis. One source of authority is the *written* tradition (*la-massoret*, the consonantal text of the Hebrew Scripture) and one source of authority is the reading tradition (*la-miqra'*, the *oral* reading or reading aloud from the Scripture, see mBer 2:1; namely the pronunciation, vocalization of the vowels who are not written in the text).²⁸⁵ Especially the full (plene) and defective spelling is used by the rabbinic interpretation as an exegetical main motive. The female term אם – *'em* “mother”²⁸⁶ indicates the “authority” guiding the rabbinic exegesis, either the authority of the *written* text (the consonantal letters without vowels) or of the *oral* reading (where the vowels are pronounced) – which is sung, declaimed, said aloud.

The biblical text interpreted here is Leviticus 12:5 about a mother giving birth to a daughter. In the case of the birth of a daughter, the mother’s postpartum impurity last for the double amount of time that in the case of the birth of a son (ואם נקבה תלד וטמאה) (שבועים): “two weeks” (שבועים – *shvu'ayim*) vs. “seven days” (שבועת ימים – *shiv'at yamim*, Lev 12:2). The term indicating the period of impurity for a daughter is written without vowels שבועים, with a defective spelling, missing the vav (שב[ו]עים), which would disambiguate the term. As it is written, the expression could mean “seventy” (*shiv'im*), instead of “two weeks” (*shvu'ayim*). The rabbinic exegetical answer is that “there is a mother / authority” to the reading version (“two weeks”) – an oral, spoken tradition to be followed.

In bSan 4a it is stated that all the rabbinic sages accept the principle of 'em la-miqra', meaning follow the vocalization of the Torah as authoritative. It brings the example of Exod 23:19 “in its mother’s milk” (בהלב – *ba-halev*) instead of “fat” (בהלֵב – *be-helev*), in which case there would be no prohibition about eating meat with milk (בחלב אמו יכול) (בחלב). The conclusion is that *yesh 'em la-miqra'* and the verse prohibits cooking the kid in its mother’s milk (אמרת יש אם למקרא).

The main point in the Talmud is the tension arising from the contrast between traditions – including the entire rabbinic production, the Oral Torah – which are transmitted orally

²⁸⁴ The textual witnesses MS Vatican ebr. 66, JTS Rab. 2171 (MS 9026), 77b attest the version 'em. MS London British Library Add. 16406 / LON BL 341 (Cat. Margoliouth), 197a, MS Parma, 064, MS Vatican ebr. 31, 102 attest the version 'em. MS Vatican ebr. 66 attest both 'em la-miqra' and 'em la-davar.

²⁸⁵ bPes 86b, bSuk 6b, bQid 18b, bSan 4a-b, bMak 5a, 7b, bBek 34a, bKer 17b.

²⁸⁶ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 74: “אם f. (b. h. to press, embrace, join, support, lead) 1) mother.”

and the written text of Scripture, which “was copied out with deliberate care to reproduce an officially accepted spelling.”²⁸⁷ This image thus stays at the core of the very ideological fundament sustaining rabbinic Judaism. The expression represents how to read the Torah for the rabbis, whereby the term “mother” stays for the ‘rabbis’ true reading.’ The “reading” has a mother - meaning a source, an authority, a right origin (*yesh 'em la-miqra*). Or in the case of a new version of the written text for a specific interpretative scope – e.g., in order to create law – there is an *'em la-massoret*. The “mother” also marks, in this case, a rabbinic innovation. Why *'em* “mother” instead of *'av* “father”? Bacher suggested that “sie kann sich auf eine sichere Tradition berufen, wie ein Kind an seine Mutter” (“[the rabbinic reading] refers to / is based in a tradition which is certain, like a child to his mother”).²⁸⁸ He then quotes the Sefer ha-‘Arukh of Nathan ben Yechi‘el from Rome (c. 1035-1106), under the voice “אם 2” (I, 110a) which explains the term *'em* in our expression as עיקר דבר ושורש – “the essence and the root/origin of the matter.”²⁸⁹ *'Em* indeed indicates from where the halakhah and different laws are derived (either from the words’ pronunciation or from the written spelling). Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal, Italy 1800-1865), in *Vikuah 'al ha-Qabbalah* section 17, states about *'em la-miqra*: “the word *'em* has as its meaning “source” (*maqor*, also “womb”), as they say [in mBekh 4:4]: עד שחותכין את הא[ו]ם שלה בשביל שלא תלד – ‘they sever its womb (*ha-'um*) (Shadal quotation has *'em*) so that it will not give birth.’ And the intent is to say that the reading which one pronounces has a trustworthy source, and this is the main meaning according to a few, and according to the opinion of others the *masoret* has a trustworthy source, and it is the primary meaning.” The term mother would give, instead of “father,” the security of the origin, and it would be connected to kinship claims.

The term אום – *'um* found in some Sifra MSS means also “mother,” as well as “womb.”²⁹⁰ It expresses again the idea of a “source.” The idea of מקרא – *miqra* “the oral reading from the written text with the vocalization and intonation according to the halakhah” is so central to the rabbinic idea, that it is used to indicate the commandment of teaching to the children, which is expressed in mNed 4:3 as including daughters: “he teaches his sons and daughters *miqra* / the oral reading of Scripture” (מלמד הוא את בניו) (ואת בנותיו מקרא).

Following the interpretation of Naeh about Sifra as discussing a sectarian polemic with the Sadducees / Boethusians, the meaning of the term “mother” indicates here a *legitimate* origin / maternity vs. a sectarian, heretic reading of the term “weeks,” which would be פסולה / *psulah*²⁹¹ – a term indicating genealogical unfitness for women marrying into the priesthood and their children. Naeh comments on the term *'um/ 'em* at the end of its article (p. 445f.). He defines its meaning as “root and essence/main part” (שורש ועיקר), with no reference to its female gender. Origins could be marked also by the word “father,” but instead the tannaitic text chooses “mother.”

Naeh identifies another passage in Sifra containing the term *'um* according to two excellent manuscript witnesses (MS Vatican ebr. 66 and the Genizah fragment T-S 16, 327). In this text R. Meir interprets Lev 2:14 אַגְבִּיב קְלִי בָאֵשׁ – “greens ears of corn parched into fire” as meaning that the commandment is to parch the corn-ears directly into the fire

²⁸⁷ YONA and GRUBER, “The Meaning of Masoret,” 218.

²⁸⁸ Wilhelm BACHER, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* (1, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1899), 120.

²⁸⁹ <https://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=42538&st=&pgnum=15>.

²⁹⁰ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 26.

²⁹¹ This term is used by NAEH, “Authoritative reading,” 441.

(a reading according to the literal meaning קלי “to parch”). The rabbis understand midrashically the verse as referring to אבוב של קלאים – “the tube of the parched-grain merchants,” which was perforated like a sieve. Thus, they interpret that the parching should be made with this instrument containing the ears and not directly into the fire. The text (Sifra, *vayiqra’ dibbura’ de-nedavah* 13:6) to support the position of the rabbis states: אחר לשון אילא לשון אחר – “the expression *qali* “parch” has / is no *’um* / “mother,” rather another expression (meaning, the tube of the merchants, קלאים).” Here the term “mother” / *’um* is used for the rabbinic midrash vs. the plain reading of Scripture. The “mother” justifies the rabbinic *midrash* (the less obvious reading) as the legitimate interpretation. The rabbinic expression (*lashon*) has a mother or is a mother, meaning it brings to light/life the legitimate reading/child. The art of midrash is indeed to bring to light an *invisible* element in the text – to render something visible which was not seen at *prima facie* in the written text. This is connected with the very physical image of the child not being visible until it comes out from the body of the mother at birth, thus becoming visible in that moment, together with being directly connected with the maternal body in this passage from invisible to visible.

Indeed, also in the image of *’em la-miqra’* we find this same conceptual mapping or embodied image. The reading is “coming out of the maternal body,” meaning the vowels are not visible in the written text, but then they become visible in the oral reading, as coming out the body of a mother (the oral reading, giving to it its legitimacy). The body of the mother gives the legitimacy – we “see” from where the child comes from.

This same cognitive pattern is expressed in other tannaitic phraseologies using the word *’um* as figurative expression. In Mishnah Negaim (mNeg 1:5, 1:6, 4:8, 4:9, 4:10, Sifra tazria’ 2:2, 3:3, 5:10) the term האומ – *ha-’om* “mother” indicates the original nega’, the starting point of the skin disease causing impurity, the first sign, from which the subsequent spreading is “born” (וְנֹלַד בּוֹ פְּסִיּוֹן). The idea of being “born” is connected to the fact that there was no spreading and then a spreading appeared / was visible. Again, the idea of being invisible and then visible, and the coming out from the body (of the first sign) are connected to the image of the maternal body and to a mother as origin. The entire text of nega’im in the Torah is connected with idea of something being “seen” by the priest and thus declared impure. This is the main concept between the biblical and rabbinic text in the laws about nega’im and impurity: visibility. And it is expressed with a female image.

In the same vein, the mass of olive from which the oil is coming out and from which oil is derived is defined as אומ [של] זיתים – “mother of olives” or simply “mother” (mToh 9:8, tToh 10:8). Before the oil was invisible, contained in the body of the olives, and then it comes out of them, it is derived from them. The pulp of olives from which the oil run off is described as the mother.

According to Henschke²⁹² the expression *’em la-miqra’* indicates the rabbinic way to derive meaning for a term from other intertextual passages in Scripture, whereby the meaning of a term is hidden and then revealed through other textual places. For instance, in the case of the reading “milk” (*halev*) instead of fat (*helev*), this is derived from the verse in Isa 60:16: וְיִגְדְּלֶנּוּ חֵלב גוֹיִם – “And you will breastfeed the milk of the nations,” whereby only milk can be the object of “breastfeeding.” This means the expression indicates a hidden origin which is visibly legitimate through her “mother.” However,

²⁹² HENSCHKE, “On the Tannaitic Meaning,” 441.

Henschke assimilates 'em la-miqra' to binyan 'av and does not discuss the gender difference between the two expressions.

The fundamental idea of revelation through the rabbinic midrashic exegetical work is expressed with the image of a mother. This is connected to the physical embodied experience of maternity, pregnancy and birth, as revealing something that was not visible. Like children are identified with the mother through the rabbinic principle of matrilineality, so it is the subject of 'em la-miqra' – with “the mother” representing legitimacy, transmission, and authority. The impact of this image is remarkable.

5. The Land of Israel, rain and agriculture as heaven-earth communication channels with a woman's voice

5.1. *Qtanah* and *neti'ah*: Covenantal promise and intergenerational continuity in laws on trees (TOrl)

Communication and transmission of knowledge through the generations and passage of the covenantal promise are concepts expressed through plants metaphors in the Hebrew Bible. Gen 2:9 speaks densely allusively of a “tree of life” and a “tree of knowledge.” Famously, *torah* (teaching) and *hokhmah* (wisdom) are described with the image “she is a tree of life” (Prov 3:18).

The law in Lev 19:23 stating that fruits of trees during the first three years after their planting cannot be eaten makes use of male figurative language, describing these fruits as 'orlah (lit., foreskin). This image implies that after this time, when the fruits may be enjoyed, it is imaginatively like the removal of the foreskin (namely circumcision), as representing male fertility and reproduction. Already the tannaitic strata makes this figurative connection between 'orlah and procreation explicit: “R. Yose said: How do we know that circumcision is from the place [that yields] fruit? That it is stated: “ve- 'araltem 'orlato, its fruit” (tShab 15:9). The concept of covenantal promise is the main point emerging in this imagery, “whereby the promise of an increased yield as a result following the law on trees parallels the promise of descendants within the account on circumcision in Genesis 17, when the covenant between G-d and Abraham is established.”²⁹³

The tannaitic material radically reverses the male image into a female one, whereby in the laws of 'orlah it describes trees as זקנה or זקינה – *zqenah* “old woman” (mOrl 1:3-5, tShev 1:2), to which the amoraic witnesses add the expression ילדה – *yaldah* “young girl” (for instance, in yOrl 1:1, 60d; 1:3, 61a-b).²⁹⁴

In tShev 1:2 the term *zqenah* is paired with the term נטיעה – *neti'ah* “newly planted tree,” “young tree,” “shoot”:

²⁹⁵ זקנה ונראה כנטיעה הרי היא כנטיעה ונטיעה נראית כזקנה הרי היא כזקנה.

A *zqenah* (“old woman,” indicating an old tree) which appears like a *neti'ah* (a newly planted tree, a young tree) [in that it yields little fruit] is like a newly planted tree. And a newly planted tree which appears like an old tree [in that it yields much fruit] is like an old tree.

²⁹³ HAENDLER, “Trees as Male and Female,” 2.

²⁹⁴ On these images and their gendered meaning see HAENDLER, “Trees as Male and Female.”

²⁹⁵ LIEBERMAN ed., Zera'im, 1:165; LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Zera'im 2, 2:484.

The term *neti'ah* is grammatically feminine and a rabbinic neologism, which is not found in the Hebrew Bible. This new term means literally “planting,” indicating a new planting (an important temporal point in the laws of ‘orlah), and it is derived from the biblical verb נָטַע – *nata’* “to plant.”²⁹⁶ As quoted by Lieberman, a *neti'ah* is אילן הקטן – *'ilan ha-qatan*, “a small tree,” which is grammatically masculine. However, together with *zqenah*, rabbinic Hebrew coins the new term *neti'ah* in the feminine.

TOrl 1:8 describes the case of doubtful kil'ayim – in this instance, the mixing of plants in vineyards – as being prohibited in the Land of Israel and permitted outside of it (and in Syria, an in-between place). The rationale is that in the Land of Israel the prohibition is of biblical origin and thus it requires stricture even in cases of doubt. In this law, the tosefta uses the terminology of כרם שנטוע ירק “A vineyard which is planted (*natu'a*) with vegetables...” It then turns to the case of doubtful ‘orlah (cf. mOrl 3:9). This is the very last tosefta and last topic in this tractate (and also in the Mishnah). The rationale is the same as in the case of kil'ayim: if someone has a young tree and does not know whether or not it is three years old and thus subject to the law of ‘orlah, since the prohibition of ‘orlah inside the Land of Israel is biblical, even in such a case of doubt the produce of the tree is prohibited (ספיקו בארץ ישראל אסור). However, in Syria and outside the Land, it is permitted (בסוריא ובחוצה לארץ מותר). The terminology about the young tree uses the term קטנה – *qtanah* “a small/young girl,” in a manuscript variant and – *neti'ah qtanah* “a small sapling” in another variant²⁹⁷:

MS Vienna	MS Erfurt	ed. princ.
הרי שנמצא נטועה קטנה בתוך שדהו	הרי שמצא נטיעה קטנה בתוך שדהו	הרי שנמצא נטועה קטנה בתוך שדהו
Behold, when it is found a <i>qtanah</i> planted [<i>netu'ah</i>] in his field	Behold, when it is found a <i>neti'ah qtanah</i> in his field	Behold, when it is found a <i>qtanah</i> planted [<i>netu'ah</i>] in his field

In both cases the young tree is defined in the feminine. If the term *neti'ah* already indicates a new planting, a shoot, a young tree, why the text found it necessary to add the descriptive *qtanah* “small”? The version in the Vienna MS could be the original one, where the tree is described as *qtanah* “small girl” or “minor girl,” a technical term in the halakhic language.

MShev 1:8 indeed asks: “Up until when are they called *neti'ot* /saplings?” (עד אימתי), which is similar to ask, when is the age of maturity for the tree? When is the tree like a minor girl? The definition until what point a tree is a *neti'ah* is answered with the phraseology of *bat*, a term used to indicate the ages of girls and women: “R. Yehoshu‘a says: until they are seven years old (lit., *bat* – daughter of seven years). Rabbi ‘Aqiva’ says: *neti'ah*, according to its name” (רבי יהושע אומר: בת שבע שנים. רבי עקיבא). (אומר: נטיעה כשמה). In the parallel tosefta, tShev 1:3, the age is articulated in more details: “What is considered a *neti'ah*? R. Yehoshu‘a says: A five-year-old [tree] (lit. daughter of five), a six-year-old [tree] (daughter), a seven-year-old [tree] (daughter)” (אי זו היא) (נטיעה? ר' יהושע אומר בת חמש בת שש בת שבע). There is clearly a connection between age, maturity, female gender and reproduction.

In the laws of marriage tYev 6:6 defines, next to *zqenah*, also the *qtanah* as “a minor who is not yet ready to give birth” (זקינה ... וקטנה שאין ראויה לילד).

²⁹⁶ JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 899.

²⁹⁷ LIEBERMAN ed., *Zera'im*, 1:285; LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, *Zera'im* 2, 2:822, lines 26-27.

TSoT 7:11 relates *neti'ah* to the idea of fertility and procreation: “Like the *neti'ah* ‘young tree’ is fruitful and multiplies, so the words of Torah are fruitful and multiply” (מה נטיעה) (פרה ורבה אף דברי תורה פריין ורביין), with a clear construction on Gen 1:22 and the commandment of reproduction: “be fruitful, and multiply” (פרו ורבו).

Bavli Ta’anit 5b within a blessing in a form of parable compares *neti'ot* “young trees / saplings” to descendants: שכל נטיעות שנוטעין ממך יהיו כמותך ... שיהיו צאצאי מעיך כמותך – “That all saplings which they plant/ one plants (your wife?) from you be like you ... that your offspring (lit., the descendants from your belly/bowels, cf. Isa 48:19) shall be like you.”

It seems that the expressions *zqenah*, *yaldah*, *qtanah*, *bat* and *neti'ah* for trees in agricultural laws refer to women and minor girls and their capability or lack thereof to have children. Trees are described systematically in female terms within the tannaitic agricultural laws. The images of descendants, intergenerational continuity and the connected covenantal promise are represented by the tannaitic text through a terminology which uses the words for women employed in the halakhic language, especially for marriage and procreation (*qtanah*, minor girl, *zqenah*). We find again images of (old) mothers and (minor) daughters representing transmission from generation to generation and the two-opposite extreme of the spectrum in the span of the reproductive phase of life, as embracing its entire significance.

5.2. Rain’s metaphors reconsidered as complementary: rain, clouds, heaven, and sky as woman (TTaan)

Mishnah Ta’anit 1:1 opens discussing from which time to add to the second blessing in the ‘amidah-prayer the mention of G-d’s power to bring rain, a formula specifically thought for the rainy season (cf. Mishnah Berakhot 5:2). The expression used, גבורות גשמים – *gevurot geshamim* “powers of rains” entails a male metaphor, whereby *gevurah* expresses also “virility,” from גבר – *gever* “man.”²⁹⁸ However, this metaphor is from the Hebrew Bible and not a rabbinic innovation. In Gen 7:18 we find the expression וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם – *va-yigberu ha-mayim*, about the waters of the rains and of the sea in Noah’s history (from the root גבר “be mighty”). Reinforcing the image of rain as male the term רַבִּיעָה, with the primary meaning of copulation (cf. Lev 20:16), is used to describe the rainfall in tTaan 1:2-4 and mTaan 3:1.

However, in the same Tosefta Ta’anit, at the core of this image, rain is also described with a female image, simultaneously with the male one (tTaan 1:3²⁹⁹, quoted in bTaan 6a, bNed 63a). Rain is defined as בכירה / ביכורה – *bikkurah* or *bakirah* “first, early (time for) rain,” בנונית – *benonit* “intermediate” and אפלה – *'afilah* “last, late, concealed (from obscure, dark).” These are not mere temporal indications. The expressions *bikkurah*, *bakirah* and *'afilah* are used together to indicate the act of “giving birth” by sheep (cf. תהיו אפילו כבש – “those are the early-bearing sheep,” “late-bearing sheep,” in ySheq 3:1, 47b, yRH 1:1, 56d), thus creating the association of heaven and rain as giving birth. The original meaning of the terms (derived from Exod 9:32) is of late and early crops/produce from the earth (cf. tShev 4:14: האפיל על הבכיר). Thus, this image does not have rain in contraposition to the earth, but as representing the same act of giving forth,

²⁹⁸ See ILAN, *Massekhet Ta’anit* (FCBT II/9), 20.

²⁹⁹ LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Mo’ed 3, 5:1065.

giving birth. These figurative expressions represent an act of birth – of rain being birthed by the heaven on earth or of rain as birthing, as representing the moment of birth. Like birth, rain can be late or early, or just at the intermediate time. The timing of birth and rain seem to be parallel in their being unpredictable and uncontrollable. Moreover, the dense clouds, full of rain, recalls the pregnancy and the foretelling of the moment of discarding the load.

The idea of rain as giving birth is found also in the Targum.³⁰⁰ Targum TgProv 25:23 translates the Masoretic רוח צפון תחולל גשם – “The north wind brings forth/begets rain” with רוחא גרבייתא בטנא דמטרא – “The north wind is **pregnant** with rain / will conceive rain / is loaded, full with rain.”³⁰¹

The Targum also employs the terminology of *shimesh* “to minister, serve,” but also to “upkeep the house,” and “have marital relations,” with often a feminine inflection (but used for both sexes), to indicate rain and dew descending from the clouds and the heaven: TgJ Is45:8: יִשְׁמְשׁוּן שְׁמַיָּא מְלַעֲיָלָא וְעִנְיָא יִגְדֹּן טוֹבָא – “the heavens will **provide** / enable [MT הִרְעִיפוּ] from above and the clouds flow with goodness,” and TgJ Zec8:12: וְאַרְעָא וְאֶרְצָא יִתְּנִין יְתָא עֲלֵיהֶן וְשְׁמַיָּא יִשְׁמְשׁוּן בְּטֵלְהוֹן – “the earth will give its produce and the heavens will **serve** them with their dew.”

This imagery of the heaven, the sky, and rain as metaphorically female also resonates in late amoraic material in an extensive manner and has a clear reception history. In bTaan 8a-b rain is compared to a woman giving birth: “when the heavens are closed from bringing down dew and rain, they are a similar to a woman who is in labor and yet does not give birth” (בשעה שהשמים נעצרים מלהוריד טל ומטר דומה לאשה שמחבלת ואינה יולדת); “closure is said of rains and it is said of a woman” (נאמרה עצירה בגשמים ונאמרה עצירה באשה), whereby the biblical verse describes the heavens as being closed; “birth is said of women and birth is said of rains” (נאמר לידה באשה ונאמר לידה בגשמים), with the manuscript version [Oxford 366 and London] “birth is said of heaven” (נאמרה לידה ברקיע) – *raqi’a*; “visitation / conception is said of a woman and visitation is said of rains” (נאמר פקידה בגשמים ונאמר פקידה באשה).³⁰² The rain as female metaphor is assigned here to Resh Laqish.

The biblical term for cloud ענן – *anan* is often “used in the sense of cover protection.”³⁰³ The term appears in the phrase ענן שכינה “the cloud of the Divine Presence” (CantR 2:6) and the midrash situates a cloud over the entrance of Sarah’s and Rebekah’s tent (GenR 60) and was removed at their death, paralleling the clouds of glory (ענני כבוד) being removed when Aaron died (tSot 11:1, bRH 3a, ref. to Num 21:1). YTa’an 3:3, 66c states that “the cloud is named *anan* because it (the rainfall) makes the creatures kind and

³⁰⁰ On Targum as a rabbinic text see, e.g., Willem F. SMELIK, “Targum (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible)” (*The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012): “While the term “Targum” simply means “translation” in Hebrew, as a technical term it is widely reserved for a qualified type of translation: the scriptural translations in Jewish Aramaic that are at home in the rabbinic tradition and display unique characteristics which set them apart from other Jewish, and non-Jewish, translations. The Targums have been transmitted as part of rabbinic literature from one generation to another.”

³⁰¹ Cf. “bṭn vb. e/a to be pregnant, 2 to conceive (trans.)” in CAL – *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* (<http://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=b%2Bn%20V&cits=all>, and see also under the voice “bṭnh, bṭnf’ (batnā, bṭantā/battentā/bāṭintā) n.f. pregnant woman,” <http://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=b%2Bnh%20N&cits=all>). JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 158: “בְּטֵן, בְּטִין” (v. בטי) to be pregnant. Targ. Prov. XXV, 23.”

³⁰² See ILAN, *Massekhet Ta’anit* (FCBT II/9), 124ff.

³⁰³ JASTROW, *Dictionary*,

humble/patient (*'anavim*) to one another” (ענן שהוא עושה את הבריות ענוים אילו לאילו) It is therefore a term very rich in figurative imagery. In bTaan 25a the heaven addressed in the feminine (although the term *raqi'a* is grammatically masculine) is asked in Hebrew to cover her face (with clouds to bring rain) and this image is associated with not being brazen, namely with modesty and humility: “Heaven, heaven, cover your face (*kassi panaikh*, f. Hebrew) ... How brazen is the face of heaven (when it is not covered/dressed)!” (אמר: רקיע רקיע, כסי פניך! ... אמר: כמה עזין פני רקיע!) It seems that conveniently the covering of the sky with clouds is associated to veiling and modesty, and the following rain as indicating female procreation. Last, in bBer 59a again refers to the heaven/sky (רקיע) in the feminine and it twice uses the technical term *taharah* “purity” to refer to a clean heaven without clouds: *רקיע בטהרתה – raqi'a be-taharatah* “the sky in her purity.” The reference to purity / *taharah* in the feminine creates an immediate association with sexual viability or viability for marital relations, from which the blessing of rain can ensue.

6. Time is a woman's body – thinking rabbinic calendar and temporality

6.1. Shabbat as woman (TBer)

In the tosefta tBer 5:2 already analyzed in section 4.4. (“Torah as Queen Esther”) another associative and metaphorical layer seems to be present, whereby the Shabbat is also compared to a queen and to Esther. Famously, Bavli Shabbat 119a describes Shabbat as a queen. The topic is the deference due to Shabbat, a personified figure:

בי שבת קיט ע"א
 רבי חנינא מיעטף וקאי אפניא דמעלי שבתא, אמר: בואו ונצא לקראת שבת המלכה.
 רבי ינאי לביש מאניה מעלי שבת, ואמר: בואי כלה בואי כלה.
 רבה בר רב הונא איקלע לבי רבה בר רב נחמן, קריבו ליה תלת סאוי טחיי. אמר להו: מי הוה ידעיתון דאתינא?
 אמרו ליה: מי עדיפת לן מינה.

bShab 119a

R. Hanina' would wrap himself [in his garment] and stand at nightfall on the Shabbat eve, and say: Come and we will go out to greet Shabbat the queen [Shabbat ha-malkah].

Rabbi Yanna'i put on his garment on the Shabbat eve and said: Enter, o bride. Enter, o bride.

Rabbah bar Rav Huna' happened to come to the house of Rabbah bar Rav Nahman [and dined with him on Shabbat]. They brought to him three se'ah of oiled biscuits. He said to them: Did you know I was coming [and prepared all of this in my honor]? They said to him: Are you more distinguished / important to us than [the Shabbat? The biscuits were prepared in deference to Shabbat, see Rashi there].

Bavli Bava Kamma 32b has the version: לקראת שבת כלה מלכתא – “to greet Shabbat, the bride, the queen.” Bavli Hullin 111a adds to the story of Rabbah bar Rav Huna' the biblical quote עונג לקדוש ה' מכבד – “If you proclaim Shabbat a delight, the sacred day of G-d honored” (Isa 58:13).

The language of Shabbat entering as a bride (בואי כלה) is based on the formulaic language about the beginning of the Shabbat day as the Shabbat entering / coming (tBQ 9:19: עד שלא תבוא שבת). In MdRSbY 19:17 (source Midrash haGadol) this language is used to describe G-d as the bride, entering the new house, the Tabernacle and coming to Israel who is going out from the camp / the house, to greet G-d:

... ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלקים ...

מושללו משל למה הדבר דומה לחתן שיצא לקראת כלה

מכבודו שליוצא אתה למד מה כבודו שלנכנס

לכך נאמר ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלקים

Moses led the people (va-yotse') out of the camp toward G-d (liqra't ha-'Eloqim) (Exod 19:7) ...

This is like a groom who goes out (*yotse'*) toward the bride (*liqra't kallah*).

From the honor of the one who goes out (*yotse'*) (Israel, the groom) you learn about the honor of the one who enters (namely who is coming, G-d, the bride)

This is way it is said: *Moses led the people (va-yotse') out of the camp toward G-d (liqra't ha-'Eloqim).*³⁰⁴

The *kavod*/honor of G-d and the *kavod*/honor of the Shabbat are compared through the metaphor of a bride entering her new house. The entrance of the Shabbat brings that spark of Divine in the house celebrating the day.

All these topics, the Shabbat as delight, the Shabbat as requiring honor and deference, the Shabbat entering in the house as the beginning of the holy day, the Shabbat as queen and bride, are found in the story in Tosefta Berakhot with the image of Queen Esther, whereby it seems that on a deeper, associative layer a comparison between the Shabbat and the queen is established by the text. The rabbi accused to have “assaulted” the queen, has “assaulted” the idea of Shabbat as delight and physical enjoyment, expressed by the discussion on eating practices. There is an interplay on the honor required for the queen (*kvod ha-malkah*) as referring both to the Torah and the day of Shabbat. The halakhic debate rotates around the question on how to receive, welcome and accept the Shabbat (whether this requires stop eating or continue eating).

A parallel is also created between the image of “toward the bride/the Shabbat” (*liqra't kallah*) and the king moving his sceptre toward Esther and Esther entering the house/palace, whereby a connection between Esther and the Shabbat is established. All these subjects – namely the time of Shabbat, the bride and Queen Esther – enter a new house (or “the house”) and change it, its destiny (as being reversed, as reversing the *pur*), its course and reality. The time of Shabbat is conceptually changing the texture of reality, and even of physical reality, as being a physical experience. This, between other aspects, is expressed with the female character of Queen Esther. Shabbat is an act of temporal segregation, whereby time is separated from everyday activities and dedicated to ritual ones, which mark the day as sacred. Shabbat as separated “sacred time” is marked by its physical activities of abstention from work and rituals as *qiddush* – the sanctification of the day. The abstention from work distinguished Jews within the Roman Empire and put them in a position of minority, exposure to misunderstanding and mockery within the larger cultural context. To restore Shabbat as queen is to mark Jewish sovereignty, its main ruling and dominant figure as not being the Romans, but the Shabbat herself, evoking the queenship of Esther in the Diaspora, whereby Esther is the only Jewish ruler

³⁰⁴ NELSON, *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai*, 227-228.

in the Diasporic world. GenR 11:5 remarks, in this broader context, how the Divine always observes the Shabbat and rests on the seventh day. “How is then possible that He causes rains to fall and winds to blow? R. ‘Aqiva’ explains that, according to rabbinic law, these activities do not represent work on the Shabbat for the Divine, and thus G-d acts within the boundaries of halakhah. This is like one who carries four *‘amot*: the world is for G-d less than four cubits and thus He can carry elements as wind and rain even in the public domain without transgressing the prohibition of transferring on the Shabbat.” G-d is depicted as acting as a rabbinic Jew, as having a ‘rabbinic, Jewish’ body moving within the rabbinic space and time of the Shabbat. The rabbinic structuring of Shabbat is projected on the world order and structure, as being specifically particular but also as affecting G-d and the world. The fact that Shabbat is assimilated with Queen Esther, a Jewish woman ruling in the Diaspora, and specifically with a woman and a queen, again constructs Jewish difference and diasporic destiny in the face of Roman domination and exile. The Shabbat is everywhere, distinguishes the Jews, and is, metaphorically, a woman.

6.2. *Leil ‘ibur, hodesh ha-‘ibur* “the month of pregnancy” and moon as woman (MTRH, MTArak)

This chapter about “time is a woman’s body” explores tannaitic conceptions of temporality and gender. It attempts to provide a reading of tannaitic gendered metaphorical language for time, which is particularly extensive and significant. Beyond the special case of the personification of the Shabbat – the most important day of the week and the marker of the basic Jewish structuring of time (in the unit of a week as seven days and a resting day at the end as its perk), women images recur in tannaitic elaborations about the concept of time and its interaction with rabbinic law and structuring of life. Through conceptual metaphor theory and linguistic, literary and comparative considerations, in the next sections it is argued that giving rabbinic time a female face and marking the rabbinic dating system with maternal experience is a peculiar strategy – a move far from natural, obvious or rhetorical. Building on previous research, this analysis suggests a step further about how important identarian and cognitive processes are at play here. It also suggests some new insights in the linguistic and gender elaborations taking place in the rabbinic terminology for time.³⁰⁵ Kattan-Gribetz has pointed in “Women’s Bodies as Metaphors for Time” how such gendered metaphors in the tannaitic corpora, “changed people’s fundamental conceptions of time by being used as central metaphorical systems.”³⁰⁶

HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE CONSIDERATIONS – SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

One of the most intriguing tannaitic figurative expressions is that which enlivens rabbinic calendar-laws. Such a metaphorical language for calendrical time appears to be a tannaitic innovation.

³⁰⁵ A first draft of this research was presented under the title “Time is a woman’s body: Tannaitic conceptions of temporality and gender,” at the AJS 52nd Annual Conference 2020.

³⁰⁶ KATTAN GRIBETZ, “Women’s Bodies as Metaphors for Time,” 177.

The calendar was a main concern in Jewish discourses during the Second Temple period. Ben Sira, the book of Jubilees, 1 and 2 Enoch and Qumran contain a large amount of material on calendrical practice as an identarian, distinctive and sectarian issue.³⁰⁷ These sources make no reference at all to gendered metaphors with images of women's bodies as source domain for the calculation of the calendar.

In these texts, the calendar is described as a way to fulfil the revelation of G-d's will and law. The calendar was understood as a tool to enable sanctification, achieve compassion from G-d and a canal of Divine judgement and regulation of the life of Israel. For rabbinic exegesis, the calendar is the first law given to Israel, fundamental to the establishment of the people (MdRY *pisha' bo' 1*, Exod 12:2).

HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE CONSIDERATIONS – ROMAN PERIOD

From the first century CE, the calendar seems to be an issue of Jewish identity vs. Roman time regulations. The expansion of the Roman Empire in the Near East meant the spread of solar calendars in this region (instead of the ancient, indigenous lunar calendars) and the universal adoption of the Julian solar calendar. The only explicit attestation of the survival of a lunar calendar is found in Jewish culture, in the tannaitic sources. The New Testament contains no calendar reference; Philo and Josephus are reticent about the reckoning of the Jewish calendar. Note how Josephus is very careful not to mention calendrical difference.³⁰⁸ The Jewish lunar calendar “stood out as a remarkably exception,” as stated by the Greek writer Galen (2nd cent). In this period, the lunar calendar “became to the Jews a marker of cultural difference” and “a deliberate attempt to distinguish themselves”³⁰⁹ (A lunar vs. a solar calendar as political tool, cf. the Judean documents from the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt making use of a Jewish calendar only). Rabbinic texts consciously express this political positioning: “Israel reckon by the moon and the nations by sun” (MdRY *pisha' bo' 1*, tSuk 2:7) and “Esau [the Roman Empire] reckons by the sun, which is large, Jacob reckons by the moon, which is small” (GenR 6:3³¹⁰). As noted by Fraade, calendrical controversies then marked “the dividing lines [...] between Judaism and Christianity.” They were central “for religious self-definition.”³¹¹

RABBINIC CALENDAR AND METAPHORS OF PREGNANCY – VISIBILITY

There are three elements which characterize the rabbinic calendar and these three rabbinic decisions are all marked by gendered metaphors of pregnancy.

1.) The first one is the empirical sight of the new moon – rather than precise calculation – for the establishment of the calendar, the beginning of the new month and intercalation. These are described as being established by the legal decision of the rabbinic court / *bet*

³⁰⁷ “[C]alendrical controversies played an important role in defining the social, religious, and political dividing lines between various Jewish groups.” Steven D. FRAADE, “Theory, Practice, and Polemic in Ancient Jewish Calendars” *Diné Israel: Studies in Halakhah and Jewish Law* 26-27 (2009-2010): 147*-81* [=Legal Fictions, 255-283], 147.

³⁰⁸ On the contrary, tannaitic sources contain a large amount of information on calendar calculation, all the material marked by gendered metaphors.

³⁰⁹ Sacha STERN, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, 2nd Century BCE-10th Century CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45.

³¹⁰ THEODOR ALBECK ed. 42.

³¹¹ FRAADE, “Theory, Practice, and Polemic,” 147.

din on the basis of the testimony of lay witnesses (mRH). Scholars presume that this tannaitic choice is ideological, in that it is assumed that the rabbis had the knowledge to establish the calendar based on calculation (cf. Fraade). This process was moved by considerations about the role of community (the court and lay witnesses) in the perception of time and fictive conservatism. The structure of empirical sighting is a conscious choice with practical consequences.³¹²

Here we find the metaphorical phrase of ליל עיבור – *leil 'ibur* “the night of pregnancy.” This expression stands for the additional 30th day of a month, which is in this case the last day of the month, the only one when the moon is not visible. Before the moon is seen is likened to not seeing the still unborn child. The new moon is understood as the new-born child, and it marks the first day of the next, new month. In the “night of pregnancy,” the moon/the baby is still not visible (mRH 2:8, cf. tRH 1:17, tMeg 3:15 with the euphemism: לאור עיבורו “on the night of its pregnancy,” with ‘or/light as euphemism for night as risky time of insecurity).

Consider also the term מולד – *molad* “the birth of the moon” (Tg. Ps-J. to Gen 1:14, Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 12:32). Qumran employs the term “molad” using it explicitly as a quote and a rabbinic term, which is polemically criticized. In answer to the rabbis the phraseology of “*moladei* of wickedness” (מולדי עולה, see 1Q27) is created,³¹³ which develops the imagery of human birth speaking of “the *prevention* of the “birth of the new moon.”³¹⁴

The biblical verse הזה החדש הזה is understood by the rabbinic midrash as G-d pointing the moon out to Moses in the sky with the finger “because Moses was perplexed about the birth of the moon” (מולד הלבנה – *molad ha-levanah*) (Rashi, MdRY *pisha' bo' 12:2*). Tanhuma (Buber, Bo, 12) states how G-d “used to sanctify moons and intercalate years, but when Israel came of age He told them: ... from now on they are your responsibility...” G-d indicating the moon to Moses with the finger is an image of the rabbinic decision to manage the regulation of time based on the empirical sighting of the new moon, which puts the power of the decision in the hands of the rabbinic court and the rabbinic community, namely on a legal and nominalist decision.

Here in mRH 2:8 we find a direct analogy to a real pregnant woman in the question: how could the witnesses state that “the woman gave birth” (האשה שילדה), meaning that the child/ new moon was seen, when then you see that “her belly is still prominent” (כריסה בין שיניה), hiding the child inside? Until very recent ultrasound technology, one of the main characteristics of pregnancy was the inability to see the inside of a pregnant woman’s belly, and birth was the first moment of getting a sight of the child. The woman / the mother is the only one feeling / experiencing the child from the inside, before it can

³¹² The consequences of this choice about empirical sighting and the new moon are not a minor matter, requiring the observance of a second festive day in the Diaspora. The second festival day was unknown to Josephus or other non-rabbinic sources. “[T]he Diaspora observance of two festival days is nowhere mentioned in any of Josephus’ works, nor indeed in any non-rabbinic ancient Jewish source (including, for instance, Philo). This suggests that the Diaspora custom of two festival days was *specific* to rabbinic Judaism, and was totally unknown outside it. The reason for this is clear. [...] [T]he rabbinic concept of two Diaspora festival days was predicated on the assumption that Diaspora communities had to follow the calendar that was set by the Palestinian rabbinic court. Since they could not obtain the Palestinian dates in time for the festivals, two days had to be observed in doubt. In practice, however, few communities are likely to have observed this custom.” (STERN, *Calendar and Community*, 115).

³¹³ “In contrast, the Covenanters made use of Rabbinic terminology with a vengeance, and defined the “new moons” with calculated acrimony מולדי עולה.” Shemaryahu TALMON, “Anti-Lunar-Calendar Polemics in Covenanters’ Writings,” in: *Das Ende der Tage und die Gegenwart des Heils* (eds. Wolfgang Fenske, Michael Becker; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 38.

³¹⁴ TALMON, “Anti-Lunar-Calendar Polemics,” 38.

be seen, perceiving its movements during pregnancy, who in this image is G-d, the only one knowing that the child will soon come out, perceiving it “from the inside.”

A reflection goes to the meaning of the “moon” for the rabbinic system. In rabbinic texts, the moon – as the small luminary – is identified with the Jewish people and with women, being metaphorically compared to a woman (Bavli Hullin 60b). In mRH 2:8 there could be an allusion between the image of a pregnant woman’s body and the full moon, but this physical image is secondary, whereby the moon is primarily identified with the new born child. However, the image of the moon as woman and as Israel, and as representing the rabbis, hovers in this imagery related to the physical viewing of the moon.³¹⁵

RABBINIC CALENDAR AND METAPHORS OF PREGNANCY – ADDITIONAL BODY

2.) The second element characterizing tannaitic calendar structure is the intercalation of the month, meaning adding a day to some months (so that they would be 30 days long rather than 29, since the lunar month is 29.5 days long). In this context, we find the expression חדש העיבור – *hodesh ha-‘ibur* “the month of pregnancy” (mArak 9:3) – parallel in its construction to *parashat ha-‘ibur* “the time of pregnancy” (see next section). The month of 30 days is “pregnant with an extra day.”³¹⁶

3.) The third element of the rabbinic calendar is the intercalation of the year, adding a month (Adar II) to some years (which is necessary in order to remain in line with the solar year). Relatedly, tannaitic expressivity forges the term שנת עיבור – *shanat ‘ibur* “the year of pregnancy” (MdRY *va-yissa ‘ beshallah* 5) (see section 6.4.).³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Note how “[i]n rabbinic sources, female bodies are evoked in the context of calendrical time, a development that corresponds well with the replacement of the biblical masculine noun for moon (ירח) with the feminine noun (לבנה), a term rarely used in the Hebrew Bible, highlighting another connection that develops between women and the calendar. This new discourse does not anchor itself in more ancient precedents; it seems to be a rabbinic innovation.” KATTAN GRIBETZ, “Women’s Bodies as Metaphors for Time,” 191.

³¹⁶ The phrase *hodesh ha-‘ibur* recurs also in mBM 8:8, tBB 2:10, SifDeut 2. We find also the similar constructions עיבור החדש – *‘ibur ha-hodesh* (mSan 8:2) and עיבורו של חדש – *‘iburo shel hodesh* (mSan 5:3) “the pregnancy of the month,” or החדש ועיבורו – *ha-hodesh ve-‘iburo* “the month and its pregnancy” (tRH 1:17, 2:1, tAr 1:11, Sifra ‘emor 9:2). Moreover, we find the expression תוספת עיבורו – *tosefet ‘iburo* “the addition of its pregnancy” (MdRY *pisha’ bo’ 2*). All these phrases are constructed with the noun עיבור – *‘ibur* “conception/pregnancy.” The adjective from the *pu’al* passive form is used as well in the phrase חדש מעובר – *hodesh me‘ubar* “pregnant month” (mShevi 10:2, mRH 3:1, mArak 2:2, tAr 1:7: *hodashim ha-me‘ubarin*, tAr 1:8). Other forms are in the *hitpa’el*, like תתעבר – *tit‘aber* “[the preceding month of ‘Elul] might be pregnant” (mEr 3:7) or *mit‘aber* (MdRY *pisha’ bo’ 2*).

³¹⁷ Connected expressions are עיבור [ה]שנה – *‘ibur [ha-]shana* “the pregnancy of the year” (mYev 16:7, mSan 1:2, tSan 2:1, tSan 5:2, 7:2, mArak 9:3, Sifra ‘emor 9:2) and שנה ועיבורה – *shana ve-‘iburah* “the year and her pregnancy” (mNed 8:5, mArak 9:3, tTaan 1:2). As for the month it is important to note the construction תוספת עיבורה – *tosefet ‘iburah* “the addition of her pregnancy” (MdRY *pisha’ bo’ 2*). The adjective in the *pu’al* is attested very frequently: שנה מעוברת – *shana me‘uberet* “pregnant year” (mSan 1:2, mEd 7:7, tTaan 1-2, tNed 4:7, tSan 2:2-2:4, 2:7, 2:8, 2:11-2:13, tAr 1:11: *be-yom ‘iburo*, MdRY *va-yissa ‘ beshallah* 5, Sifra ‘emor 9:1). The *hitpa’el* form is attested as well: נתעברה השנה – *nit‘abrah* (mMeg 1:4, mNed 8:5, mBM 8:8, tMeg 1:7. tBM 8:31, tParah 1:6, Sifra *behar* 4:1) or *mit‘aberet* (MdRY *pisha’ bo’ 2*). SifDeut127 states that Scripture recalls the *parashat mo‘adot* “the festival calendar” in three different passages, expounding that it is mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy “for the sake of teaching the rules of *‘ibur*/intercalation” (מפני הציבור {העיבור}). (Hebrew text according to MS Vatican ebr. 32:2, 185). The same confusion between *tsibur* “community” and *‘ibur* appears in tShevu 1:2. SifDeut 306 refers translated to the calculation of the leap/additional years as *‘ibur shanim* “the pregnancy of the years,” and tSan 2:13, 9:1, tEd 3:1 simply as *‘ibur* “the pregnancy/the addition.” tSan 1:14 speaks of sitting in the *‘ibur*

The rabbis “render time as being pregnant” (*me‘abrim*)³¹⁸ in three crucial points where their calendar system is peculiar and structured by their exegesis.

6.3. *Parashat ha-‘ibur* “the time of pregnancy” (M_{Ber})

LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

The root עִבַּר – *iber* in the D-stem / *pi‘el* having a female subject and meaning “being pregnant” is attested only in tannaitic/rabbinic textual sources (for the Hebrew see Ma’agarim *The Historical Dictionary*, for the Aramaic: CAL – *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*).³¹⁹ It is not found in biblical Hebrew (which uses terms as הרה – *harah*).

‘*Avar* in the *pi‘el* (*iber*) “lit., to cause to cross” appears only twice in the Hebrew Bible, once in 1 Kings 6:21 (וַיַּעְבֵּר בְּרִתִּיקוֹת (בְּרִתִּיקוֹת) זָהָב לִפְנֵי הַדְּבִיר) “[Solomon] made to pass across [va-ye‘aber] with gold chains before the innermost part of the Sanctuary” or “drew gold chains”) and once in Job 21:10, where it has as subject an ox: שֹׁרוֹ עֵבֵר.

The phrase *shoro‘ibar* (without accusative object) is generally understood as “the ox is able to emit/pass semen” in the sense “to cause to pass over (semen in intercourse),” whereby there is no female subject or object. From the context the verse means that the ox does not fail to produce semen (שֹׁרוֹ עֵבֵר וְלֹא יִגְעַל).³²⁰ In the parallel second part of the verse, the cow is able to emit ‘semen’ (in our understanding, ‘eggs’) (תִּפְלֹט פְּרִתוֹ)³²¹ and does not miscarry (וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּל). From this verse, it seems that pregnancy results from the ox and the cow both emitting ‘semen,’ and the cow holding the fetus/embryo resulting from their fusion. It seems that in the tannaitic production the term *iber* reassumes the entire process described in the verse which results into pregnancy. In the tannaitic construction indeed we never find *iber‘et ha-‘ishah* (which would mean “the man renders the woman pregnant / impregnates”), only *iber‘et ha-shanah* “render the year as [if it were] a pregnant [woman]” (whereby there is no male subject for real pregnancy). We find this meaning in Aramaic in the C-stem (causative) attested in mMeg 4:9 “You shall not give of your seed to pass to a pagan woman” (, ומזרעך לא תתן להעביר למולך ,) (ומזרעך לא תתן לאעברא בארמיותא “in,” and not with the accusative object as in the rabbinic Hebrew form. For instance, in

(meaning, joins in the session called for intercalating the year.” M_{DRSbY} 16:35 (St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, Evr. II, A 268) states: ועיבור לא היתה לשנה באותה שנה – “the year had no pregnancy.”

³¹⁸ mEd 7:7, tPes 8:5, tMeg 2:5, tSan 2:1, 2:2, 2:3, 2:4, 2:7, 2:8, 2:9, 2:10, 2:11, 2:12, 2:13, tEd 3:1, M_{DRY} *pisha’bo* 2, 16, Sifra *emor* 9:1-2; 12:2, M_{DRSbY} 13:10, St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, Evr. II, A 268

³¹⁹ For the Hebrew see MA’AGARIM: *The Historical Dictionary*, under the voice: תוצאות חיפוש שורש: עִבַּר – verbal root ‘*avar*. In Aramaic as well, the lemma ‘*br* vb. “to cross over” in the D-stem as meaning “to be pregnant” (with its derivatives) is attested only in rabbinic (or rabbinic-related) texts, meaning in the targumim, the midrashim, the two Talmuds and in the liturgical poetry of the piyyut (or according to the dialects, in Jewish Palestinian [Galilean] Aramaic, Jewish Literary Aramaic of the early targumim [Onqelos and Jonathan to the prophets], Palestinian Targumic Aramaic, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and Late Jewish Literary Aramaic, see CAL – *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, <http://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=%28br+V&cits=all>). In GenR 68:2 the root is used to indicate “parents” (אל ההורים למלפני ולמעברניי) (<http://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=m%28brn+N&cits=all>).

³²⁰ The Targum translates *iber* as פִּקְטִין to issue forth, to drop semen. Targ. Job XXI, 10 וְפִקְטִין “http://cal.huc.edu/showtargum.php.

³²¹ The Targum translates *palat* as תִּשְׁבַּח “releasing/emitting” (the egg, semen).

the Amulet 33:9³²² we find the Aramaic form בטין as more common term for pregnancy in everyday language.

The reconstruction of *iber* as meaning “being pregnant” in two Qumran texts was deemed problematic. Qumran texts use systematically the term מלאה – *mele’ah* for pregnancy and merely the term ולד – *valad* “child” for the fetus, instead of the tannaitic עובר – *ubar*. Within the Qumran texts, 4Q 396 1-2 – 4Q MMT (Miqsat Ma’ase ha-Torah) B, lines 36-38 reads:

...<א?ת? האם ואת ה?ולד ביום אחד.
...<ו? חושבים? ש?איאכל את הולד.
...<כ?ן? זה?דבר כתוב עברה.

[...] the mother and its child on the same day [Lev 22:28].
[we think that one can eat] the fetus [הולד- *ha-valad*].
[...so, and] the word is written [in the Torah]: עברה.

The term עברה was understood as meaning “a pregnant animal,” but there are clear problems with the reconstruction of the text.³²³ Similarly, 4Q 270 (Damascus Document), lines 26-28, contains the following fragmentary text:

את פי אל או ישחט בהמה וחיה עבר?רות <...
אשה הרה מק?ו?ד?ם? <...> <...> <...>
משכבי אשה.

[Whoever] slaughters a domestic or wild animal <...> עבר?רות
a pregnant woman ... of blood ...
... cohabitations with a woman.

Again, the phrase <...> עבר?רות is not unequivocal and could simply mean *averot* “transgressions.” The reconstruction was based on Temple Scroll 11Q19 52.5-7, which explicitly prohibits to slaughter a pregnant animal. However, Temple Scroll does not refer to pregnant animals with the root *avar*, but as מלאות – *mele’ot* “full” (ולוא תזבח לי שור ושה ועז והמה מלאות כי תועבה) – another term which is absent in the Hebrew Bible, but which is attested to in rabbinic Hebrew (mYev 16:1). For a pregnant woman the material found a Qumran uses expressions as אשה הרה – *ishah harah* (like in biblical Hebrew); והרית – *ve-harit* (1QH^a 11.12); הריה – “pregnant woman” (1QH^a 11:12a); or for instance, in the Temple scroll מלאה – *mele’ah* (11QTa 50:10: “And if a woman is pregnant and her child dies in her womb”).

In rabbinic language/mishnaic Hebrew, *iber* takes the significance of “to become/be pregnant/conceive,” acquiring a female subject (see, e.g., מעוברת – *me’uberet* “pregnant woman” in *pu’al* passive causative “she is rendered pregnant”/

³²² See <http://cal.huc.edu/showachapter.php?fullcoord=5270003309> (A. YARDENI and G. BOHAK, *Eretz-Israel* 32 (2016):100ff.).

³²³ Ian WERRETT, The Reconstruction of 4QMMT: A Methodological Critique,” in: *Northern Lights on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Nordic Qumran Network 2003-2006* (ed. Anders Klostergaard Petersen et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 210, see also 211: “[t]he presence of the citation formula in 4Q396 1-2 i 4 suggests that the author/redactor believed that his interpretations, whatever they might have been, were founded upon scripture. But as Bernstein has noted, “there is certainly no obvious way of reading the biblical text [Lev 22:28] which would imply that slaughtering pregnant animals is prohibited” (Bernstein 1996b, 41).”

“she becomes pregnant,” cf. next voice in the active³²⁴; עיברה – *ibrah* “she is pregnant/she conceived” in *pi’el* active³²⁵; or in *qal* present active עוברה – *ubarah*³²⁶; נשים עוברות – *nashim ‘ubarot*³²⁷; and עוברת – *uberet*³²⁸), with the related neologisms עובר – “fetus/embryo”³²⁹ and עיבור – “conception/pregnancy”³³⁰.

Consider that the rabbis not only invent the verb semantically, but also how, in the case of the *pi’el* active *ibrah* “she is pregnant” (mYev 7:5), they assign the verb a grammatical usage that is new to the grammatical system: *pi’el* usually requires a direct object, but here *ibrah* is used intransitively, only with a subject, the pregnant woman; or consider *qal* present active *ubarah*, mYom 8:5; *nashim ‘ubarot*, mPar 3:2, where the male subject is suppressed.

The use of *iber* to indicate pregnancy and a pregnant woman, as well as the fetus, thus seems to be originally a tannaitic usage, whereby these terms are used by the tannaitic texts prominently in metaphorical images – more for metaphors than reality. I think a common conceptual structure underlines these images.

LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS – THE DIVINE AS PREGNANT WOMAN

We have seen in section 1.2., how in SifDeut 29 R. Yehoshu‘a compares G-d to a pregnant woman (כאשה עוברה – *ke-‘ishah ‘ubarah*). His exegesis attempts to mitigate the image of G-d’s anger toward Moses and Israel (*evrah*), present in the Hebrew Bible and employed by contemporary Christian polemic (especially by Origen and Marcion). The midrashic moment is found in the interpretation of the Divine anger/*evrah* as actually meaning that G-d is a mother pregnant with Israel (*ke-‘ishah ‘ubarah*), experiencing difficulty, compassion and visceral vicinity. The *source domain* of pregnancy marks pregnancy as a salient moment to describe rabbinic theology, the *target domain* of the metaphor. Tanhuma comments on the phrase of R. Yehoshu‘a, making its meaning explicit: “Even when G-d is angry, He remains merciful (lit., יש רחמים לפניו, – *rahamyim* is before Him).”

LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS – “TIME OF PREGNANCY”

This text seems to represent the backdrop of mBer 4:4 (a text of difficult interpretation³³¹). In SifDeut R. Yehoshu‘a discusses the term *va-yit’aber* (G-d was angry) at the beginning

³²⁴ mBer 9:3, mYev 4:1-2; 7:3, 9:4, 16:1, mKet 1:9, mSot 4:3, mQid 3:5, mBekh 8:1, mNid 1:3.

³²⁵ mYev 7:5, tYev 9:4, mBQ 9:1 [MS Kaufmann], tBQ 10:1, Sifra *tazria* ‘ 1 [MS Vatican ebr. 66], GenR 45:4 [THEODOR and ALBECK ed.] about both Hagar and Sarah, yPes 8:1, 35c.

³²⁶ mYom 8:5, tShab 6:16, tYom 4:4, EchaR 7:13.

³²⁷ mPar 3:2, tTaan 2:14, tNid 8:5.

³²⁸ Tanhuma Buber va’era 18:34 [MS Oxford Bodleian 154].

³²⁹ E.g., mYev 7:3-5, mKet 1:9, mQid 4:8, mBQ 5:1, mHul 4:1,3-4, mBekh 1:1, 2:1, mTem 1:3, 2:3, mNid 1:4; see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1047.

³³⁰ tNid 1:10, GenR 20:15, yBer 9:3, 14a.

³³¹ David HENSCHKE, בין פרשת העיבור לברכת המינים – “Parashat ha-Ibbur and the Blessing of the Apostates,” in: מקומראן עד קהיר: מחקרים בתולדות התפילה – *From Qumran to Cairo: Studies in the History of Prayer* (ed. Joseph Tabory; Jerusalem: Orhot Press, 1999), 75-102; Shlomo NAEH, עוד על פרשת העיבור, – “Again on Parashat ha-‘Ibur,” in: *From Qumran to Cairo: Studies in the History of Prayer* (ed. Joseph Tabory; Jerusalem: Orhot Press, 1999), 103-120; Michal BAR-ASHER-SIEGAL, עיבור הדין ופרשת, עיבר, עיונים לשוניים – “*Iber, ‘Ibur haDin and Parashat ha ‘Ibur*,” *Leshonenu* 78 (2016), 43-59. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal understand *iber* as meaning blockage, also in the sense of a difficulty. However, in this

of parashat *va-’ethanan* (ואתחנן), containing Moses’ supplication for compassion to G-d. In mBer 4:4 again R. Yehoshu’a discusses the meaning of the “supplication prayer” (*tahanunim* – תחנונים). “One traveling in a dangerous place” should say a supplication prayer. R. Yehoshu’a defines the formula of the supplication as: “in every time of crisis/pregnancy (*parashat ha-’ibur*) may their [Israel’s] needs be before You” (בכל פרשת העיבור יהיו צרכיהם לפניך). We have the same R. Yehoshu’a who explicitly speaks of G-d once as a “pregnant woman” with pregnancy understood as time of difficulty and relationship (SifDeut) and once of *parashat ha-’ibur*, thus a “time of difficulty/pregnancy” (mBer). In SifDeut the exegetical trope is how compassion is *before* G-d also when there is judgement or anger on His side, and in mBer the exegetical trope is how compassion/the needs of Israel are *before* G-d also in a difficult/exposed situation of risk/Divine judgement. BBer 29b connects explicitly the phrase *parashat ha-’ibur* with the metaphor of pregnancy: מאי פרשת העיבור? אמר רב חסדא אמר מר עוקבא: ... כאשה ... עוברה יהיו כל צרכיהם לפניך. For this position in the Bavli, a “pregnant woman” means and expresses as image that “all the needs of Israel are in front of G-d.” In antiquity, the road (cf. *’iber derekh*) and traveling were a strong image for a dangerous time. This was understood as a moment of judgment/*din* from G-d, when a person was particularly exposed, but also an occasion for supplication for compassion and additional relationship with the Divine.

6.4. Pregnant year (*shannah me’uberet* and *’ibur ha-shannah*) (MTSan)

TOSEFTA SANHEDRIN: PREGNANCY AS TIME OF RISK AND ADDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The same conceptual mapping seems to be present in the pregnancy-metaphors for the calendar. In this sense, Tosefta Sanhedrin chapter 2 is a revelatory passage. And an important locus for the development of this imagery.

In Antiquity, pregnancy was understood as a particularly risky time, like birth (cf. GenR 20:15), when a person was exposed to the Divine judgment, contiguous feelings of difficulty and compassion (mShab 2:6, bShab 31b).

The metaphor of pregnancy in the calendar points to the relationship established with G-d through the rabbinic calendrical structure. Like pregnancy is semantically connected to taking/experiencing a risk, the tannaitic metaphor points to the risk-taking involved in the tannaitic practice of intercalation. The rabbis, competing with other claimants of authority, “render time as being pregnant” (מעברין – *me’abrim/n*). They are rendering a month/year “pregnant,” meaning a month or year entailing a moment of risk and hazard – represented by the process of witnesses and empirical sighting in the delicate matter of holidays-rhythm and making of sacral times – allowing through it an additional relationship with G-d. The concept of “render time as pregnant” is connected to render time a moment of relationship and to the fact of taking a risk through the structuring of time. Maintaining the lunar calendar and establishing the empirical sight of the moon require adding a month and a year to the calendar, and it has consequences, like the two festive days to be observed in the Diaspora. It entails a burden for the people and a risk-taking/hazard for the rabbinic establishment. The people carry the burden and live time “as being pregnant.”

reading the exact same meaning is present both in the source and target domain, with no cross-domain mapping, which does not fit in a metaphorical pattern according to conceptual metaphor theory.

Mishnah Rosh Hashanah is the textual *topos* for the intercalation of the month and the sight of the new moon, and it has a rather short metaphorical passage. The texts from Tosefta Sanhedrin, on the other hand, represent a very long passage on the rabbinic year's intercalation (completely absent in the Mishnah), an entire chapter with a huge presence of the metaphorical expressions *me'abrim* and *me'uberet*. Its construction of nominal as well as verbal forms, its relation to rabbinic power and calendar control, and its explicit mention of central identarian issues uncover it as an early site for the elaboration of the metaphorical structure of time as pregnant woman.

The chapter opens stating that the decision to intercalate is taken by a rabbinic court, composed of seven judges, since the “*minyan* (the basic unit for a community) may not be less than seven” (tSan 2:1). Highly remarkably, it concludes stating that “neither the king nor the high priest sits in the session for intercalating the year” (ולא מלך ולא כהן) (גדול יושבין בעיבור שנה (tSan 2:15). Rabban Gamaliel and the elders occupy the Temple space, from where they give notice of the intercalation to the Galilee, the South and the Diaspora in an Aramaic letter (with a salutation from the encyclical letters of the Babylonian kings in the book of Daniel, tSan 2:6³³²). The ‘rabbinicising’ process taking place in these texts is clear.

In tSan 2:10 it is stated that “they do not intercalate the year (מעברין את השנה) because of impurity,” and then a ‘biblical *ma'aseh*’ is brought:

ת' סנהדרין ב' י'
מעשה בחזקיה המלך שעבר את השנה מפני הטומאה, שנ': "כי מרבית העם רבת מאפרים ומנשה מישכר
וזבולן לא הטהרו כי אכלו את הפסח בלא ככתוב, כי התפלל חזקיהו עליהם לאמר: ה' הטוב יכפר בעד" (דברי
הימים ב' ל' יח).³³³

A *ma'aseh* / an event / halakhic precedent about Hezeqiah the King who intercalated the year (*'iber 'et ha-shanah*) because of impurity,

C. for it is said, *For a multitude of the people, even many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Pesah not how it is written. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'the good L-rd pardon every one* (2 Chron 30:18) [everyone who seeks G-d...though s/he not be purified according to the purification that pertains to sacred items.]

The tannaitic text prescribes not to intercalate the year because of ritual impurity. “Because of ritual impurity” means in the event that most of the Jewish people are in a state of impurity, and intercalation would give them enough time to become ritually pure before Pesah. This is not deemed a legitimate reason to intercalate. The text goes on with a *ma'aseh*, where it is midrashically interpreted that the righteous king Hezeqiah intercalated because of impurity – against the rabbinic law. “It is highly irregular – indeed, amazing – for Scripture to supply a case/precedent in a Halakhic context. What we expect is a reference to sages’ response. I cannot point to a single counterpart in the corpus of *ma'asim* in the Mishnah and the Tosefta.”³³⁴ The phrase “yet they ate the Pesah not how it is written” (כי אכלו את הפסח בלא ככתוב) is understood as meaning “since he intercalated the year because of impurity which is an act not according to the law” (שעבר את השנה מפני הטומאה שלא כדת Rashi on bSan 12b), meaning the king went against the rabbinic decree. In this image we have Hezeqiah the king doing a supplication prayer for compassion on behalf of the people (כי התפלל חזקיהו עליהם), the same topic of *parashat*

³³² Lutz DOERING, *Ancient Jewish Letters and the Beginnings of Christian Epistolography* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 354.

³³³ Hebrew text according to Erfurt MS.

³³⁴ Jacob NEUSNER, *Rabbinic Narrative: A Documentary Perspective: vol. 1 Forms, Types and Distribution of Narrative in the Mishnah, Tractate Abot and the Tosefta* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003), 235.

ha-ibur and G-d as pregnant woman. The Bavli introduces explicitly the topic of the quest for compassion: “for what reason did [Hezeqiah] request compassion for himself?” (מפני מה ביקש רחמים על עצמו).

tSan 2:12 states that they intercalate the year for extenuating circumstances only when the year herself “requires” it and not the behavior of the people (אין מעברין את השנה אלא), meaning when the roads and the Pesah ovens are ruined by the winter rains of that year. A year “pregnant with rain” requires also rabbinic time “to be pregnant,” namely intercalation, delaying the festival date. Crucially, the topic of the needs of Israel (מפני הצרכין) in front of G-d in a time of real difficulty (as a particularly rainy year) is again present in this section about intercalation as pregnancy. In a period of extreme necessity or pressure, as in the case of religious persecution, the laws of intercalation can be particularly difficult and leniencies are allowed (tSan 2:7). The reference to “religious persecution” (מפני הדחק) is a reference to the Bar Kokhba revolt, which connects tSan 2:7 and Tosefta Sanhedrin chapter 2 to the imagery of Tosefta Berakhot (analyzed in section 4.1.) of the rabbis as mother taking risks during and after the revolt with their decisions and decrees (tBer 6:23). In both Tosefta Berakhot and Sanhedrin the imagery of a mother, pregnancy, risk-taking and righteousness expresses rabbinic innovative laws in face of the war with Rome and destruction. tSan 2:8 reports a *ma’aseh* about “R. ‘Aqiva’ who was imprisoned and intercalated three years one after the other (an exceptional practice, reported after the law: “they do not intercalate one year after another (successively)” (מעשה בר’ עקיבא שהיה חבוש בבית האיסורין ועיבר שלש שנים) (זו אחר זו).

The rabbis give notice of the intercalation/pregnancy/ *ibur* and the people are said to be happy/rejoice about the “announcement/news of the pregnancy” if there is enough grain (tSan 2:2-3) (היו שמחין). If the grain is not ripe, people are happy to wait an extra month to consume the year’s produce, which could not be consumed before the offering of the first crop of barley on Nisan 16th. If the grain is already ripe, however, the additional month would simply prolong the period during which the grain may not be eaten due to the prohibition of the new crop.

The main concern of the entire chapter is the risk involved in the rabbinic intercalation practice. “They do not intercalate the year in a time of famine” (tSan 2:9). When grain is scarce, intercalating the year would exacerbate the food shortage. “They do not intercalate in the Sabbatical Year,” so as not to prolong the prohibition of the Sabbatical Year, causing hardship, or the year thereafter, when there is not much produce available. “Why did ‘Elisha’ not intercalate it? Because it was a year of famine, and the whole people was running to the threshing floors.” Adding time with intercalation is like adding a new life, a new child, a new pregnancy – it can be risky and too demanding.

I have suggested that the tannaitic images of pregnancy and of a pregnant woman, for time and the calendar, are related to being interconnected by the concept of “addition,” represented by pregnancy, in that a human is sharing her body with another, containing another presence, creating an additional relationship. Their conceptual mapping is also marked by the risk and difficulty entailed in pregnancy. The image of pregnancy achieves another conceptual and ideological significance. Time here is connected to the body, specifically to a woman’s body. There is a conscious, identity-formative claim in this image about time, that it is not graphically depicted as linear or historical, but rather as a body containing another body, as an additional relationship, as an occasion of encounter between G-d and Israel, in the presence of ritual events. Adding a month or a year is depicted as a “time contained in a time” with elements of embodied thinking about time,

as every month or holiday would be an inevitable moment of encounter (as the inevitable time of pregnancy and birth, as noted by Kattan-Gribetz). The rabbinic production defines temporal relations through this embodied existence and physical dimensions, making a conscious claim of breaking linearity and progressive time into a different representation/signification of “additional time contained within time,” and of time as being marked by the moon, by a lunar (out of date) calendar. The physical element of seeing the baby born is connected to the physical procedure of seeing the moon. Moreover, *ibur* / rabbinic intercalation is understood as changing the form of time.

An entire new semantic field and conceptual field is created. *‘Iber* indicating pregnancy, and metaphors of time through pregnancy represents a new term, a new linguistic expression and a new mental/linguistic construction or association.

Linguistically, and from a literary point of view, there is a set of particular expressions being developed by the tannaitic production:

- a.) G-d as *‘ishah ‘ubarah*;
- b.) *parashat ha-‘ibur* (a time of *ibur*) as a time to connect to the Divine, *hodesh ha-‘ibur* “the month of pregnancy” and *shanat ‘ibur* “the year of pregnancy” – whereby we can translate the parallel first expression as “the time of pregnancy” –, *middat ha-‘ibur* (tEr 4:10,4:16): “even if it is a house inside another house [...] in measuring for the *ibur* [extending the Shabbat’s city limit, adding Shabbat space to Shabbat space, a “time-space,” another rabbinic peculiar practice] (see section 7.1.);”
- c.) the month and the year as pregnant woman (*me‘ubar, me‘uberet*),³³⁵
- d.) parallel to *ibur ha-shanah* “the pregnancy of the year,” we find עיבור הדין – *ibur ha-din*, tentatively “the pregnancy of judgment” (like the fetus inside the mother in addition to her own body, a body in addition to another body; a *din* child of *din*, a *din* derived from *din*, indicating a derivative nature, but also the same character of the derivative, which is like the mother),³³⁶
- e.) *me‘abrim ‘et ha-shanah* “they render the year pregnant [with an additional month]” is parallel to *me‘abrim ‘et ha-din* and *me‘abrim ‘et ha-derekh* [they add *din* to *din* and *derekh* to *derekh*].³³⁷ For the concept of *ibur ha-derekh* consider the biblical אִם הַדֶּרֶךְ – *‘em ha-derekh* (Ezek 21:26) whereby the *derekh* is mother of another *derekh* (cf. אִם הַבְּנוֹת הַדֶּרֶךְ לִפִּי שֶׁהִיא כֹּאֵם לְדַרְכִּים הַפּוֹנוֹת אֵלֶיהָ וְהֵם לֵה כְּבוֹנוֹת, *Mikhlal Yofi*, 1600).

This analysis’ reading of the numerous gendered metaphors for time in the tannaitic production through conceptual metaphor theory argues how these metaphors are interconnected and represent a systematic cognitive process. This results in rabbinic time and ritual calendar that have a female face, and a tannaitic normative dating system marked by maternal experience. The linguistic construction of the halakhic process is

³³⁵ “The use of the idea of “pregnant” to indicate a leap year seems to be particular to Jewish sources; the Syriac (*shunta kbishta*) and Arabic (*sana kabisa*) designations for leap years are linguistically unrelated, as is the Latin term *saltus lunae*, which refers to a “jumping” moon, from which the English term “leap” comes.” KATTAN GRIBETZ, “Women’s Bodies as Metaphors for Time,” 204 n. 67.

³³⁶ mMid 2:2 (the only tannaitic attestation of *ibur ha-din*) in the phrase עליו את הדין עשיתן כאלו עיברו עליו את הדין – *ibru ‘alav ‘et ha-din* (MS. Kaufmann, A 50) “you made it seem as if they rendered [the decision/judgement/*din*] concerning him [a banished person] pregnant with *din* [that is, containing additional, extra stricture].” yBB 8:1, 15d-16a simply states that the rule of the daughters of Tselofhad adding the inheritance of daughters is the “addition of a rule/*din*” (עִיבוֹר הַדִּין הוּא שֶׁתֵּהָא) (כתוב “והעברתם”: עיבור הדין הוא שתהא). In this expression, we see also the halakha as developing and growing through the addition of rules (as a procreative process).

³³⁷ עיבור הדין – *ibru ‘alav ‘et ha-derekh* (tBM 11:27) could be understood as “they added the road to him,” “making the road longer and more complicated for him.”

causative: “to render as if it were pregnant,” with time, the year and the month of the lunar calendar as object. Through rendering time “pregnant” the rabbinic authorities and court take a risk and a burden upon themselves and upon the people. This means that through the experience of time as ‘being pregnant,’ they themselves are made ‘as pregnant,’ carrying the burden and the merit of the halakhic structure. The concept of forming and formation are expressed by the image of pregnancy – forming time, thinking time is connected to pregnancy as a forming process, also conceptually. Rabbinic authority forming its time-boundaries is represented with a mother-image for time. Rabbinic time is mothering/forming/imprinting the community. The process of the creation of halakhah is connected to the procreative image of pregnancy, whereby rules ‘come from inside’ other rules, the Oral Torah from the inside (the belly) of the Written one. In the background G-d and a time of risk are both described as being like a pregnant woman. These Divine images represent the ultimate model of the rabbinic act of making time and their temporal community as “pregnant” themselves.

6.5. Sacrifice: halakhic form and legal time as pregnancy (MTPes, MSheq, MZev)

In mNid 10:1, tNid 1:5, 9:6 (cf. bNid 67b), a young woman whose time to see/observe a menstrual flow has arrived (namely puberty) is an event described with the terminology “her [expected] time to see” (הר [צפוי] זמנה לראות – *zmanah lir’ot*). The menstrual blood of niddah and the time of puberty are at the same time predictable and unpredictable, and it marks the time for reproduction. The expression “in her time” is connected to an act of observation (*lir’ot*), whereby “to observe/see” by the woman and by the rabbinic expert is a crucial aspect of the laws of menstrual purity (observation of blood, stains, colours, flow), which connect them to the act of inspection/observation of the priest in the case of *nega'im* (cf. the use of the verb רָאָה – “to see” in Lev 13).

The same terminology is found mRH 2:7-8 for the moon seen in its proper/expected time (בין שנראה בזמנו בין שלא נראה בזמנו – *she-nir’eh bi-zmano ... she-lo’ nir’eh bi-zmano ... ראינוהו בזמנו – re’inuhu bi-zmano*). The act of seeing the moon is parallel for this text to the moment of seeing the child at birth, coming out of the maternal body. It is similarly constructed as the time observing the blood coming out of the body – the expected time. Language for women’s menstruation was most probably formulated first and the applied to the rabbinic calendar.³³⁸

This terminology appears also in tSan 2:8 where the court/bet din is said to be “reckoning the need for one year after another, in its time [*bi-zmanah*]” for intercalation/pregnancy (ומחשבין אחת אחת בזמנה). Again, the term “in its time” indicates how the year is expected to be intercalated / pregnant from observing each time the circumstances, and by deciding when they are extenuating, in rabbinic parlance “when the year required it.” The act of seeing/observing a pregnancy, which is ‘coming out,’ and being expected in certain circumstances (at the same time predicable and unpredictable) connects this image with the preceding ones. In all three cases, there is also a realistic vs. nominalist issue, whereby the establishment of the new month, of blood as being impure/niddah and of the

³³⁸ Ron FELDMAN, “Controlling Women and Controlling Time: The Use of Female Imagery in Rabbinic Calendar Literature” (Association for Jewish Studies Conference Paper, December 2010, Boston, MA), as quoted in KATTAN GRIBETZ, “Women’s Bodies as Metaphors for Time,” 194.

year as being intercalated/pregnant is ultimately a nominalist decision of the rabbinic court vs. certain realistic elements. Time is legally and halakhically framed by the rabbinic decision-making.

In mZev 1:1 the Pesah sacrifice is also defined as being sacrificed *bi-zmano* “in its due time,” or as being disqualified when beyond its due time. In this context we find another metaphor of pregnancy for time. MPes 7:9 and tPes 6:6 discuss the case of a Pesah sacrifice, which has been already slaughtered but cannot be sacrificed, not because it has been disqualified, but because its owners, the only ones who are allowed to have it sacrificed, cannot consume it:

<p style="text-align: center;">מ' פסחים ז ט</p> <p>הפסח ... נטמאו הבעלים או שמתו <u>תעובר צורתו</u> וישרף בששה עשר.</p> <p>mPes 7:9 A Paschal lamb ... if its owners were defiled or they died, its form must change / be pregnant [<i>te'ubar tsurato</i>] and [then] it is burned on the sixteenth [of Nisan, it is not burned on the fifteenth, because it is a festive day].</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ת' פסחים י י</p> <p>זה הכלל: אירע פסול בגופו ישרף מיד. בדם או ובעלים <u>תעיבר צורתו</u> ויצא לבית השריפה.³³⁹</p> <p>tPes 6:6 This is the general rule: [If] a cause of invalidation affected its [the animal's] own body, it is to be burned immediately. [If it affected] the blood or the owner its form must change / be pregnant [<i>te'ibar tsurato</i>] and it goes out to the house (place) of the burning [<i>beit ha-srefah</i>].</p>
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In this case, the Pesah sacrifice itself has not become disqualified (*pasul*, cf. tPes 6:6: פסול בגופו) and has been slaughtered in a permitted way. Rather its owners (*ba'alim*) – the only ones who are entitled to eat it – have become disqualified, meaning they have become impure, or have died, and this happened after the slaughtering or was not known at the time of the slaughtering. No one can now eat this paschal lamb. The final part of the sacrificial procedure, the sprinkling of the blood, cannot be done. To burn it would be problematic, given that the sacrifice itself is fit, since it has been slaughtered under the right conditions. This opinion thus suggests to wait and leave it until the following night, when its form (*tsurato*) will be changed. “Form changing” does not refer to the Pesah’s physical form but to its halakhic form it is now “remainder” and must be burned.”³⁴⁰ In this way, the Pesah will become a נותר – *notar* “a sacrifice or portions of sacrifices left over beyond the legal time / its prescribed time” (*lo' bi-zmano*) and bound to be burnt.

The terminology used is again the pi'el of *'iber*: תעובר צורתו “its halakhic form (*tsurato*) is pregnant/ is rendered pregnant (*te'ubar*).” The passing or changing of time does not justify the grammatically used of *'iber*, rather in Hebrew it would require *'avar* in the qal or hif'il. Again, *'iber* is used in tannaitic text as a neologism indicating pregnancy, mostly in metaphors. This seems to be the usage also here.

From the point of view of conceptual metaphor theory and the cognitive processes at play here, it seems that like the child is due for a certain date/period during pregnancy, and sometimes it is born beyond its due date, in which case the mother is still pregnant for a longer period, so in the case of this sacrifice, it is prescribed to leave it beyond its due time, so that its halakhic form remains “still pregnant” and the lamb is not sacrificed. So

³³⁹ Hebrew text according to Erfurt MS. MS Vienna and ed. princ. read: תעבר צורתו – *te'aber tsurato*, which is clearly a mistake. It is pi'el active, and it would be either 2nd person masculine or 3rd person feminine. MS London reads: תעובר צורתו – *te'ubar tsurato*, which is the only form correct from grammatical point of view.

³⁴⁰ Joshua KULP, *Mishnah Yomit: A contemporary user-friendly explanation of the Mishnah*, 2013 (sefaria.org).

we have עִבּוּר צוּרָה – *ibur tsurah* “the pregnancy of the halakhic form” (for this expression cf. bPes 34b), whereby the Pesah sacrifice / the *notar* “remains still pregnant.” The sacrifice is expected to be sacrificed (the end of the process), as the child is expected to be born in a certain window of time. Beyond the due time, both are still pregnant, whereby the end of the process has not taken place. The element of predictable/unpredictable about pregnancy and birth in matter of time / timing connects this metaphor to all the other metaphors using the imagery of birth and pregnancy for temporal concepts as *bi-zmano* and *lo’ bi-zmano*, together with the element of appearance, sight, and observation (the woman’s *tsurah* – ‘form’ / the halakhic form/status is still that of pregnancy). Pregnancy/birth as an unpredictable time is a unique conceptual pattern and model to reflect on rabbinic decisions about sacrifices and their legal time, wrapping up the possibility of something unforeseeable and unexpected. Pregnancy prefigures the act of expecting the unexpected. The halakhic form of the Pesah sacrifice is described as remaining pregnant, whereby its going beyond its legal time is like a pregnancy going beyond the due date of birth. One waits until the sacrifice comes to be portions left over beyond its due time, meaning it comes to the halakhic form of being pregnant ‘after her due time.’ The act of waiting – simply waiting – parallels the experience of the woman just waiting the birth to happen. Pregnancy defines the halakhic time, in a construction of a rabbinic legal decision vs. the sacrifice status (being rendered *notar* by waiting vs. being fit to be sacrificed). The halakhic solution to a problem in the sacrificial procedure is ‘to wait,’ whereby things are sorted out by putting them back in ‘G-d’s hands,’ without intervening. This figurative association again recalls the maternal experience. This is the sense of the terminology *te’ubar tsurato* also in mSheq 7:3, where a case of doubt about meat found in various places in Jerusalem, in the Temple, is solved by waiting for the sacrificed meat to remain pregnant beyond its due time (so that it becomes disqualified from being eaten and may be burned without doubt). This seems to be the meaning in all other passages using this phraseology for sacrifices (mZev 8:4: תַּעֲבֹר צוּרָתָן; tPes 4:1 תַּעֲבֹר צוּרָתָהּ ... תַּעֲבֹר צוּרָתוֹ; tSot 2:4 about a minhah / meal offering; tBQ 10:18-19; tZev 4:1, 7:6, 8:14; tTem 3:9, 4:16; tKer 4:11 about a minhah, 4:13; tNeg 8:10, 9:2).

It is interesting to note that in two cases in the Tosefta this expression moves from the altar and sacrifices to the real of the kitchen. It is used to describe a dish/broth (in the status of *terumah*-offering) who has been spoiled, meaning it has gone beyond its time to be eat (תַּבְּשִׁיל שְׁעִיבְרָה צוּרָתוֹ). The text states that *terumah* given as food to the priest only in the parts and forms which are usually eaten (לֹא אֲכֹל דָּבָר שֶׁדָּרְכּוֹ לֹא אֲכֹל), meaning the priest is not obligated to eat the peel of a vegetable (in the status of *terumah*-offering) or bread which has become stale or a dish whose “form” is that of something that cannot be eaten anymore, because too many days have passed since it should have been eaten, so it is “beyond its time” as being something eatable, its “form” as food (*she-’ibrah tsurato*). Again, the principle seems to be “beyond its due time,” like the expiration date on our food cans. The experience with food and cooking (and sacrifices as food) is put in conversation with the experience of birth and pregnancy, with consideration about time, predictability and observation. A lot about female experience interacts figuratively and shapes halakhic and legal temporal frames.

Lieberman understands the metaphor in all these images about sacrifices and food as referring to the physical phenomenon of the meat/food, that when decaying, extends its surface and swallows, like the belly during pregnancy.³⁴¹ Its “form” thus would be

³⁴¹ LIEBERMAN *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Mo’ed 2, 4:545 (Pisha’), note 1.

pregnant. It implies that the food becomes pregnant, develops a belly, and it changes its form to pregnancy, not that it remains pregnant beyond its time instead of “giving birth.” However, a swollen belly can be the result of eating, fatness, age, famine or disease (as the swollen belly of the Sotah), all images that are better related to the swelling of decayed food. In Roman satirical literature, the stomach swollen by excessive eating was depicted as a grotesque bodily metaphor of moral and physical derangement vs. the belly swollen by pregnancy as a desirable image.³⁴² Food can swell for decay, but also in cooking, as in dough-rising, in a cooked dish, in the act of boiling, in fermentation, or in the swelling of fruits or vegetables (as gourds) when becoming ripe. There is no a specific and particular associative overlap between pregnancy and a decayed food in the image of abdominal distension. The body, moreover, seems not to represent in the rabbinic image a source of ridicule, of decay, disgust or moral reprobation. The question is what the text wants to achieve with the image of pregnancy for sacrifices and food, connected to the element of time. In the case of the sacrifices, it wants to defend a rabbinic enactment transforming a doubtful sacrificial outcome into the biblical *notar*, allowing its disposal. The halakhic form/status of *notar* is compared to an overdue pregnancy. The expected outcome (i.e., birth, symbolizing the expected time for eating a food or for eating the sacrifice) is delayed beyond its legal / due time (i.e., it is still pregnant, overdue). This possibility of an expected/due time, which could be delayed, is a far-reaching conceptual structure containing reflections on predictability, presence/absence of control and observation by humans toward Divine acts, which is at best expressed by the unique and female experience of pregnancy.

7. The making of sacred items through women’s images

Times (*mo’adim* or *zmanim*) as sacred days are marked by physical objects, whereby every holiday is recognizable by a characteristic object embodying its essence, as significant symbols punctuating everyday life rhythms and horizons. These sacred items often acquire, in tannaitic literature, female metaphorical images, which express their character and the character of the holiday through embodied experiences. For instance, Shabbat is constructed as a physical space, a house, whereby the city and the space where one is allowed to walk on Shabbat becomes a map and a house with a marked boundary. This image is described with the metaphor of pregnancy, with the observant Jew living inside the womb or the belly of the Shabbat space. Like the fetus can move only within the amniocytic sac, the Shabbat observant person can move only within the Shabbat-space/map.

7.1. The rabbinic Shabbat map and the Shabbat changing boundary as pregnancy (MTEr, MNed)

The Shabbat boundary/limit (תחום שבת – *tehum shabbat*) is the concept of a limited physical area in which it is permitted to walk outside on the Shabbat (mEr 5:5, mSot 5:3, cf. Acts 1:12³⁴³). This law of the Shabbat limit is derived by rabbinic interpretation from

³⁴² Emily GOWERS, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 122.

³⁴³ “The origins of this Jewish tradition ... reach back to the second temple period.” Shaye J. D. COHEN, “Sabbath Law and Mishnah Shabbat in Origen De Principiis,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17:2 (2010): 170.

the verse “Remain every one of you in his place, let none of you go out *from his place* on the Seventh Day” (Exod 16:29, MdRY beshallah va-yissa’ 5, tEruv 3:11, Lieberman TKF 347-348). According to this legislation, it is prohibited on the Shabbat to go beyond a distance of 2000 cubits (אלפים אמה – *alpayim ’amah*, mSot 5:3). In mSot 5:3 R. ‘Aqiva’ midrashically derives the measure from Num 35:5 about the Levitical city’s territory as extending in the open land beyond its walls for 2000 cubits. This measure is attested also at Qumran (see, e.g., the Damascus Covenant 11:5-6). For rabbinic halakhah it is measured from where a person is when Shabbat begins (tEr 4:11, mEr 4:5, 4:8).

A person who is located in an open area outside human settlement, measures 2000 cubits outside the “four square cubits” (ארבע אמות – *’arba’ ’amot*) surrounding her which are considered her personal space, as the spatial area taken by the *human body* (tEr 3:11: “the full extent of his height in addition to his stretched arms”).

When one is inside the “architectural body of an enclosure, a building or a city” these become “one’s place” for the time of the Shabbat.³⁴⁴ If the person is within a settlement (a town, a city), he may walk anywhere within that entire area, no matter how far away that it. That became “his place,” his personal space. The 2000 cubits are counted from outside of the city. The city *contains* the person as the four cubits of her own body. This is a rabbinic leniency extending the distance a person can traverse significantly. The entire city is defined as a person’s Shabbat residence, dwelling or house.

To calculate the *tehum*/Shabbat limit for a city, it is first necessary to determine the city boundary from which the 2000 cubits are to be measured. The practice of the *tehum* Shabbat “mostly works on the level of the city as a whole” and as such has clearly political implications.³⁴⁵ The irregular margins of a city make calculation and measurements difficult. Thus, the rabbinic innovative and peculiar solution is to *extend* the city’s limit to *include/ contain* in its various buildings sticking out from the margins. This rabbinic idea is called עיבור העיר – *ibur ha-’ir* “the pregnancy of the city”:

פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם נדרים ז ד
ואותן ההוספות שנוספין לעיר כשמרבעין אותה מסוף הבתים היוצאין ממנה נקרא עיבור העיר, והרי הוא
כעיר ודינו כדינה.

Rambam commentary to the Mishnah, Nedarim 7:4

And those additions that they add to the city when they square it at the end of the houses which come out / protrude from it, it is called “**the pregnancy of the city**” (*ibur ha-’ir*), and it is like **the city** and its law is like the law of the city.

MEr 5:7 and tEr 3:14 attest the expression עיבורה של עיר – *iburah shel ’ir* “the pregnancy of the city.” The same terminology used for the intercalation of the month and the year (extending them, adding a day and a month) is used for the extension or augmentation of the city, or better, of the Shabbat’s city:

מ' עירובין ה א
כיצד מעברים את הערים? בית נכנס בית יוצא, פגום נכנס פגום יוצא, היו שם גדודיות גבוהות עשרה טפחים
וגשרים ונפשות שיש להם בית דירא, מוציאין את המידה כנגדן ועושין אותה כטבלא מרובעת כדי שיהא נשכר
את הזויות.³⁴⁶

How do they render cities pregnant (*me’abrin*) [as in *’ishah me’uberet* – a pregnant woman]? If a house recedes [from the city’s outline] and a house protrudes [from the city’s outline], if a turret [in the

³⁴⁴ Gil P. KLEIN, “Sabbath as City: Rabbinic Urbanism and Imperial Territoriality in Roman Palestine” in: *Placing Ancient Texts* (eds. Mika Ahuvia and Alexander Kocar; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 57.

³⁴⁵ KLEIN, “Sabbath as City,” 67.

³⁴⁶ Hebrew text according to MS Kaufman A 50 (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=31000&mm15=000013005010%2000&mismilla=2>).

wall, a tower to guard the city] recedes and a turret protrudes, if there were ruins there, which are ten handbreadths high, and bridges and tombs that contains dwelling chambers, the measurement is extended to include them. And they make it [f., the extended Shabbat limit] like a square tablet [*tavla*, Latin *tabula*], in order that the use of the corners might be gained.

If something protrudes from the straight line drawn as a border of the city, the rabbis push the entire front of the border out to include it into the limits. According to Bartenura, “the language is that of a pregnant woman whose belly protrudes” (לשון אשה מעוברת שכריסה) (בולט), whereby he uses the same term used in mRH for the intercalation of the month. The extension is necessary “when one comes to put up a *marker as a sign of the boundary of the city* and to measure two-thousand [cubits] outside it.”

mNed 7:5 understands “the pregnancy of the city” as part of the city, like the fetus is understood as part of its mother (“the fetus is its mother’s thigh” – עובר ירך אמו – *ubar yerekh ’imo*, bYev 78a): מותר ליכנס לתחומה של עיר, ואסור ליכנס – לעיבורה – “one who vows that the city is forbidden to him, it is permitted to enter the Shabbat boundary of that city, and it is prohibited to enter its pregnancy [*iburah*] [which is like the city itself].”

TERuv 4:4, 4:7, 4:8, 4:9, 4:10, 4:16, 5:4 all contain expressions of “the pregnant city.” Here the expression אילו שמתעברין עמה “these get pregnant with her (the city): a tomb etc.” is found. This means that the spaces which are included in the Shabbat space are also pregnant, containing the person observing the Shabbat.

Different conceptual elements are at play here. This practice of the Shabbat boundary with the image of “the pregnancy of the city” renders the outside, the space of the city as “Shabbat space,” meaning as a sacred, ritual circumscribed area, like a house, house of prayer or house of learning. This space encloses the worshipper like the maternal body encloses the child. It creates the boundary of the community. Most importantly, “it makes religious values manifest spatially in the form of a border that filters and limits movement.”³⁴⁷ These values are manifested physically, visually, externally, attracting attention and marking identity. The limit filters the movement of insiders, and not of outsiders, again something rendered at best by the image of the fetus in its mother’s body. The maternal body also imparts the identity on the child, like the Shabbat map and limit on its inhabitants. The practice of *ibur* / pregnancy allows adding Shabbat space to Shabbat space, making a claim on the mapping of the city. The pregnancy is attributed to the Jewish map of the Shabbat superimposed on the territory, whose boundaries extend and change as the changing and extending pregnant body. “Existing cities that were conquered by Rome were also expanded and sometimes redesigned according to Roman planning and building conventions, an act that enhanced their incorporation into the empire’s urban network.”³⁴⁸ The act of incorporation, expansion and visibility of a Jewish territory vs. an imperial, Roman one is expressed with the idea of pregnancy and maternity.

One of the characteristics of pregnancy is indeed its visibility. There is also a sense that the visible embodied reality of pregnancy hides in its internal body an addition (the life of a Shabbat observing person, as well as an addition of the margins to the Shabbat city). Moreover, pregnancy expresses how limits can be expanded, with the idea of going beyond the limit line of the shape of the body. These concepts enliven the idea of the rabbinic Shabbat limit-map. There is also an important claim in making the landscape

³⁴⁷ KLEIN, “Sabbath as City,” 79.

³⁴⁸ KLEIN, “Sabbath as City,” 55-56.

Jewish, like a mother makes her children Jewish. In the Hebrew Bible, villages are defined as daughters (*bnot*, e.g., Num 21:25, 32, Josh 15:45, Isa 32:9), whereby cities are defined as their mothers. We find “the analogy of a walled mother-city exerting control over the unwalled, dependent daughter-villages. Just as a mother had major responsibilities in caring for her children, so the city provided protection for its people”³⁴⁹ with her body. The image is also used to state that like the belly of a pregnant woman protrudes, but it is nevertheless part of her (as the fetus), so the part of the Shabbat cities which protrude from them are still part of the Shabbat city and incorporated in the Shabbat boundary. Conceptually imaging the Shabbat map, the protrusions from its boundary and the Shabbat city as pregnancy means that the idea is created of a changing shape which can expand and diminish, with no permanent structure, whereby the Shabbat limit is a living, changing body. To make the entire city as a person’s place on the Shabbat and to expand its limits, to augment its space, including any irregularity on the margins, is a rabbinic leniency to enlarge the space a person can traverse and walk in during the Shabbat.

The *pomerium*, the sacred boundary around Rome and other Roman cities – which was meant to remain an empty strip of land – was established by plowing a furrow (apparently an ancient Etruscan rite). This act has a clear symbolism connected to fertility, procreation and impregnation, expressed by the ritual of plowing. The furrow is analogized to the female vulva, the seed to the male semen, the plowing to the male act of intercourse, whereby the female is the soil in which new life is planted by the male founder of the city. A coin from Roman Palestine (second century CE) depicts Hadrian plowing the furrow around Jerusalem. This image is evoked in mTaan 4:6 “On the Ninth of ’Av ... the city of Jerusalem was plowed” (ונחרשה העיר), see also yTaan 4:5, 69b with the depiction of the Roman Rufus who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple by “plowing over it.” In the rabbinic imagery, the act of plowing is assimilated to an act of rape, to Jerusalem, the Jewish people, the Temple and translated to G-d. In SifDeut 328 Titus perpetrated an act of rape, as it were, on the Jewish G-d: “The Wicked Titus, the son of Vespasian’s wife entered the Most Holy, and slashed two altar Veils with his sword, saying: If He is in fact G-d, let Him file an objection!” (טיטוס הרשע בן אשתו של אספסיינוס שנכנס לבית קדש הקדשים וגדר שתי פרכות בסייף ואמר אם אלוה הוא יבוא וימחה.) The sword and the plow are parallel image for the act of conquest of Rome.

The feminine image of the pregnant city evokes not the male act of impregnation, but, in its visual image and association, the expanding belly of the woman’s body. We see the female body, rather than the male one. The Shabbat map and city is analogized to a woman, like the city founded by the Roman conquerors. However, in the first image the pregnant city imparts her identity on her inhabitants as Shabbat observers and pregnancy represents the rabbinic practice of expanding the Shabbat space as being legitimate – like the natural expansion of pregnancy, which is still being part of the maternal body (of the city). It might be a response to the second image about the Roman act of plowing the *pomerium*, representing male conquering, impregnating and, for the rabbinic image, raping the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish cities in the Land of Israel.

The Shabbat limit changes through the contracting and expanding of rabbinic law, which imprints the life of those adhering to it as fluid and in movement. Within the fluid and

³⁴⁹ Frank S. FRICK, “Mother/Daughter (NRSV, Village) as Territory,” in: *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (eds. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 532–533.

limited space of the halakhah, formation takes place. In the associations of this image, pregnancy represent again rabbinic law, practice and world.

7.2. Shofar as a crying woman (MTRS, TSot)

The shofar “an animal’s horn, usually a ram’s horn, used as a musical instrument” is one of the earliest known musical instruments which are still in use. It is first mentioned in Exod 19:16 at the Sinai theophany. In the Hebrew Bible, Rosh ha-Shanah is never connected with the shofar. The first day of the seventh month is merely defined as זְכֵרוֹן תְּרוּעָה – *zikhron teru’ah* “a memorial of blowing/blast” (Lev 23:24), or יוֹם תְּרוּעָה – *yom teru’ah* “a day of blowing” (Num 29:1). The blowing of the shofar on Rosh ha-Shanah is not mentioned in the book of Nehemiah (Neh 8:2-3) and Josephus makes no reference to the shofar ever being sounded on Rosh ha-Shanah (Ant. 3.239). On the contrary, mRS 3:3 points out how that the commandment of the day is with a shofar (שִׁמְצוֹת הַיּוֹם בְּשׁוֹפָר).

The final mishnah in tractate Rosh ha-Shanah describes the *seder teqi’ot* “the order of the shofar blasts.” In this context, we find the expression יֵבָבוֹת – *yevavot*:

<p>מ' ראש השנה ד ט שעור תרועה כשלש יֵבָבוֹת</p>	<p>ת' ראש השנה ב טו שיעור תרועה כשלש יֵבָבוֹת</p>
<p>mRS 4:9 The length of a <i>teru’ah</i> is equal to three <i>yevavot</i>.</p>	<p>tRS 2:15 (Erfurt MS) The length of a <i>teru’ah</i> is equal to three <i>yevavot</i>.</p>

The term derives from the biblical root יָבַב – *yavav*, attested only once in the Hebrew Bible in the pi’el form in Judg 5:28 (quoted in tSot 9:4):

בְּעֵד הַחֲלוֹן נִשְׁקְפָה וַתֵּיבַב אִם סִיסְרָא בְּעֵד הָאֲשָׁנָב: מְדוּעַ בִּשְׁשׁ רֶכְבּוֹ לְבוֹא? מְדוּעַ אַחֲרוֹ פְּעָמֵי מַרְכָּבוֹתָיו?
Through the window peered and **sobbed the mother** (*va-teyabev ’em*) of Sisera through the lattice:
“Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why so delayed the wheels of his chariots?”

The expression “the mother sobbed” (*va-teyabev ’em*) is used to create the tannaitic term *yevavot*. *Yevavot* are described as three short blows or short sounds, like short sobs. They are depicted as being like the cry and weeping of a bereaved mother. Targum Onqelos on Num 29:1 translates *yom teru’ah* as יוֹם יֵבָבָא – *yom yevava’* and on Lev 23:24 דוֹכְרָן יֵבָבָא.³⁵⁰ In bRS 33b the commentary on the mishnah establishes this connection:

דכתיב (במדבר כט, א): "יום תרועה יהיה לכם, "יום יֵבָבָא יהא לכוֹן". וכתב באימיה דסיסרא (שופטים ה, כח): "בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא. ... ילולי יליל.
For it is written, *It shall be a day of teru’ah for you* (Num 29:1) and we translate [in Aramaic] ‘It shall be a day of *yevava’* for you.’ And it is written of the **mother** of Sisera, *Through the window peered and sobbed the mother* (*va-teyabev ’em*) of Sisera ... uttering short sobs.

Rabbenu Hananel (eleventh-century) on his commentary to bRS 35a depicts the halakhic source for the practice of hearing one hundred shofar-sounds on Rosh ha-Shanah as Sisera’s mother (cf. Arukh): “Sisera’s mother cried one hundred cries...to a total of one hundred shofar blows [like Sisera’s mother cried]” (מאה פעיות פעתה אימה דסיסרא).

The raw, piercing cry of a mother losing her child – the vulnerability, pain and transience of this image – are used to depict the shofar’s sound as a deep call. Crying is an embodied form of expression that transcends words and speech and a powerful form of persuasion,

³⁵⁰ <http://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=ybbh%20N&cits=all>.

calling and compelling the attention of others. The woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14) and Rachel (Jer 31:15-22) are prototypical examples of maternal cry. For Pirquei de-Rabbi 'Eli'ezer 31 Sarah, upon hearing the announcement by the evil angel that Isaac was sacrificed, began to weep "three *yevavot* corresponding to the three *yevavot* notes of the shofar" and then she died. Here the shofar as the ram's horn remembering the binding of Isaac is connected to the cry of his mother Sarah and her death out of sorrow. The maternal grief expresses deeply the shattering and loss of self, according to modern-day psychology:

Miller and Stiver claim that "an inner sense of connection to others is a central organizing feature in women's development and that women's core self-structure, or their primary motivational thrust concerns growth within a relationship or what is called 'the self-in-relation.'" Consequently, when a woman's meaningful relationship is terminated due to death it is not just a "loss of relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self." This is particularly true when a woman loses her child. In fact, writing on the experience of pregnancy and childbirth as identity-changing events and identifying childbirth as a "crucible tempering of the self," Shainess notes that if birth is unsuccessful, it damages not only "the woman's sense of self but also her sense of self in relation to others." Sered quotes mothers who express their disbelief at the experience: "Is the dead child a part of me – am I now partly dead..." She further explains that: Miscarriage and neonatal death physically affect the mother in identifiable ways. Especially during the first year of life, the psychological boundaries between the mother and child overlap ... during the pregnancy the baby is physically part of the mother; breast feeding (for many women) continues this physical bond; and social arrangements in which women have primary or exclusive responsibility for child care reinforce that connection.³⁵¹

Sisera's mother loses an adult son in war and is depicted as a wicked character. Even so, her sobbing and longing at the window express for the rabbinic authors the atoning Jew on Rosh ha-Shanah whose eyes peer at Heaven with a wordless quest.

7.3. 'Etrog as identarian symbol, corporeal integrity and its 'breasts nipple' (MSuk)

A recent education campaign aimed to create awareness about the symptoms of breast cancer compares the common lemon fruit from the citrus family to the female breast, in order to depict the physical signs of the disease (<https://knowyourlemons.org/symptoms>). "[T]he familiar, friendly lemon crosses common healthcare communication barriers of literacy, taboo and fear" and it was the result of "developing patient-centred communication materials for breast cancer detection," the dissertation of Dr. Corrine Ellsworth-Beaumont (<https://knowyourlemons.org/story>).

³⁵¹ Ekaterina E. KOZLOVA, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8-9.



This imagery is significant in its poignancy, whereby the lemon – a more common and known image – is used to describe the female breast – a less understood and known element, the target domain to be explained. We find a similar imagery in the Mishnah, connecting the 'etrog (the citrus fruit among the four species used on Sukkot) to the female breast. However here the female breast is not the target domain – the object to be described and better understood in its function and structure – but the source domain. The female breast as source domain to describe the 'etrog marks the 'etrog as the image to be understood and described in the metaphorical phrase. This is achieved by the use of the image of the female breast.

The 'etrog and the four species in general appear on the coins minted during the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 69 CE and in the Bar Kokhba rebellion in 132-135 CE. The significance of this symbol was central to the fight against Roman domination. It was an icon of the Temple and its rituals, with Sukkot as the most important pilgrimage festival during the Second Temple period. Lev 23:40 prescribes to take for Sukkot פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר – *pri 'ets hadar* “the beautiful fruit of the tree,” whereby the mention of the term “beautiful” (*hadar*) was interpreted by tannaitic exegesis as requiring the physical perfection of the 'etrog. For its ritual use, the 'etrog must be perfect in stem and body, according to rabbinic halakhah. MSuk 3:6 expresses the necessity for the physical integrity of the 'etrog in the following way:

מ' סוכה ג' ו
 עלתה חזזית על רובו, נטלה פטמתו, נקלף נסדק ניקב וחסר כל שהוא, פסול.

If a rash [lit; a cutaneous disease] spread out on a majority of it, or if its *pitma*' is removed [*nitlah pitmato* (f.)], if it is peeled, split, or perforated so that any part is missing, it is invalid.

The *pitma*’ is a significant mark of the ’etrog’s beauty, perfection and integrity. Bartenura defines the פִּיטְמָא – *pitma*’ as “*pitmato* – the nipple (*dad*) at its head” (פִּטְמָתוֹ. הַדָּד) (שְׁבֵרָא שׁוֹ). MNid 5:8 indeed labels the areola or the nipple at the tip of the female breast as פִּיטְמֵת – *pitomet*. The etymology seems to refer to its form as a pestle seated in a mortar.³⁵² In mSuk 3:6 there is also a discussion on the green, unripe ’etrog like the green, unripe fig used to describe a young woman’s breast in Mishnah Niddah.

There are only other two places where we find the term *pitma*’ in tannaitic literature and both are in Mishnah Uqtsin, the last tractate of Seder Tohorot. This treatise deals with “stems” in food. The basic question underlining this Massekhet is whether something is considered as being attached to food in a way that, if it is impure the whole is impure, or if the stems and the food are two independent parts. We find the term *pitma*’ in reference to the top-parts of garlic, onions, and leeks, which are considered to be part of the plant, both when they are moist or dry (mUqts 1:2: וְהַפִּיטְמָא ... וְהַקְפְּלוּטוֹת (שְׁלֵהֵן). The term for leek, קֶפְלוּט, is derived from the Greek κεφάλωτον (sub. πράσσον), meaning “leek with a head (*porrum capitatum*), porret.” Then in mUqts 2:3 *pitma*’ is used to indicate the top-part of the pomegranate (הַפִּיטְמָא שֶׁל רִמּוֹן), which like other stems is considered as joining the food in the laws of impurity. Bartenura comments on the pomegranate: – “like a sort of nipple” (*dad*).

In the pomegranate, garlic and onion, the *pitma*’, when closed, looks like a nipple, with an indented opening like a crown, from where the milk goes out. The aspect of moist and dry also evokes the production of milk by the human nipple. Moreover, we find the image of integrity in the halakhic requirement for these endings to be intact and not cut. Why describe something as well-known as the aspect of the plant’s head through the bodily image of the female nipple?

The gendering of the image of the ’etrog was not missed by the Rishonim, who explain the image of the female nipple in the case of the ’etrog as follows:

תוספות סוכה לו ב, ד"ה נטלה בוכנתו

דעוקץ הוא חודו של דד שהתינוק מכניס לתוך פיו, ופיטמא הוא הבשר שתחת העוקץ שמשחיר סביב. וקצת היה נראה מדמזכיר כאן גבי אתרוג פטמתו ועוקצו וחוטמו וכן נמי התם גבי דדי אשה משמע ששלשה במקום אחד לצד ראשו של אתרוג.

Tosafot on bSuk 35b:14 (v. *nitlah bukhnato*)

The *’uqats* is the point of the breast (the nipple, *dad*) which the baby takes into its mouth, and the *pitma*’ is the flesh that surrounds it that turns black.

The fact that it mentions *pitmato*, *’uqtso* and *chotmo* both here about the ’etrog and there about a woman’s breasts [*dadei ’ishah*] suggests that all three are in the same place on the top/head of the ’etrog.

This means that the physical structure of the female breast is analogous to that of the ’etrog. The female breast is used to understand better the structure of the ’etrog for its halakhic requirements and ritual use.

The ’etrog represents physical perfection, integrity, beauty, but also the bounty of nurture and nutrition through its perfume and taste. It is both tasty and smelling good. These are its characteristics within the bouquet of the four species, whereby the other components are either only tasty or only smelling good. Corporeal integrity as required in the sacrifices and the priests, is represented by the complex surface and composition of the female breast, which the ’etrog resembles (with bumps, masses, discoloration,

³⁵² JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1161, v. *pitma*’, cf. *pitomet*.

stains, liquids). More than all, its nipple, areola and opening from which the maternal milk comes out are the three components resembling and describing the head of the 'etrog, as representing physical integrity and bounty.

Conclusions

In this analysis, it has emerged how gender is used to construct meaning in the tannaitic production through metaphorical images where the source domain of the metaphor entails a female figure. This way of gendering meaning in the rabbinic project is significant. The figurative topics collected in this dissertation show associative structures covering the entire rabbinic reality. G-d and the Temple, Moses and prophecy, Aaron and the priestly service, Israel the people and its priestly role, the idea of commandments / mitzvot, rabbinic constructions of the Torah as law, learning and oral practice, tannaitic developments in blessings and prayers, are all topics expressed through this gendered and figurative device. Central rabbinic principles and innovations are upheld in these constructions. The Land of Israel in Seder Zera'im, Shabbat and the calendar with the lunar month, as well as the significant symbols of the holidays cycle in Seder Mo'ed are again depicted with female metaphors. To discuss these images as a cognitive process allows us to understand them and to detect their significance. They always depart from an exegetical moment or have some connection to the biblical text, but they give voice through the conscious choice of the female gender, to concerns specific to the rabbinic world. In many cases the gendered term and metaphor are new rabbinic phraseologies or neologisms, not found in the Hebrew Bible. Some recurring topics connect many of these images, pointing to a cognitive mapping taking place and to strong gendered figurative associations being anchored in the tannaitic traditions. Conceptual metaphor theory helps to infer their reasoning and the working of gendering and identity construction at their core.

CHAPTER 1 – G-D AS WOMAN

The first chapter deals with the realm of the Divine and with G-d being represented in female terms. Tosefta Sanhedrin describes G-d creating the world as a wise woman building her house: חכמות נשים – *hakhmot nashim* (Prov 14:1) “The wisest of women: This is the King of the kings.” SifDeut sees G-d bringing Israel in the Land as a pregnant woman carrying and forming her fetus. It creates the new formula “G-d is like a woman” (כאשה עוברה – *ke-'ishah 'ubarah*), a bold midrashic/exegetical interpretation of Deut 3:26, which entails no female gender, but just the similarly sounding *yit'aber* “G-d was angry.”

The phrase דד לכיור – *dad la-kior* “breasts for the [Temple's] laver” for its two spigots (MTYom) is embedded in the metaphorical cluster of *dad/* maternal breastfeeding, which is exclusively used for the Divine/Temple, with the three target domains of G-d (tSot, based on the similar term *leshad* for the manna in Num 11:8 and SifNum), the ark in Tosefta Yoma and the laver. The metaphor for the laver and the ark (the most external and the most internal objects in the Temple) is constructed on the similar physical form between the female breasts and the two objects (respectively, because of the spigots and the positioning of the poles). However, both the spigots and the positioning of the poles are attested only in the tannaitic tradition (not in the Bible or in Josephus), so the argument is circular between the objects being “made” or being depicted as resembling female

breasts by the tannaitic text and female breasts alluding and being connected to these objects through a physical similarity. Breastfeeding represents the vicinity between Israel and G-d as a mother having her child feeding directly from her body.

MdRY, MdRSbY (in a tannaitic fragment) speak of G-d as mother, Israel as daughter and the Temple as maternal house (בית אמי – *beit 'imi*, a lemma from Song 3:4). The female figures in the biblical verse are projected on G-d and Israel. Moreover, the mother's house is depicted as the place from which Israel/the daughter is instructed Torah/the law by her mother (הורתתי – *horati* “[the chamber] of my conception” in Song 3:4 is changed midrashically in הוראה – *hora'ah* “[the chamber of my] learning / instruction,” namely the Tabernacle). This image is part of a midrash on Exod 15:2 which interprets the hapax *'anvehu* “I will glorify Him” as indicating the Temple, *navehu* “His habitation.” His habitation is then transformed in a mother's house through the use of the verse from Song.

The image of the mother for G-d is consciously chosen to make several theological points important for tannaitic ideology and peculiar to the rabbinic vision. G-d is depicted as having a maternal body, to express the vicinity between G-d and Israel. G-d's teaching Torah to Israel in the intimate space of the house/Tabernacle is compared to the primary, impactful teaching and imprinting given by a mother. Another theological message is that G-d creating the world and G-d residing in the Tabernacle are two moments connected by the image of a wise woman at the head of her house. She transmits her knowledge and identity to her daughter, with a solidarity on gender lines between the Divine mother and the daughter Israel as building and upkeeping the ‘house,’ as the place for the enactment of piety.

CHAPTER 2 – PROPHECY AND WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

The second chapter moves from these theological reflections – theology and the relationship between G-d and Israel being central to the rabbinic/tannaitic project – to the question of prophecy and revelation. Parallel to the opening of the first chapter with G-d, the King of kings, as the wisest of women, in this case we find Moses, “the most excellent among all prophets” as the “most beautiful among women” (היפה בנשים – *ha-yafah ba-nashim*; Song 1:8) in SifNum. Explaining Num 27:17 about Israel being after Moses as “a flock that has no shepherd,” Moses is compared to the woman shepherd of Song. All the prophets and leaders of Israel after him are the other “women shepherds, less beautiful, less powerful.” SongR 1:7 asks in this insight: “Why were the prophets referred to as women?” The topic of beauty and the importance of performative externalization in ritual and rabbinic piety, as well as the prophet as a woman shepherd going outside alone (both exposed and daring), seem to represent the conceptual mapping of this peculiar image. Prophecy as an act of externalization, model behavior and revelation is put in relation to rabbinic ritual practice and external acts as meaningful (cf. section 3.4. about the mitzvot as women's jewels) through this female image. The gendered image is again not casual.

Connected to the idea of G-d and Israel as mother and daughter, Sifra constructs the image of Moses and Aaron the priest as mother and daughter, which is modelled on the theological one. Again, the Tabernacle represents the place of instruction. And as in the case of G-d being a wise woman building and upkeeping the house, and slaughtering meat (*tavhah*, tSan), so Aaron slaughters the meat of the sacrifices in the Sanctuary. Rabbinic cultural transmission as an embodied practice shared through experience is compared to

a mother-daughter transmission. The Moses-Aaron image continues the G-d-Moses/Israel teaching image and line of transmission as an intergenerational transmission between women: *בת מלכים*... ופסקה עם אמה... עד שעה שתלמד “[Aaron is like] a daughter of kings [*bat melakhim*] ... a minor [*qtanah*]. And she made an agreement with her mother [Moses] [*pasqah ‘im ‘imah*].... until [the daughter] would learn [*tilmad*].” This is the metaphorical comment on the inauguration of the Tabernacle and Moses doing its first service round before Aaron starting his role as high priest (Lev 8:15).

The next topic opens another conceptual mapping dear to the rabbinic beliefs system: the defence of Israel. A fascinating parable describes Moses as a woman defending herself from injustice (SifNum, SifDeut, MekhDv): *אשה אחת בת טובים* “One woman, daughter of decent people [*bat tovim*].” It interprets Deut 3:23 about Moses being angry at the people, an episode which precedes Deut 3:26 about G-d being in turn angry at Moses. We have seen how Deut 3:26 is transformed in G-d being a pregnant woman. Here Moses is transformed into a woman, with a connection between the two figures being changed from angry into women with a right cause. Both moments of anger are defined by the rabbinic midrash as righteous through the female images. Some form of injustice and its turning/reversal are seen as being expressed at best by women’s gendered experience.

Moses’ defence from injustice is then replicated in Israel as a people defence from injustice and the rabbis defence from injustice – three topics interconnected and expressed through three metaphorical women.

CHAPTER 3 – ISRAEL THE PEOPLE AS WOMAN

The third chapter analyses Israel’s role in the world and its sense according to the tannaim. In MdRY, MdRSbY Israel speaks in the first person, defending her priestly role: *אני מלכה* בת מלכים “I am a queen, daughter of kings” [*malkah bat melakhim*]. This is again an interpretation of Exod 15:2, this time on the section “the G-d of my father.” In LevR 4:2 the term *bat melakhim* is used for the soul, married to the body – an ordinary man. Israel is an only daughter with noble origins. Her female character contributes to Israel’s sense of self as being exposed in front of the nations of the world; especially connected to her past, like a daughter to her house of origin (the patriarchal history); particular and unique in the world (as daughter and not a son). Like a woman’s only protection is given by her *genos*, so Israel’s only protection is given by its ancestral history (not by physical or military force). This is rooted in the covenant pact with G-d.

In Sifra, Israel is the mother of G-d, bringing G-d to the world – a consciously odd image representing the rabbinic idea of self. The mother crowing her son in Song 3:11 (part of an old homily) is Israel crowing G-d with the Tabernacle: *אין "אמו" אילא ישראל, שנאמר*, – “His [G-d’s] mother [*‘imo*] is none other than Israel, as it is said: “And My nation [*le’umi*]” (Isa 51:4) [*le’umi* is transformed into *le’imi* “My mother”].

Tosefta Bava Qamma defends Israel as a woman claiming for herself her rights. The exile is going back to her “father’s house” (transformed in the Bavli in her “mother’s house”), Babylonia, from which Abraham is originally (based on Gen 11:27-28, ... *אשה* – *ishah le-veit ‘aviah*). After the breaking of the tablets, Israel is a woman having her betrothal contract signed (*היא מביאה את הכל* – *hi’ mevi’ah*), based on Exod 32:16: “the writing [namely the signature] [on the second Tablets, i.e., the *shtar* “the betrothal contract”] was the writing of G-d.” Prophetic images of Divine husbandry as entailing violence and abandonment are transformed by the tannaitic exegesis into the wife negotiating and the relationship being upheld.

In the last section of this chapter, the mitzvot, as a hallmark of Israel's identity, are depicted as women's jewels (הוי מתקשטת בכל תכשיטיה – *mitqashetet ... takhshiteha*) by SifDeut commenting on the Shema' Deut 6:4-9. The verse Song 6:4 is used to support this image, whereby Israel, dressed with the commandments as external signs and physical practices, is said to be “desirable.”

Israel, as a woman, holds her protection and power through her *genos*/ancestry; her own negotiations, claims and acts; and the upkeep of the commandments as external acts, like jewelry – are not a frivolity, but an essential part of expressing her status and self, through embodiment and externalization. In this way, she is mothering the Divine into the world.

CHAPTER 4 – RABBIS, RABBINIC ORAL TORAH AND RABBINIC PRAYER AS WOMEN

The fourth chapter moves from the rabbinic archetypes to the rabbis or the tannaim themselves, their movement and their innovative institutions. MTBerakhot has the rabbis as an old, wise mother. It uses the Prov 23:22 image of a mother who demands respect, as source domain to describe the rabbinic movement and the rabbis (זקנה אמר – *zaqnah 'imekha* is the biblical phrase used for the comparison and projected on the rabbinic authorities). In Mishnah Berakhot, the mother-image defines the rabbinic practice of blessings/berakhot and the use of the Divine Name in everyday life and greetings. Taking risks is attributed to the role of a mother, and creation and imprinting to maternal procreation. In Tosefta Berakhot, the metaphor describes the rabbis hiding the Torah and their concern about the people of Israel forgetting it.

Relatedly, the person learning Torah is compared to “a woman giving birth” and forgetting it to “burying the child” (יולדת וקוברת – *yoledet ve-qoveret*) in Tosefta Parah and Ahilot. A Genizah fragment adds the image of a woman breastfeeding living in the same courtyard with the woman who lost her child (יולדת וקוברת ... [יולדת] ומנקת) – *yoledet ve-qoveret ... [yoledet] ve-meneqet*). The language of *yoledet ve-qoveret* is not biblical and the topic is not derived from a midrashic reading or exegesis on biblical verses. The metaphor is born out of the unique rabbinic concern about learning and forgetting the Torah.

SifDeut applies Prov 31:14 about “a woman of strength” to the person learning Torah. This metaphor is modelled on the one about G-d forming the world as a wise woman building her house (and to the one about Aaron in the Tabernacle as a woman upkeeping her house). Torah study is compared to a woman's accumulating storage and providing for the household; Torah to the household/house (היתה כאניות סוחר – *haitah ka-'oniot soher* “She is like merchant ships”). The biblical verse already contains a metaphor comparing the woman of strength to merchant ships going afar. Then this image is projected on the Torah scholar. The person learning Torah is compared to a woman who is like merchant ships in her capability to provide for the household. Not only maternal experience, but also work and ritual female experience, is used as source domain for both the Divine and rabbinic practice of Torah.

Tosefta Berakhot employs the image in Esther 7:8 (המלכה עמי בבית – *ha-malkah 'imi ba-bayit* “the Queen [Esther] with me in the house”) for the Torah as law. The female image of Queen Esther serves the idea of Torah/halakhah as ruling woman. The absolute ruler being depicted as a woman might point out to the absence of the use of physical force in its enforcement. Additionally, the topic of the house and of the head of the household resonates in this passage.

Tosefta Megillah creates the peculiar expression *אמן יתומה* – *'amen yetomah* “a female orphan 'amen,” meant to catch the attention of the audience. The rabbinic idea of 'amen is depicted as being neglected (like the Torah being forgotten) or applied differently by competing groups. The female gender seems to add to the sense of anxiety about its security and vulnerability.

Sifra attests the original phraseology of *אום למקרא* / *אם 'em / 'um la-miqra'* “a mother to the oral reading,” expressing transmission, authority and legitimacy. These are given by the maternal image. The expression is again a rabbinic neologism. Maternity as representing a legitimate origin and rabbinic matrilineality seem to be a main point in this figurative association. Even more so, the idea that the exegetical, oral practice of the rabbis renders visible the meaning embedded in the body of the written text, as a child coming out from the body of the mother, after having being nestled in it.

In Sifra, the term “mother” – *'um* (*אום לשון*) is used within another passage for the rabbinic *midrash* (the less obvious reading) as the legitimate interpretation. The art of midrash is indeed to bring to light an *invisible* element in the text – to render something visible which was not immediately seen in the written text. In Mishnah Negaim the term *האום* – *ha-'om* “mother” indicates the original *nega'*, from which the subsequent spreading is “born” (*וְנוֹלַד בּוֹ פְּסִיּוֹן*). The idea of being “born” is connected to the fact that there was no spreading and then a spreading appeared / was visible. The idea of being invisible and then visible, and the coming out from the body (of the first sign) are connected to the image of the maternal body.

The mass of olive from which the oil comes out, and from which oil is derived. is defined as *אום [של] זיתים* – “mother of olives” or simply “mother” (Mishnah and Tosefta Tohorot). Before the oil was invisible, contained in the body of the olives, and then it comes out of them. The pulp of olives from which the oil run off is “the mother.”

CHAPTER 5 – THE LAND OF ISRAEL, ITS COMMANDMENTS AND RAIN/HEAVEN AS WOMEN

Chapter five discusses the term *קטנה* – *qtanah* “minor girl” for 'orlah-trees in Tosefta Orlah (next to *zqenah* “old woman” in Mishnah Orlah and Tosefta Shevi'it). Intergenerational continuity and covenantal promise in the law of 'orlah are expressed with gendered and halakhic terms used for marriage and reproduction in the case of real women. The image of old mothers and minor daughters represents the entire spectrum of the reproductive phase of life, and transmission of identity.

Tosefta Ta'anit uses the image of giving birth for rain through the terminology of *ביכורה* / *בכירה* – *bikkurah* or *bakirah* “first, early rain,” and *אפלה* – *'afilah* “last, late rain.” They derive from the Exodus account in the Bible, which speaks of late crops and firstborns (in the masculine). Within this passage rain as a response to prayer in the Land of Israel, evokes the Exodus story and the image of birth.

Deeply entrenched in the image of the Land of Israel are the ideas of the Divine commandments as shaping Jewish identity, of the passage between the generations of a covenantal promise with G-d, and of the act of giving from the Divine/Heaven. All these concepts are rendered through the idea of women giving birth, and of minor girls and old women as intergenerational Jewish images.

The same text in Tosefta Berakhot analyzed in chapter four where the Torah is compared to Esther, also seems to create an image where the Shabbat is compared to her. The queenship of Esther in the Diaspora, whereby Esther as the only Jewish ruler in the Diasporic world, is used to construct the Shabbat as Jewish sovereignty. Esther entering the palace parallels the Shabbat entering the house. In a passage of MdRSbY the famous image of the bride entering the house is projected possibly on G-d. This metaphorical topic puts the Divine, the Shabbat, Esther the monarch as *entering the space of the house*.

In general, rabbinic language for temporality is rich in female images. Gendered metaphorical language for calendrical time is a tannaitic innovation in the context of Jewish and non-Jewish discourses of the period and precedent to the tannaitic movement.

In Mishnah Rosh ha-Shanah ליל עיבור – *leil 'ibur* “the night of pregnancy” indicates the empirical sighting of the new moon as the sighting of the child at birth (cf. the term *molad* for the moon in the Targums), whereby pregnancy indicates the moon being still hidden in her mother’s belly, invisible. Two other characteristics shaping the rabbinic calendar as peculiar are defined through the image of pregnancy. We find in this insight the expressions חדש העיבור – *hodesh ha-'ibur* “the month of pregnancy” (mArak) for a month with an extra day, and שנת עיבור – *shanat 'ibur* “the year of pregnancy” (MdRY) for a year with an extra, intercalated month.

The Root עיבר – *'iber* in the pi‘el with a female subject and indicating “being pregnant,” “a pregnant woman,” “pregnancy” and “the fetus” is attested only in tannaitic/rabbinic textual sources, including the constructions pi‘el active *'ibrah* “she is pregnant” and qal present active *'ubarah*. These terms are used more in metaphorical images than for real women, whereby a common conceptual structure seems to connect the figurative patterns. In these images the physical resemblance which is evocated is that of a woman’s pregnant body and experience. The choice of *'iber* for pregnancy points to its use in Job and its indicating a process (a passing), which will not fail (the image in Job 21:10).

Mishnah Berakhot speaks of a time of risk and danger as פרשת העיבור – *parashat ha-'ibur* “a time of pregnancy [of G-d],” with a reference to supplication for compassion to the Divine by R. Yehoshu‘a. We have seen in SifDeut the same R. Yehoshu‘a speaking of a supplication for compassion to G-d, who is metaphorically depicted as a pregnant woman.

Tosefta Sanhedrin points out how intercalation can be a risky practice, like adding a new pregnancy. Conceptually related expressions are *me'abrim 'et ha-shanah*, *me'abrim 'et ha-din* and *me'abrim 'et ha-derekh*. Traveling on the road was a dangerous time, a moment of judgement, vulnerability, supplication for compassion and additional relationship with G-d. This conceptual mapping is valid also for the calendar. All these expressions are tannaitic neologisms.

Between others Mishnah and Tosefta Pesahim compare the halakhic status of notar to an overdue pregnant: תעובר צורתו – *te'ubar tsurato* “pregnant form.” The expected time for birth, eating a food or a sacrifice, is skipped, so that the status of the sacrifice is that of being “still pregnant, overdue.” A conceptual association about predictability and observation is expressed through pregnancy.

Fundamental ideas about time and how rabbinic law shapes them are represented through the image of women’s bodies, and female experience with time.

In the context of the rabbinic Shabbat map and boundary, defining Shabbat as a sacred space, Mishnah and Tosefta Eruvim attest the metaphor of עִיר שֶׁל עֵיבֹרָה – *iburah shel 'ir* “the pregnancy of the city.” Tosefta Eruvim also has the phrase *middat ha-'ibur* “the measuring of the pregnancy.” Mishnah Nedarim defines “the pregnancy of the city” as part of the city, like the fetus is understood as part of its mother (*'ubar yerekh 'imo*). The image of pregnancy defines the rabbinic practice of expanding the Shabbat space as being legitimate – like the natural expansion of pregnancy, which is still being part of the maternal body (in this case, of the city).

Mishnah and Tosefta Rosh ha-Shanah create the term יֵבָבוֹת – *yevavot* for the Shofar blasts, which is derived from the biblical phrase “the mother sobbed” (Judg 5:28) for the death of her son. Maternal grief defines the prayer of the High Holiday and its characteristic and unique instrument.

Mishnah Sukkah depicts the 'etrog as a female breast, through the use of the term פִּטְמָתוֹ – *pitmato* “nipple” for its protrusion. This neologism is used to indicate the head of the 'etrog and this fruit as representing physical integrity, bounty and nutrition (smell and taste) in its religious significance. The 'etrog acquired a special status as the choicest of choice fruits, and to express rabbinic identity (it was not adopted by the Samaritans, for instance).

In conclusion, a broader historical-comparative context for the importance of metaphors and gender is provided by Roman war discourse. Gendered female metaphorical language was used in the rhetoric of Roman imperialism to denote the subjugation of Palestine. This discursive practice deeply enabled the working of imperial power and of the imperial project. Roman texts and material findings draw on a wide range of metaphors in the feminine to describe the wounded body of conquered Judea. The depiction of Judea as a seated woman bound and mourning shows how impactful the employment of figurative language can be – a political tool. The gender specific construct of such imagery represents its central point. The Flavian coinage was rather innovative in its use of the female images,³⁵³ whereby “military insurgence” and “personal religious and social heritage” are both touched and connected. However, to feminize the enemies in order to disempower them is a practice as old as it can get. Consider the Assyrian depictions of the enemy soldiers as women or the biblical prophetic response to defeat in the self-picture of being like a raped woman. The tannaitic production recasts its self-image as that of a woman, in response to such a metaphorical discourse, but to empower itself, to reverse the defeat. This move is not obvious. Several texts in this dissertation point to the background of the Bar Kokhba revolt, the second and more devastating defeat at the hand of Rome. In Palestine, Rome twice almost lost control of the region, and to mark the keeping of imperial order and social hierarchy, it marks the overpowered as women. In this context, the rabbinic texts maintain the image of themselves and of the people of Israel as women, not because conquered and captive, but in their own terms and identarian patterns.

A deep reason for this move seems to reside in the importance attributed to embodied reality, to the fact that the body and its diversity matter. Cicero uses the female body and women's jewels to depict what the practice of speech and philosophy should *not* be,

³⁵³ Edward ZARROW, “Gendered Ideology: Flavian Politics and the *femina capta*,” The 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association.

namely as a negative connotation, and Plato uses images of women's bodies, pregnancy and birth, to denote how they are superseded by thought, the mind and philosophy. On the contrary, for the rabbis, these same images denote something significant indicative of rabbinic Torah and life system. Embodied practice is expressed through the unicity of the female body and some of its experiences. The maternal act of carrying the child in the body is compared to the people of Israel who carry the Torah in their body and practice. This experience is consciously contraposed to the dominant cultural approach in the Graeco-Roman world – depicting a different experience for Israel, like the parental one of mothers vs. that of fathers.

The interconnected metaphorical mappings found in this dissertation show how these gendered metaphors express something deeply entrenched in the cultural language of the tannaitic movement. The main topics of embodiment, vicinity to G-d, externalization and risk express main rabbinic tenants of rabbinic practice, piety and Torah. The parallels constructed between women's experience and that of a Jewish observant life give a place and meaning to women within this religious system.

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