WHAT ATHENS HAS TO DO
WITH JERUSALEM
ESSAYS ON CLASSICAL, JEWISH, AND
EARLY CHRISTIAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY
IN HONOR OF GIDEON FOERSTER

BY

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ABBREVIATIONS

For the abbreviations used throughout this book, see L'Année Philologique.

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADAJ</td>
<td><em>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td><em>L'année épigraphique.</em> Paris 1888f.</td>
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<td>BAR</td>
<td><em>Biblical Archaeology Review</em></td>
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<td>CCL</td>
<td><em>Corpus christianorum, series latina.</em> Turnhout: Brepols, 1957f.</td>
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<td>CIL</td>
<td><em>Corpus inscriptionum latinorum.</em> Berlin: Reimer, 1863f.</td>
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<td>CSEL</td>
<td><em>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum.</em> Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky; Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866f.</td>
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<td>DACL</td>
<td><em>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie.</em> Edited by F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907-1953</td>
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<td>DSD</td>
<td><em>Dead Sea Discoveries</em></td>
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<td>GCS</td>
<td><em>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller.</em> Berlin: Akademie — Verlag. 1897f.</td>
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<td>ESI</td>
<td><em>Excavations and Surveys in Israel</em></td>
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<td>HA</td>
<td><em>Hadashot Arkheologiyot</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HT</td>
<td>Hebrew Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td><em>Liber Annuus</em></td>
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<td>MAMA</td>
<td><em>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiquae.</em> Manchester 1928f.</td>
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<td>NBDB</td>
<td>New Brown-Driver-Briggs Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
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<td>NJPS</td>
<td>The New Jewish Publication Society Translation (&quot;Tanakh&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NKJV</td>
<td>New King James Version</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSI</td>
<td><em>Papiri greci e latini.</em> Pubblicazioni della società italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto. Florence: Ariani, 1912-1957</td>
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<td>RQ</td>
<td><em>Revue de Qumran</em></td>
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<td>SEG</td>
<td><em>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum.</em> Leiden: Sythoff; Amsterdam: Gieben, 1923f.</td>
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<td>QC</td>
<td><em>Qumran Chronicle</em></td>
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<td>QDAP</td>
<td><em>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine</em></td>
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INTRODUCTION

The transmission of traditions in rabbinic literature is a well-known phenomenon, and so is the need to trace the process by which developments and alterations occur in the course of this transmission. However, to date most scholarly attention has centred on the "global stages" of transmission, that is, from oral to written traditions, or from tannaitic sources to amoraic, saboraic, geonic, and medieval literature. Some scholars have focused on textual variants, while others have devoted their studies to what could be called "higher criticism," in three main areas: sources, forms, and redaction.¹ The same holds true with regard to descriptions of events throughout rabbinic literature: in this case too, scholars have focussed on how to reconstruct comprehensively key moments in Jewish history such as major events of the Second Temple period, the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, the rise and fall of the Jewish Patriarch, and so forth.²

¹ Pointed out by the late Baruch Bokser in his last survey of the field. See B. M. Bokser, "Talmudic Studies," in The State of Jewish Studies (ed. S. J. D. Cohen and E. L. Greenstein; Detroit: Wayne State U.P. and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990), 80-112. The important developments of the last two decades in textual criticism of rabbinic literature, especially in Israeli universities, have not yet been summarized. Unfortunately, space does not permit citing them here.

² There is still no up-to-date summary on historical research of the mishnaic and talmudic periods (see also n. 6). Below (and in n. 7-10), I review the major views in contemporary studies, although this is far from being a comprehensive survey. For now see B. M. Bokser, "Recent Developments in the Study of Judaism 70-200 C.E.,” The Second Century 3 (1983): 36-40.
Despite this tendency, from the very beginning of scholarship many have recognized the need to trace what I define here as the "lesser steps" of transmission, that is the process, whether orally or textually, which took place in local environments and during short and limited time periods. The significance of this process was understood mainly in literary terms, namely as promoting our understanding of the creation of texts. However, these "lesser stages," reflecting as they do the local setting in which they were produced prior to being incorporated in a larger textual context, could significantly contribute to the study of history in general, and to the history of daily life in particular.

Characteristically, the study of daily life shifts attention from an emphasis on political history, so typical of nineteenth century scholarship, to an investigation of common people and their everyday routines and customs. The study of daily life comprises a wide variety of interests, both material (e.g. garments, foods) and spiritual (e.g. superstitions). As such, it is dependent on a variety of methods from social studies and archaeology. At the same time, daily life studies cannot allow itself to disregard the historian's primary tools, namely philology and historical analysis. Only when combined properly, do these disciplines and approaches allow one to draw a comprehensive picture of the ordinary lives of human beings and their society.

Daily life research could be defined functionally in a two-fold manner:

1. *Realia*: An accurate description of the different factors that make up man's material reality, including the natural environment

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3 An ample example of such attention is the effort devoted by many scholars to exploring the manner in which traditions were conveyed from the Land of Israel to Babylon and vice versa. The examples discussed below are also related to this topic (see also n. 19). One contemporary study that intensely examines the "minor" developments of the Palestinian text is C. Hezser, *Form, Function and Historical Significance of the Rabbinic Story in Yerushalmi Nesiqin* (TSAJ 37; Tübingen: Mohr, 1993). Leading scholars of rabbinic literature during the past generation, such as Saul Lieberman and David Weiss-Halivni, have always emphasized the need to clarify these stages, minor as they might be. Invariably present in their writings, this tendency has influenced many others as well.

and man-made artefacts, from the smallest of objects to the largest of monuments. Some scholars refer to this field in the Latin term \textit{realia} (adopted in the following due mainly to the lack of a more appropriate term). In the study of such \textit{realia}, archaeology and its various sub-disciplines play a leading role.

2. \textit{Daily life}: the study of the encounter between people and the objects that existed in their world. This includes not only the description of how those artefacts were used (their \textit{modus operandi}). It also extends to the circumstances and the socio-cultural context in which they were used or functioned. Here, it is the human user that is at the centre of research.

The core of "daily life studies" can thus be said to lie in the interface between the "user" and the "object." For that reason, daily life studies make an integrated use of a number of affiliated disciplines: archaeology, which deals with inanimate structures and objects, on the one hand, and history, which explores the life of people, on the other. Needless to say, there is no clear-cut dichotomy here. However, the foci are different, as are the objectives and the methodologies.

Although some scholars have contributed significantly to the study of \textit{realia} in rabbinic literature,\textsuperscript{5} until recently not much has

\textsuperscript{5} The interest in these subjects towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries is reflected, for example, by Gustav Dalman’s monumental seven volume study: G. Dalman, \textit{Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina} (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann 1928-1942). Regarding rabbinic literature, Krauss’ venture is considered the basic study on this topic: S. Krauss, \textit{Talmudische Archäologie} (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1910; reprint 1966). The problem underlying Krauss’ work, and many other studies as well, is the vague definition they apply to the term “daily life.” Although entirely abandoning the “classical” historical approach, which concentrates on politics and wars, the precise content of their studies, as well as their definition, aim and scope, is unclear. Daniel-Rops’ book offers a good example of such ambiguity, see H. Daniel-Rops, \textit{Daily Life in the Time of Jesus} (trans. P. O’Brian; New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962). Chapter by chapter, the book deals with various topics connected to people’s lives: from economics (part II, chapter 8), society and law (ibid., chapter 4), geography (part I, chapters 1 and 4), religion (most of the chapters in part III), to aspects that are explicitly related to everyday life such as washing and eating (part II, chapters 6 and 11). Of course, a single book cannot properly encompass such diverse dimensions and maintain academic standards. Indeed, the result is more popular than scientific. Likewise, many compositions concerning the daily lives of Jews and Pagans, both in ancient and modern times, contain similar flaws. I believe that in this field of research, as in others, exact theoretical definitions cannot be disregarded, and a broad inclusive framework, such as
been achieved in the field of daily life studies based on evidence provided by rabbinic literature. Moreover, the enterprise on the subject is usually asymmetrical in the sense that it heads in one direction only — from the literature to the realia. Scholars typically try to cull details about realia from rabbinic material. Once they have gathered all the scattered information on a given topic, they complement these data with additional material drawn from non-rabbinic literary and archaeological sources, and then synthesize them, thus drawing a comprehensive, though occasionally fractured, picture.

To my knowledge, there are hardly any works, however, that try to proceed in the opposite direction: studies that seek to use "realistic" information in order to draw conclusions about the quality and nature of rabbinic literature and about the question of how this

"all that is connected to a person's life," is insufficient. This formula must be resolved and precisely defined. Although the current paper attempts to contribute to this issue, a broader and more comprehensive discussion is required. For a basic approach that seeks a synthesis of written sources and material findings, see D. P. Dymond, Archaeology and History: A Plea for Reconciliation (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974). And, regarding rabbinic literature: E. M. Meyers, "The Use of Archaeology in Understanding Rabbinic Materials," in Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glazzer (ed. M. A. Fishbane and P. R. Flohr; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 29-42. See also the following note here.

There has been significant progress in the study of the realia and daily life as reflected in rabbinic literature in three regions: In Israel, especially in the studies by Daniel Sperber and Joshua Schwartz from Bar-Ilan University. See, e.g., D. Sperber, Material Culture in Eretz-Israel during the Talmudic Period (Jerusalem: Yad Itzhak ben Zvi, 1993) (in Hebrew), which includes references to his previous studies. Especially important is his survey on pp. 3-23. J. Schwartz, "'Ball-Playing' in Jewish Society and in the Greco-Roman World," Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: The World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), B:1, 17-24. See also: D. Adan-Bayewitz, Common Pottery in Roman Galilee: A Study of Local Trade (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan U.P., 1993). In Germany, by a group of scholars and students led by Peter Schäfer. For the first fruits of this group see P. Schäfer (ed.), The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998). In the U.S.A., although in a less systematic manner, see, e.g.: C. E. Hayes, "Amoraic Interpretation and Halakhic Development: The Case of the Prohibited Basilica," JSJ 26 (1995): 157-68. The methodology that Hayes uses to analyze the halakhic development of the basilica is very similar to the way I have utilized the hypocausa below. Finally, the issue of realia and daily life in rabbinic literature has also been the focus of several of my own studies. See Y. Z. Eliav "The Roman Bath as a Jewish Institution: Another Look at the Encounter between Judaism and the Greco-Roman Culture" JSJ 31 (2000): 416-54, where I refer to previous studies of mine.
literature came about. This paper suggests that the "realia kernel" of a text may help us in the search for its "historical kernel." In other words, clarifying the ways in which realia merge into rabbinic texts may enhance our comprehension of the process of formation of those writings, and thus increase our ability to evaluate the historical authenticity of these texts.

The historical authenticity of accounts in rabbinic literature — mainly stories and anecdotes generally termed "aggada" — has stood at the heart of a heated debate throughout the last generation. Many scholars from different schools of thought and opposing methodologies have stated their opinion on this issue, and have approached the problem from various directions. Philology, theology, hermeneutics, literary criticism, and historiography are only some of the disciplines involved in this discussion. It is worth noting that discussions regarding the historical value of legendary texts are not limited to the study of rabbinic literature alone; such discussions also arise among general historians and literary critics. A fundamental issue in all

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7 This fascinating debate continues to stir up the academic world, with no resolution in sight. It was the focal point of discussions by the study group "The History of the Jewish people in the Period of the Mishnah and Talmud," held in 1993 at the In Hebrew University's Center for Advanced Studies, for which I was privileged to be a research assistant. The issues discussed in this article took shape during that year. The state of research regarding the historicity of rabbinic texts has not yet been summarized. For now, see the discussion below. See also the summaries by: Bokser, "Recent Developments" in R. L. Kalmin, Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 1-24, esp. 21-23 n. 1. The variety of opinions in the academic world today are reflected (even if not entirely) by the articles collected in J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck (eds.), Judaism in Late Antiquity: Where we Stand — Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 3,1:123-241.

8 For an example of the relationship between literature and realia in the writings of the fourth century historian Ammianus Marcellinus see T. D. Barnes, "Literary Convention, Nostalgia and Reality in Ammianus Marcellinus," in Reading the Past in Late Antiquity (ed. by G. Clarke et al., Australian National University Press, 1990), 82-83. For another example regarding the realia in Josephus' stories of the bath-house see Y. Z. Eliav, "Did the Jews at First Abstain from Using the Roman Bath-House?," Cathedra 75 (1995): 3-35 (in Hebrew). This issue's conceptual and theoretical aspects have been well-researched. For a basic introductory discussion, see L. Gossman, "History and Literature: Reproduction or significance" and H. White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding (ed. R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 3-62. There is also a perceptive
these discussions is the question about the extent to which the “creators” of stories and literary accounts based their work on reality. Hence the controversy over the validity, content, and range of the term “historical kernel.”

With regard to rabbinic literature, there is one group of historians that attaches considerable credence to the information found in rabbinic stories (though at the same time such scholars apply critical historical methods to examine the credibility of that information). At the “head” of this school stand G. Alon and his student S. Safrai.9 Among the leading opponents to the notion of historicity in the aggada are J. Fraenkel10 and J. Neusner11 (though this, I believe, is their

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9 Unfortunately, Alon’s views on the question of the historicity of rabbinic literature have not been preserved. However, his positivist approach, which furnishes these texts with far-reaching historical credibility, is evident on almost every page of his books. Professor Aharon Oppenheimer lectured on Alon’s historical concepts, including its positive and negative aspects, during the summer discussions at the above-mentioned seminar (n. 6). His remarks will be published in a special volume that will summarize the group’s research. I wish to thank Professor Oppenheimer for allowing me to make use of his paper before publication. Safrai’s approach is well known, see S. Safrai, “Tales of the Sages in the Palestinian Tradition and the Babylonian Talmud,” Scrjpta Hierosolymitana 22 (1971): 209-32. Nonetheless, the so-called “Jerusalem School” does not speak in one voice on this matter. Compare, for example, M. D. Herr, “The Conception of History among the Sages,” Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), 3:129-42, esp. pp. 141-42 and n. 70 (in Hebrew).


only common trait). In recent years, and subsequent to Neusner’s criticism, some scholars have attempted to discuss the issue of a text’s validity from new perspectives in an attempt to produce fresh criteria for the historical study of rabbinic literature. This paper contributes another perspective to this discussion, by highlighting the research of daily life.


13 The following example clarifies how daily life studies are integral to the debate over the historicity of rabbinic literature. In Sperber, *Material Culture*, 173-76), the talmudic story (b. Ta'an. 21a) of Ilfa, who committed suicide by throwing himself “from the mast of a ship” (אַל הָרֶשֶׁף), is explained against the background of Roman ships of that period. At a discussion held on January 12, 1994 at Yad Yizhak Ben Zvi, in honor of the publication of this book, Professor Jona Frankel claimed, in accordance with his methodology, that although the interpretation of אַל הָרֶשֶׁף is plausible, the story of a person who throws himself overboard
The passages that will be examined below provide us with two examples of how to study Talmudic daily life. In both cases the goal is to address the “lesser” and “local” stages of transmission: to trace the origins of the process, to define the literary problems which confronted the rabbis at the time, and to characterize the ways in which “new” information became associated with a tradition, eventually becoming part of it. Only such a laborious methodology enables one to place the source’s data in a particular daily life context. But while the first case benefits from the realia interwoven in the text, the second example lacks such an advantage and therefore serves as the “control” case for this study. Indeed, as shall be illustrated below, the results of its analysis are much more meagre.

R. Abbahu in the Tiberias Bathhouse

Tractate Yom Tov in the Palestinian Talmud recounts an anecdote14 about R. Abbahu concerning an incident that supposedly occurred in the bathhouse of Tiberias:

R. Abbahu was going down [=came] to bathe in the bath-house (דימית) of Tiberias, and [while in the bath-house] was leaning on two Goths. They stumbled and he steadied them, they stumbled [again] and he stabilized them [for a second time]. They said to him: “How is this so?” He said to them: “I saved my strength for my old age.” (p. YomT. 60c).15

from such a beam remains a “legendary fantasy.” In other words, although the realia of the text is authentic, the daily life episode is imaginary. In Fraenkel’s view, not only is there no proof that Ilfi’s suicide really occurred. There is likewise no proof that in daily-life people tended to commit suicide by jumping off beams (I wish to thank Professor Fraenkel for allowing me to quote his remarks). See also J. Fraenkel, “The Study of Aggadic Literature: A View into the Future,” Jewish Studies 30 (1990): 21 (in Hebrew). Frankel clearly comments there “Hazar’s perception of reality and the manner in which they chose to describe it... pertain to the essence of their inner world (and it is) yet to be studied” (my translation). This statement can serve as the point of departure for the current paper.

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15 My translation, based on the editio princeps (Venice 1523-4). Neusner’s translation, apparently misled by R. Yohanan’s response in the Babylonian Talmud
A similar event is narrated twice in the Babylonian Talmud:

When Ravin came he stated: for instance, like the pampered men (מַעְנִים) of the west [=Land of Israel]. R. Abbahu was once standing in a bathhouse (בָּחֹז), two slaves supporting him, when [the floor of] the bathhouse collapsed under him. By chance he was near a column [upon which] he climbed taking up the slaves with him (b. Ketub. 62a). 16

R. Abbahu [once] went into the bathhouse (בָּחֹז) and the floor of the bathhouse gave way [=collapsed] beneath him, and a miracle was wrought for him, and he stood on a pillar and rescued a hundred and one men with one arm (b. Ber. 60a). 17

Are stories such as these of any use for the historian? At first glance this does not seem to be the case. The three accounts may not deal

(b. Ketub. 62a), misses the main point, see J. Neusner, The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 18:35. A Geniza fragment reflects a different calligraphy wherein the amora’s name is spelled אַבַּבָּה and the city יִרְשָׁלְמִי, see L. Ginzberg, Yerushalmi Fragments from the Genizah (New York 1909, repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), 170. There is a parallel to this passage in the Vatican MS. 30 of Gen. Rab. 97 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 1241 = Midrash Ha-Gadol Gen. 48:1; ed. Margulies, p. 813]). The entire excerpt of the midrash, including the text before and after the story of R. Abbahu, is apparently based upon a tradition close to that of the Palestinian Talmud, but with the following differences: Tiberias, where the incident occurs, is not mentioned in Gen. Rab., and the version there also adds that כִּנְסָי (sic — probably “Goths,” and in Midrash Ha-Gadol כִּנְסָי; these readings are discussed infra, n. 23) walked “one on his right and one on his left.” A third variant, toward the end of the story, is in the dialogue between R. Abbahu and the Goths. Although the content and vocabulary are similar in this case, the reading is different.


17 Trans. by M. Simon in Epstein, Babylonian Talmud, 377. A reading preserved in an old-printed Spanish edition adds after the word “pillar” — “(and) there were present two slaves.” See H. Z. Dimitrovsky, Sridei Bavli 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), 49. It seems as if this clause is based upon the reading in b. Ketub. However, on the following page (ibid., p. 50), which is apparently of the same edition, the number of survivors is “hundred and one” as in the common version of b. Ber., although in the Spanish version it is doubled to: “one hundred and one in one arm and one hundred and one in the other arm.” Consequently, the Spanish version combined the two readings of the Babylonian Talmud into one! Since the pages were cut off, it is impossible to view the complete story of this version.
with the same event. Moreover, they might well be merely legendary fictions that exist only in the writers’ minds. Even if we assume or prove that something actually happened to R. Abbahu in the bath-house, and that the three stories refer to the same episode, we are still left with three versions regarding the details of this incident, which brings us back to our starting point.

A closer comparison of these three passages helps to reveal a number of similarities: the main character, namely R. Abbahu; the place, namely bath-house; and the core of the story, in spite of differences in detail, namely an incident that involved the collapse of a building, R. Abbahu’s rescue from it, and the help R. Abbahu extended to his escorts. A further parallelism can be observed when we look at the broader textual framework. In the Palestinian Talmud R. Abbahu’s story is integrated into a discussion about the difficulties of ageing. R. Ishmael opens with a general statement: “The stones on which we sat in our youth make war against us in our old age.” The Talmud illustrates this saying by narrating some relevant accounts. R. Abbahu’s concluding words “I saved my strength for my old age” weave this incident into the wider tapestry of examples cited there. The traditions in tractate Ketubbot in the Babylonian Talmud, even though they reflect a different setting, also echo the topic of old age. The context there is Ravin’s interpretation of the mishnaic term מֵאַלָּא דִּמְשׁוֹרָה, which he interprets as the strong men of Palestine (cf. also Rashi’s explanation מֵאַלָּא דִּמְשׁוֹרָה: “The natives of the Land of Israel, pampered with food and beverage, are thus strong and potent” [my translation]). In order to illustrate his statement, Ravin includes two anecdotes: the first is the one mentioned above about R. Abbahu, and the second tells us what happened to R. Yohanan while climbing stairs. At the end of the second anecdote, while responding to the question of a student, Ravin adds: “Since [your strength is] such, why do you require support?” R. Yohanan replies to this question with a question:

18 On δημόσιον and βαλανεῖον as names for the bath-house in rabbinic literature see Y. Z. Elij.,Sites, Institutions, and Daily Life in Tiberias during the Talmudic Period(Mituv Tveria 10; Jerusalem: Ariel, 1995), 23 (in Hebrew); idem, “Bath House,” ns. 45 and 85, with the bibliographical references cited there. This matter requires further examination. For other sources that associate R. Abbahu to the bath-house see L. I. Levine, “R. Abbahu of Caesarea,” in Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults. Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty (ed. J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 4:63, n. 44.
"Otherwise what [strength] will I reserve for the time of my old age?" Thus it seems that Ravin's stories are taken from a tradition close to the one contained in the Palestinian Talmud.

When compared, a gradual development in the story's plot can be observed, especially where the role of "external force" is concerned. In the Palestinian Talmud the situation seems as normal as can be: What could be more natural than an old man slipping into a bathhouse? The surprise in this event lies in the great, but possible, strength of the elderly man.

The core of the plot in tractate Ketubbot in the Babylonian Talmud is likewise R. Abbahu's vigor: this illustrates the words of Ravin regarding the strength of the inhabitants of the Land of Israel. In this version of the story, however, a new, dramatic element is inserted: the bathhouse floor collapses, and a random pillar happens to be in the path of R. Abbahu's fall; only then does his real strength and power become evident; his dexterity saves himself and his escorts. The floor scene adds a heroic flavour to the story. It was probably meant to intensify R. Abbahu's heroism, or, alternatively, to capture the listeners' attention. Yet, paradoxically, it also results in diminishing R. Abbahu's might in that no power in the world could have saved him had not the pillar appeared in his path.

In the third version, as preserved in tractate Berakhot of the Babylonian Talmud, the "external force" reaches its culmination. No longer a random pillar, but a true miracle saves R. Abbahu. He is now stronger than ever before. Consequently, the number of survivors rises to one hundred and one, and, in another version (see note 17), even twice this number.

This literary analysis suggests that these are three evolutionary phases of the same account.19 The narrator in Ketubbot is Ravin, a fourth

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19 Cf. S. Krauss, "Bad und Badewesen im Talmud," Hakedem 1 (1907-1908): 184-85. Krauss links the two stories in the Babylonian Talmud; however, he does not relate them to the story in the Palestinian Talmud. Therefore, he reaches the conclusion that the incident took place in Caesarea. See also Levine, "R. Abbahu," n. 43; M. R. Hanoune, "Thermes romains et Talmud," in Colloque histoire et historiographie (ed. R. Chevallier; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1980), 258; R. Kalmin, Sage, 44. For the opposite opinion see O. Meir, The Acting Characters in the Stories of the Talmud and the Midrash (A Sample) (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977), 392. Meir links the traditions in the Palestinian Talmud and Genesis Rabbah, but ignores the two stories in the Babylonian Talmud. Overlooking the
century amora, only thirty or forty years younger than R. Abbahu. Though his origins are vague, Ravin was one of the רביי — a group of amoraim who travelled from Palestine to Babylon, and "brought" with them halakhic traditions and anecdotes about life in Palestine. Keeping this information in mind, it is possible to suggest a reconstruction for the developmental stages of the story.

The version closest to the "factual core" is preserved in the Palestinian Talmud. It lacks any miraculous collapses. R. Abbahu, a guest in Tiberias and one of the distinguished rabbis of the time, is involved in an alluring anecdote: his escorts slip while in the bathhouse, and he helps to stabilize them. The story seems credible: the characters involved, the site, and the event itself are typical of the period. Although there is no way of telling whether such an episode really took place, from the standpoint of daily life studies this does not really matter. The dialogue between R. Abbahu and his escorts, on the other hand, appears to be a literary invention that lacks a basis in history; its importance lies primarily in the function it fulfills within the Talmudic context in which it appears.

The second evolutionary stage of the story is Ravin's account in Ketubbot in the Babylonian Talmud. In an attempt to visualize strength of the men of Palestine, Ravin embellishes the description of the event by inserting the collapse scene. This insertion, then, is generally considered to be the main distinction between a plain, supposedly factual account of events as narrated in Palestinian Talmud, and a legendary fiction — one that includes both factual and invented elements. In the third version of the story, the more factual elements recede into the background completely: the story has now become a work of fictions, full of miracles and fantasy.

Once we remove the additions inserted by Ravin (or by a narrator that preceded him) in Ketubbot, we are left with a plot that includes the dramatic scene describing the breakdown of the bathhouse floor,

literary process discussed here brought Jacobs to the conclusion that the story in b. Ketub presents "wundersame Errettung." See M. Jacobs, "Römishe Thermenkultur im Spiegel des Talmud Yerushalmi," in Schäfer, Yerushalmi, 294, n. 381.


21 Levine's "R. Abbahu," deals with R. Abbahu's status, and refers to previous studies, especially p. 66ff.
the story of the pillar which happened to halt beneath the participants’ feet, and the actions of R. Abbahu in response to these events. The other two changes that can be observed in Ketubbot — the elimination of the name of Tiberias and the change of “Goths” to “slaves” — are of minor importance. The name of the place, namely Tiberias, is missing already from early textual witnesses (see note 15). It is not unusual for distant versions to omit or to blur names. The “Goths” — the definition of the term and its function in the story cannot be determined very well — were probably unknown to the Babylonians. This may explain why their name was changed.

22 In this case, there is no absolute certainty as to the “original” reading. Was it omitted from Gen. Rab. (cited above, n. 15) or added to the Palestinian Talmud? Philological considerations go either way. Cf. Hanouné, “Thermes,” 258. Hanouné believes that this incident occurred in Caesarea, but his view originates in the fact that he did not connect the versions in the Babylonian Talmud with that in the Palestinian Talmud (see above, n. 19 as well). On the overall relationship between the Palestinian Talmud and Gen. Rab., see Albeck’s introductory essay at the end of his critical edition (pp. 66-75 referring and discussing the position of nineteenth century scholars). Albeck's famous remarks on the exceptional quality of the Vatican Manuscript (p. 107) have since been widely accepted.

23 The ambiguity originates already in the sources themselves and exists on all levels of interpretation. For example, compare the “friendly” Goths here with the threatening Goths from which one must flee, in Gen. Rab. 31:11 (ed. Theodor and Albeck p. 283). Regarding this source see Eliav, Sites, 84-86. According to David Fränkel, a “classical” eighteenth century commentator of the Palestinian Talmud the (Qorbān ha-Edhah to the phrase וְאִישׁ יָשָׁר in the above mentioned passage [n. 15] in γ Yom T), the meaning of מָשֵׁי הָגָנִיָּן, that is, a type of foot-board so that “one shall not walk barefoot on the cold ground” (translations in this note are mine). For the elaboration of this mistake, see J. Levy, Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim (Berlin: Benjamin Harz Verlag, 1924), 4:612. In contrast to this interpretation, Moses Margolies, a contemporary of David Fränkel, explained Goths as “lads who served him” (Pene Moshe, ibid.). A similar ambiguity is reflected by the many suggestions offered by contemporary scholars. Some view this name as an ethnic-geographic term, derived from the name of the land or people Gotthia, see S. Krauss, Griechische und lateinische Lehnmörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum (Berlin: Calvary, 1898-1899), 2:170. Others interpret it to be a “slave,” see Z. W. Rabinovitz, Shā’aret torath erez ʻisrael (Jerusalem, 1950), 512. A third suggestion is that Goths in the talmud are “bodyguards,” see H. Mantel, Studies in the History of the Sanhedrin (Harvard Semitic Studies 17; Cambridge Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1961), 242, n. 505. However, this proposition does not conform to the term’s general occurrences in rabbinic literature. In my opinion, Alexander Kohut’s proposal, which was later adopted by others, seems to be correct, that is, that מָשֵׁי הָגָנִיָּן is a general appellation for Gentiles living among the Jews in the
Whence did the composer of the tale in Ketubbot draw his material? The answer, I believe, is unequivocal: from realia. The details of the legendary scene reflect the reality of Roman bathhouses in Palestine. The function of the collapsing floor with a pillar underneath it become clear once we take into account the layout and structure of a typical bathhouse. The warm room (caldarium) was heated by a system called hypocaust. Such a system consisted of a hollow space underneath the floor, designed specifically for the circulation of hot air that derived from the burning stoves (praefurnium). The caldarium floor itself was supported by short pillars or pilasters (suspensurae), which carried the floor. Inasmuch as these pillars were often made out of limestone, they were an easy prey for fire, heat, and humidity. For that reason it was not unusual for floors in bathhouses to collapse.

A reflection of this reality may be found in the Jewish-Palestinian version of a prayer said before entering the bath-house: "May it be thy will, Lord my God, that you protect me from the flames of the fire, and from injury by the steam and from the collapse of the building" (italics mine). Stories related to collapsing floors of the

Land of Israel in that period, see A. Kohut (ed.), Aruch Completum (New York: Pardes, 1926), 2:324 (in Hebrew); M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Pardes, 1950), 228. Gentiles fulfilled various tasks: at times they served as bodyguards and at others they were slaves or servants. Indeed, the reading in the Babylonian Talmud denotes R. Abbahu's escort as "slaves." Cf. the reading "Gothic slaves" in the Midrash Ha-Gadol (above, n. 15). See also: Levine, "R. Abbahu," 56-57 and n. 3.


25 Although the documentation on such collapses has not been inclusively collected, it is well attested in a variety of sources. Archaeological evidence shows that many repairs were made on the hypocaust's floor, in Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire, see Gichon, "Bath-Houses," 46; K. M. D. Dunbabin, "Baiarum grata voluptas: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths," PBSR 57 (1989): 35, n. 191. For evidence in written sources see my discussion in the following and ns. 26-28.

26 y. Ber. 14b, translated by Neusner, Talmud, 1: 342. I do not wish to discuss here the various aspects of this prayer and it textual history and parallels, which do
bathhouse were well known among the Romans as well. A good example of this can be found in a fragment of Irenaeus (preserved by Eusebius), where an early tradition by Polycarp tells of John, who met Cerinthus, the Gnostic heretic, in the bathhouse and proclaimed: “Let us flee, lest the bathhouse fall in.” While this account sees the collapse as resulting from the heretic Cerenthos’ presence at the site, it’s realistic dimension cannot be overlooked: in the narrator’s mind bathhouses are apparently very likely to suffer from collapse. Moreover, like in the story of R. Abahu, miraculous events are an integral part of such collapse stories.

Bathhouses similar to the Roman ones seem to have been unknown in Babylonia. The most eastern Roman bathhouse in Mesopotamia was excavated in the suburb of Dura Europos, a cosmopolitan city on the banks of the Euphrates, on the eastern border

not mention the collapse, see t. Ber. 6:17 (ed. Lieberman p. 38); b. Ber. 60a (adjacent to the R. Abbahu story); Tractates Derekh Erets: Pereq ha-nikhamas la-merhats 1 (ed. Higger p. 295-96). See also: J. Heinemann, Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 187-89; Jacobs, “Thermenkultur,” 293, n. 381. The version in the Palestinian Talmud clearly reflects the “realia truth” of the period. On this term, see the subsequent discussion and n. 65.

27 Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3:28:6 (GCS 9,1: 258-60). In this case, the Latin translation, which is, in fact, the only complete version of the lost Greek text, totally overlaps the Greek fragment in stating dicem quod timeat ne balneum concidat, see Irenaeus, Haer. 3:3:4 (SC 211:42). Although the Greek version cites John’s words as direct speech, while the Latin version quotes them in the indirect form, the narrator nonetheless expresses the same fear in both versions – the fear of a collapse (συμπυκνώσω and convido). Moreover, the versions share similar syntactical structure. In both, the clause expressing the fear’s content is conveyed in a subjunctive form which follows the negative particle (μή; ne) which functions as the English “lest.” All these indicate that both texts, apparently not directly related to each other, support the same version of the story. Another variant of the story, reflecting this tradition, appears in Epiphanius, Pan. 30:24 (GCS 25:365).

28 Such an understanding solves the question that Zlotnick posed to Lieberman, see D. Zlotnick, “The Methodology of Saul Lieberman in Greek in Jewish Palestine and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine,” Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: The World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), 3,1:11-12 (in Hebrew). The tradition about John should be added to other evidence that scholars have gathered on disasters and renovations of bath-houses, see A. Berger, Das Bad in der byzantinischen Zeit (Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia 27; Munich: Institut für Byzantinistik und neugriechische Philologie der Universität, 1982), 47-50. Note especially the testimony of Cyril of Jerusalem (ibid., n. 18), more or less R. Abahu’s young contemporary. See also: Hanoune, “Thermes,” 257-59.
of the Roman Empire. To the east of Dura Europos and throughout the Persian Empire, bathing practices were utterly different in all respects. Those bathing facilities that have survived in Babylonia indicate that they were not constructed in Roman style; such evidence also indicates that the *hypocaust* system was apparently not utilized there.29

According to Ravin’s dramatic description, R. Abbahu manages to climb on one of the pillars and then succeeds in lifting with him the people that escort him. Although these details transcend reality — it is practically impossible to climb on the hypocaust pillars because they are not large enough to stand on — the kernel of the story is clearly based on daily events in bathhouses at that time. Floors did collapse, and people were actually hurt in the process. This is the *realia* kernel in this legend. It is interesting to note, furthermore, that these *realia* details — the bathhouse itself, its floor, and the hypocaust — also surface in the third and most elaborate version of the story, namely the fantastic tale in Berakhot. In this version the plot itself is not directly affected by miraculous events. But such events shape the story nonetheless in that hundred and two people (and in another version two hundred and three) are now rescued by R. Abahu while standing on a small pillar — instead of just three, as was the case in the first version of the legend. Such fanciful additions originate in the mind of the “author’s” of this version. Needless to say, they could be exaggerated or simplified in every possible way.

The study of *realia* enables us, then, to follow the various stages in the formation of the legend of R. Abbahu. As a result, it is possible

29 On the geographical distribution of Roman bath-houses in the East see Nielsen, *Thermae*, 96. On Persian bathing customs where bath-houses were infrequently used in the period preceding the rise of Islam see W. Floor, “Bathhouses,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3 (1989): 863. An additional reason for the lack of bath-houses in Persia, aside from the religious-cultural factors cited by Floor, is the Persians’ technological inferiority during that period, see O. Kurz, “Cultural Relations between Parthia and Rome,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran* (ed. E. Yarshater; Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), 3,1:563-564. On the “encounter” of Jews with this world see Eliav, “Jews,” 33-34, and the bibliography cited there in ns. 126, 128; Kalmin, *Sage*, 44 and ns. 71-72. Based on all this, we should reconsider whether “bath-houses” mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud relate to Roman institutions or to Persian bathing structures.
to determine the “author’s” working methods and to establish how his creation relates to the realities of daily life. It is evident that reality and fiction are not completely separated from one another. On the contrary, for all its use of legend and fantasy, the story has its roots in reality — both historical and material. All three stories have two authentic nuclei: the realia of bathhouses on the one hand and the events that took place in these bathhouses on the other. Along with the literary process described above, these two elements are clearly of significance in determining the place and time of the formation of the legend. Only those who knew the reality of bathhouses as described in these Talmudic accounts could use it as raw material for a literary creation.

When bathhouses disappeared and people were no longer familiar with the realia of such bathing facilities, interpreters of these texts were no longer able to fully understand the event. This helps to explain the imaginary character of their interpretations. One example of such a misunderstanding is Rashi’s explanation “Underneath the baths there is a cavity where the water falls (sewerage?).” Along similar lines, some early modern scholars have proposed that “columns” of the story did not belong to the actual bath, but should be understood as being part of the bath’s colonnaded courtyard.30

Whether or not R. Abbahu really walked and slipped in the bathhouse cannot be determined (whether this is so, is ultimately unimportant since it does not add anything substantial to our knowledge). By contrast, the information about the realia and daily life is significant in that it contributes to the study of antiquity in two ways: it helps us to understand the literary processes characteristic of rabbinic literature, and it reveals important information concerning the reality of daily life in Palestine during the Roman period.

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30 Rashi’s commentary on the phrase אָבֶּדּה תְּבַנִי ה בַּכְּלָל (b. Ketub. 62a), cf. Hanoune, “Thermes,” 258 n. 11. Following Rashi (presumably), the translator of the Soncino edition (above n. 16) in his comment on n. 11; G. Perlitz, “Rabbi Abahu: Charakter und Lebensbild eines palästinensischen Amoräers,” MGWJ 36 (1887): 62; Krauss, Talmudische Archäologie, 1:220. The preservation of realia information about the Land of Israel in the Babylonian Talmud has been widely debated among scholars. I believe that the conclusions here should balance approaches that negate the value of Palestinian realia in this corpus. However, this issue merits a separate study.
It may thus be clear how useful it is to study legends of this kind against the background of the history of Palestine in the later Roman period. That such stories typically contain a mixture of dramatic and miraculous elements should not surprise us.\textsuperscript{31} Such additions merely reflect a kind of folklore that was widespread in antiquity in both oral and written form — a folklore that tended to focus on people of high status in particular.\textsuperscript{32} Incidentally, such a folkloric approach was not limited to Jewish literature alone. In late antiquity it is widespread in both pagan and early Christian writings.

\textbf{THE TEARING OF A TORAH SCROLL}

In Mishnah Eruvin, as elsewhere, a halakha appears together with a short tradition:

A bolt which has a knob at the top — R. Eleazar forbids it, but R. Yose permits it. R. Eleazar said: It happened (מןושוס) in the great keneset in


\textsuperscript{32} In its full-fledged form, as it took shape in the European Middle Ages, this model is called “hagiography,” see Delehaye, \textit{Legends}. Since the publication of this book at the beginning of the twentieth century, studies on hagiography have increased dramatically. On the early roots of this phenomenon and its by-products in the East, which may have influenced rabbinic literature, see M. Smith, “Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus,” \textit{JBL} 90 (1971): 174-99; G. Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” \textit{JHS} 102 (1982): 33-59; S. A. Harvey, \textit{Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints} (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 18; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 34-42; P. Brown, \textit{Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 62-64.
Tiberias that they had been used to permit it until Rabban Gamaliel and the elders came and forbade it to them. R. Yose says: they deemed it forbidden but Rabban Gamaliel and the elders allowed it to them (m. Erub. 10:10).33

The halakhic background to this mishnah concerns muqtseh rules of the Sabbath: the bolt (נִדֶּמֶּמֶּמ)34 itself is not considered a tool, hence it is regarded as muqtseh that must not be carried around during the Sabbath. On the other hand, the glostra or knob — a word that derives from the Greek κλαστρον and the Latin claustrum and which means “a closing device”35 — is regarded as a tool since it can be used for purposes other than bolting (such as pounding). The mishnah presents the argument that since the glostra is a tool, so, too, should the bolt be regarded as such.36 The people involved in this dispute are R. Yose b. Halafta and R. Eleazar b. Shammua, two of R. Aqiba’s disciples, commonly believed to have been active in the mid-second century, in the Ushana era. But the controversy regarding bolt and glostra began earlier than that, and can be traced back to the days of R. Tarfon and R. Yehoshua in the Yavnean era, at the end of the first or at the beginning of the second century C.E.37

The above mishnah conveys a tradition from the days of Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh, who visited the great kneset (כְּנֶסֶת יָבְנֵה) according to Codex Kaufmann) of Tiberias and determined the halakha regarding the bolt and glostra. His decree dates thirty to forty years prior to the dispute between R. Yose and R. Eleazar, each of whom...

36 The mishnaic phrase לְבָּאֶת נִדֶּמֶּמֶּמ אֶלֶּוּסְטְרָה was interpreted in many ways, as early as the Middle Ages. The accepted explanation is that the glostera is a type of ball or hook at the top of a lock, which prevented the lock embedded in the holes in the door from slipping out, thus helping the door to remain closed, see Goldberg, Mishna, 299-300. This technique is anchored in the realia of the Roman period, and corresponding techniques are portrayed on frescoes and mentioned in other sources, see Krauss, Talmudische Archäologie, 1:39-40 and in his notes.
bases his argument upon a different, or, rather, contradictory tradition of Rabban Gamaliel’s ruling.  

A tradition mentioning the halakha of bolt and głostra also appears in the Babylonian Talmud:

R. Eleazar came and reported this [=a certain] statement at the academy (ביהל הרמב) but did not say it in the name of R. Yohanan. When R. Yohanan heard this he was annoyed. Thereupon R. Ami and R. Asi came in and said to him: Did it not happen at the synagogue of Tiberias that R. Eleazar and R. Yose disputed so heatedly about a bolt which had a knob at one end that they tore a scroll of the Law (הכתובות) in their anger? “They tore” — could this be imagined?! Say rather, “that a scroll of the Law was torn in their excitement.” R. Yosi b. Qisma who was then present exclaimed: “I would be surprised if this synagogue does not become a house of idolatry.” And so it happened. [On hearing this, R. Yohanan] was annoyed all the more. “Friendship too,” he exclaimed [as if saying: how dare you consider me and my disciple as friends] (b. Yebam. 96b).  

A tradition regarding the dispute over the bolt and the knob appears here within a wider context, as a segment of a larger tale which took place in Tiberias at the very height of the amoraic period. The protagonists in the story are R. Yohanan and his disciples (the R. Eleazar mentioned here is the amora R. Eleazar b. Pedat), about hundred years after the tannaim R. Eleazar b. Shamua and R. Yose b. Halafta. According to this story, R. Eleazar b. Pedat recites a

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38 A story regarding the implementation of the tannaitic law is seldom integrated within the halakhot of the mishnah, since this corpus is precisely and concisely worded, as befits a compendium of rules and regulations. Hanoch Albeck was one of the first to examine this phenomenon and to attempt to clarify its significance, see Ch. Albeck, Untersuchungen über die Redaktion der Mishna (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1923), 89-95. Many subsequent studies have attempted to propose various generalizations about this matter, see also: E. E. Urbach, The Halakhah: Its Sources and Development (Ramat Gan and Jerusalem: Masadah and Yad la-Talmud, 1986), 77-92.

halakha (הַלַּכָּה)\textsuperscript{40} in bet ha-midrash, without giving R. Yohanan’s name as his source. Tension between the two as a result of R. Eleazar’s oversight is mentioned in other sources as well.\textsuperscript{41} In an attempt to placate their rabbi, R. Ami and R. Asi allude to an example that emphasizes the extremes to which such obstinacy could lead. They allude to the severe case of a Torah scroll that was torn in a synagogue in the city as a result of a dispute over “a bolt and knob.” The irony and moral are transparent.

The story in tractate Yevamot in the Babylonian Talmud contains at least three chronological layers: the date of the text of which it forms a part (the Babylonian Talmud which was redacted in amoraic Babylon), the Palestinian amoraic setting as evident from the presence in the story of R. Yohanan, and the Palestinian tannaitic context as reflected in the story of the torn Torah scroll. In addition, it should be noted that the traditions regarding the tannaim in the Babylonian Talmud and in Mishnah Eruvin differ in chronology and content. Chronologically, the mishnah relates the events to the time of Rabban Gamaliel (Yavneh), while Babylonian Talmud ascribes them to the days of R. Eleazar b. Shamma and R. Yose b. Halafta (Usha). With regard to the content of this story: the mishnah formulates a halakhic ruling; the Babylonian Talmud tradition describes a dispute which resulted in the tearing of a Torah scroll.

Applying the basic tools of textual-analysis to the passage in the Babylonian Talmud, a number of stages can be distinguished in the formation of the story as a whole. First, the language: the introduction, which mentions some background details, and the conclusion, which reports R. Yohanan’s response, are in Aramaic. R. Ami and R. Asi’s remarks, along with the section about R. Yose b. Qisma’s “prophetic” statement, on the other hand, are in clear and accurate Hebrew. Secondly, the Talmudic redactor, who had the story before him in its final form, incorporated two further comments. First, he abstained from the idea that the tearing the Torah scroll was performed by the tannaim themselves (קרם ותנו שלמה ויהו). Second, he confirmed the “prophecy” of R. Yose b. Qisma, namely that the synagogue would turn into a house of idolatry (וּמֶה הָיוּ).

\textsuperscript{41} E.g.: \textit{y. Ber.} 4b (= \textit{y. Mo'ed Qat.} 83c); \textit{y. Yebam.} 5a; b. \textit{Ketub.} 25b.
From the point of view of daily life studies, it is not necessary to determine whether the tearing of a Torah scroll represents an event that is historically reliable. As I have already argued, there are many doubts regarding the details of the incident. Even so, the story contains abundant information on various aspects of daily life. Debates concerning halakhic issues could very well deteriorate into a quarrel, and the synagogue provided a "suitable" setting for such an incident. It is quite well conceivable that in the heat of an argument a Torah scroll was damaged, as is the case in our story. R. Yose b. Qisma's horrified reaction — he observes that the synagogue not only loses its raison d'être but will be converted from the holiest to the most profane of places — illustrates the importance of holy artefacts in the world of late antiquity. Studying this encounter between the holy and the profane, is an issue that stands at the heart of daily life research.

It goes beyond saying that it is not easy to locate the scene in question. It is especially difficult to determine whether the story originated in Babylon (whence the text that contains this story derives) or in Palestine (where the story is supposedly happening). Unlike in our previous discussion about the bathhouse, the torn Torah scroll story lacks any realia information.

Our analysis of the story's literary features has already shown that the passage has been reworked and redacted. The following examination of the passage's other textual characteristics will show how difficult it is to determine the historicity of the story. For reasons of convenience, I shall divide the discussion into two separate sections.

**Geography**

A parallel version of our story, which appears in tractate Sheqalim of the Palestinian Talmud, reads "synagogue of Tarsians" instead of "synagogue of Tiberias."\(^{42}\) The better versions of the Palestinian Talmud, however, such as manuscript Leiden and some Genizah fragments, do not contain the story at all. In the Leiden manuscript it appears only as a marginal gloss, which incorporates supplementary material from the Babylonian Talmud (following J. Süssmann's

\(^{42}\) y. Sheqal. 47a. On additional differences between these parallel passages see my discussion below.
definition, these additions are usually referred to as “Version B.”\(^{43}\) The tradition has also been preserved in manuscript Oxford 370 of Sheqalim,\(^ {44}\) and in manuscript Munich of *b. Sheqal*. It was already an integral part of the version of the Palestinian Talmud used by Nathan b. Yehiel author of the *Arukh* (perhaps according to Rabbe- nu Hananel’s version?).\(^ {45}\) It was also included in the base text of Solomon Sirillo and in Ibn Habib’s *Ein Ya’aqov*.\(^ {46}\) The practice of adding parts of the Babylonian Talmud to the text of tractate She- qalim in the Palestinian Talmud is a well-known phenomenon, and it is against this background that the passage under discussion should be regarded, that is, it is a variant of the account contained in *b. Yebam*.\(^ {47}\)

At first glance, our variant, namely “Tarsians,” seems to be out of place when compared to the other textual variants: it does not appear in any of the direct witnesses of Yevamot. However, it is found in the Ribtas (Yom Tov b. Abraham Ishvili’s) commentary to the sugya in Yevamot. Therefore, Riba must have had a manuscript with this version in front of him,\(^ {48}\) as did the compiler of Yalqut Makhiri to Psalms when he quoted *b. Yebam*.\(^ {49}\)

In short, then, there are two traditions concerning the name of the location where the Torah scroll was torn: the “synagogue of Tiberias” as preserved in the text before us and in all other manuscripts of tractate Yevamot; and “synagogue of Tarsians” as preserved in the margin

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of the Leiden manuscript to Sheqalim, in manuscript Oxford 370, as well as in Yalqut Makhiri and the Ritba. This variation can be explained in at least two ways. The original version was “synagogue of Tiberias;” it was changed subsequently to “synagogue of Tarsians.” Alternatively, the original version was “synagogue of Tarsians,” it was “corrected” and changed to “synagogue of Tiberias.” A third explanation is also conceivable. According to this explanation, the original version could have read: “synagogue of Tarsians (in) Tiberias.” However, this explanation is less likely: similarities in spelling rather suggest that one word replaced the other — not to mention the fact that none of the textual variants imply such a reading.\textsuperscript{50}

The version “Tarsians,” although surviving in only few textual witnesses, seems preferable, not only because it is obviously the more difficult reading (lectio difficilior potior), but also because it enables us to establish how it caused the simple version (lectio facilior) to come into existence (compare the modern philological guideline of utrum in alterum abiturum erat). The distortion occurred as a result of the reading in Mishnah Eruvin. Those scribes and proof-readers, who encountered the name “Tarsians” in the margin to Sheqalim were, of course, familiar with Mishnah Eruvin. In addition to containing many details that are similar to and even identical with the account in Sheqalim — such as the halakhic issue of bolt and glosstra; an argument between the sages with matching names — this mishnaic tractate uses the term Tiberias. This explains why the redactors of the Talmud decided to amend “Tarsians” and change it into “Tiberias.”\textsuperscript{51} We may thus conclude that the story was originally situated in a “synagogue of Tarsians.”

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. On the one hand A. Büchler, Der galiläische ’Am-ba-’Ares des zweiten Jahrhunderts (Wien: Hölzer, 1906), 287-88, n. 3, which prefers a harmonistic version, and on the other hand Goldberg, Mishna, 300, n. 38, which favors the assumption that זרסיים was an error of the抄ist. See also: L. I. Levine, The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity (Jerusalem and New York: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Press and Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1989), 38-39, and n. 47. Furthermore, see the studies listed below in notes 51 and 58.

\textsuperscript{51} Unlike the scholars in the preceding note, Krauss has reached the same conclusion presented here even though he did not have in front of him all the data on the textual variants drawn upon in the current paper, see S. Krauss, Beiträge zur Geographie und Geschichte Galiläas (Kirchhain: Schmersow, 1909), 33, n. 2. See also below n. 58. The conclusion that the reading preserved in the margin to Sheqalim (and others like it) is preferable to that of b. Yeḥam. is also supported by the fact
What was the *Sitz im Leben* of this “synagogue of Tarsians”? Tarsus, the famous capital city of Cilicia in southern Asia Minor, had a strong Jewish community already in the Second Temple period. Rabbinic literature suggests two definitions of the word “Tarsians”: the first is based on the name of the city and interprets the Tarsians as a community of Diaspora Jews from Tarsus that resided in Palestine. The second meaning regards the Tarsians as craftsmen, associating them with either the silver blacksmiths and designers of metal, or with the tailors and the fabric designers.

Also in other Jewish sources, there is documentation for Tarsian synagogues in Palestine. A Palestinian source mentions “a Tarsian synagogue in Lydda,” and the Babylonian Talmud locates such a synagogue in Jerusalem, probably before the destruction of the Second Temple. Another Tarsian community is known to have resided in

that the second comment of the talmudic editor “and so it happened” is missing from the *Sheqalim* margin. In MS. Oxford 370 (above, n. 44), R. Yossi b. Qisma’s “prophecy” is converted into the past tense: “...if this synagogue was not [prior to being a synagogue, YZE] a house of idolatry,” see Sofer’s *apparatus criticus*, that such a reading was also preserved in Babylonian Talmud, Manuscript Munich, to *Sheqalim*. Obviously, according to these readings, there is no need for the confirmation “and so it happened.”


54 Lydda: *Lev. Rab.* 35:12 (ed Margulies p. 831); Jerusalem: b. Meg. 26a (see also Acts 6:9). The reading of the Babylonian Talmud, although confirmed by all textual witnesses, appears to be distorted. Not only does it place R. Eleazar b. Azaryaḥ (sin in all manuscripts) in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Second Temple, it also contradicts the reading in the tosefta “Synagogue of Alexandrians,” see t. Meg. 2:17 (ed. Lieberman, p. 352); S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* 5 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 1162. In any case, even if this reading does not embody philological veracity, it does reflect the truth as perceived by the editor of this reading of the Babylonian Talmud, who was acquainted with the appellation “Synagogue of Tarsians.”
Jaffa as is evident from epigraphic sources. This phenomenon should not surprise us. Synagogues of different Diaspora groups, who all continued to observe their own customs, were a common sight in Roman and Byzantine Palestine. The story regarding the incident that led to the tearing of a Torah scroll could have happened in any of the known Tarsian communities throughout Palestine (note that sources never indicate the existence of such synagogues in Babylon). Tiberias itself is only a possible location, but has no advantage over other locations. It is important to note, however, that even if

See also: b. Naz. 52a, its parallel in t. 'Ohal. 4:2 (ed. Zuckermandel, p. 600), and Lieberman's comments on these two sources in S. Lieberman, Tosefeth Rishonim (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1939), 3:102.

55 J. B. Frey, Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum (Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane 3; Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1952), 2:134 no. 925, 137 no. 931.

56 See L. I. Levine, Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 54-55; idem, Rabbinic Class, 89-96.

57 Even though we have no documentation of a Tarsian community residing in Tiberias, there is ample evidence of other Diaspora communities, especially the Babylonian one, living in this city, see Levine, Rabbinic Class, 94-96; Eliav, Sites, 75-76. Likewise, there is documentation on workers' unions (guilds), although their nature is not always clear. For example, the sailors organization mentioned by Josephus (Josephus, Vita 12:66), or the "fishermen of Tiberias" and the "merchants of Tiberias" in rabbinic literature, see y. Pesah. 30d; y. Mo'ed Qat. 81b; b. Mo'ed Qat. 13b. See also epigraphic documentation (although doubtful) in M. Schwabe, "Letoldot Teverya," in Commentationes Judaica-Hellenisticae in Memoriam Johannis Levy (1901-1945) (ed. M. Schwabe and I. Gutman; Jerusalem: Magness, 1949), 207-208.

58 This was noted by S. Krauss, Synagogale Altertümer (Berlin: Harz, 1922), 205-206. But he too concludes: "... doch ist es wahrscheinlich, daß ihr Standort [of the Tarsian synagogue YZE] eben Tiberias war." Many other studies did not recognize this point, and based on this passage, the Tarsian synagogue's location in Tiberias was considered self-evident. Aside from what I have mentioned above in n. 50, see, for example, W. Bach, Die Agada der Tannaiten (Strassburg: Trübner, 1903), 1:398 n. 1 (in the name of Büchler); M. Avi-Yonah, Carta's Atlas of the Period of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud (Jerusalem: Carta, 1966), 92 (in Hebrew); M. Margalioth (ed.), Encyclopedia of Tabnudic and Geonic Literature Being a Biographical Dictionary of the Tanaim, Amoraim and Geonim (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1976), 544 (in Hebrew); S. Safrai, "Ha-yishuv ha-yehudi bagali' uvagolan bame'ot ha-shelishit vchareviti," in Eretz Israel: From the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest (ed. Z. Baras et al.; Jerusalem: Yad Yizhak ben-Zvi, 1982), 1:162; M. D. Herr, The History of Eretz Israel: The Roman Byzantine Period (Jerusalem: Izhad Yad ben Zvi, 1985), 129-30 (in Hebrew); A. Oppenheimer,
we would succeed in clarifying the original version of the site’s name, this does not help us to settle the question of the origin of the story. For example, the story may very well have originated in Babylonia. It is well known, after all, that in the Babylonian Talmud stories on Palestine were often composed by the Babylonians themselves and reflect their own reality.  

However this may be, our discussion has succeeded in identifying an important factor that helped to shape the story, namely the Mishnah. In our case, the influence of the Mishnah becomes tangible only during the later stages of transmission, namely during the Middle Ages (the time of the manuscripts’ emendations). In the next section, I will show how the Mishnah was influential during the early stages of the story’s formation as well.

CHRONOLOGY

When did this incident supposedly happen? The story as it is before us states clearly that the tearing of the Torah scroll occurred in the heat of an argument between R. Yose and R. Eleazar. This can be deduced from the subordination of the word דע of the sentence describing the controversy: דע שבולך... דע שקראתי (“disputed so hotly... that they


59 For a clear and well-analyzed example of such a case, see C. E. Hayes, “Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of Minim and Romans in B. Sanhedrin 90b-91a,” in Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine (ed. H. Lapin; Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 1998), 249-89. Many other examples are brought by: Kalmin, Sages.
tore"), and by R. Yohanan's reply: "חבקתי נמי ("Friendship too?! ")
The question of the Talmudic editor קרבתי מלקט דינון? ("They tore'
- Could this be imagined?") further reflects this interpretation.

Such a conclusion, however, raises chronological problems becomes evident when we read on. Further on in the story, R. Yosi b. Qisma is said to have been present at the time of the argument. This does not seem possible, as there is solid evidence that R. Yosi b. Qisma did not outlive the period of religious persecutions following the Bar Kokhba revolt.60 R. Yose b. Halafta and R. Eleazar b. Shammua on the other hand are known to have active only in the Ushan era, that is after the revolt.61 Therefore, R. Yosi b. Qisma could never have been present at a dispute that involved R. Yose and R. Eleazar. While some scholars have simply ignored this problem, others have suggested inadequate explanations.62

During the previous discussion concerning the "synagogue of the Tarsian" we have established that the Mishnah was an important factor that shaped the account of the torn Torah scroll. The reason for this is to be sought in the many similarities between the mishnaic and later talmudic accounts. With regard to the sages R. Yose and R. Eleazar we may venture to propose a similar explanation: these sages, too, were imported into the talmudic accounts because of their appearance in the Mishnah.

60 Iggeret Rav Sherira Ga'on (ed. Levine, pp. 12-13); Abraham Ibn Daud, Sefer Ha-Qabbalah 19 (ed. Cohen, p. 26). Both of the above place him among the more senior sages of the Yavneh generation. This is derived not only from (a) the story in b. Abod. Zad 18a about his death which preceded that of R. Hanina b. Teradyon and R. Akiva, and (b) from him not appearing together with sages throughout rabbinic literature from the period following the Bar Kokhba revolt, but also from (c) the mood that emanates from some of his sayings, which resonate with the period before the revolt. See also Y. Guttman, "Milhamot ha-yehudim biyemeyi teryanus," in Sefer Assaf (M. D. Cassuto et al.; Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1953), 174; G. Alon, The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 C.E.) (2d ed.; Cambridge: Harvard U.P, 1994), 495-96.
According to this reconstruction, the original story probably happened in R. Yosi b. Qisma's days, that is before the Bar-Kokhba revolt. It was then that a Torah scroll was torn at a Tarsian synagogue. This happened in the course of a controversy over a much debated halakhic question concerning a bolt and a knob on the Sabbath. Only at a later stage, by accident or intentionally, were the two tannaim from the Mishnah inserted into the incident. Although such an insertion allowed the redactor to illustrate a rabbinic quarrel, this also resulted in a disregard for history: teachers belonging to completely different generations now feature in one and the same story.

Who were the redactors or creators of this a story that linked the characters of the Mishnah with the incident of the torn Torah scroll? R. Ami and R. Asi are possible candidates inasmuch as they had good reason to mollify R. Yohanan. Still, there is no substantial evidence that they are responsible for the fabrication of this synthesis. There are two plausible alternatives. The story could have taken shape during the hundred years that separated the Usha era from the second and third generations of amora'im in Palestine. Or, alternatively, if one is inclined to deny the historical authenticity of the story regarding R. Yohanan and his students and see it as mere fiction, one could argue that the insertion of the sources happened in talmudic Babylonia. In that case, one has to bear in mind that the Babylonian redactor only added remarks to an already existing story; the story did not originate with him. Such observations seem to indicate that the nucleus of the story of the torn Torah scroll originated in the Land of Israel. Put differently, the Babylonian Talmud essentially transmits a Palestinian story and not one that was formed in Babylonia. The Hebrew language of the story's main segment further

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63 In this case, there is no decisive proof for either side, hence, it is more a question of one's approach and initial agenda. In my opinion, three factors augment the story's veracity. First, the fact that it tells of a talmudic personality who lived close to the narrators' time. Second, its simplicity, which lacks any fantastic components. Third, the fact that various details are corroborated by other sources as well, such as the tension between R. Yohanan and R. Eleazar (see supra, n. 41). An extreme skeptical view would obviously negate the authenticity of any story in the absence of external proof. However, I share the opinion that this approach is too radical. It removes the historical basis from large segments of ancient literature and in many cases can be proven wrong. Moreover, to the focus of the current paper — daily life and realia — it is irrelevant.
sustains this argument. A realia component, like the one found in the R. Abbahu anecdotes, would have helped to further sustain this conclusion. The text's lack of such an element makes this conclusion somewhat tentative.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have used four disciplines while examining accounts about R. Abbahu and about the tearing of a Torah scroll, namely philology, literary criticism, history, and archaeology. All these sub disciplines are essential tools for the study of realia and of daily life in the talmudic period.

Analysis of the kind performed in this paper demonstrates the various manners in which stories and anecdotes have undergone change in the process of transmission, especially from the amoraic period onwards. One of the proposed emendations, namely the revision of “Tarsians” to “Tiberias,” could be shown to date to the medieval ages. Undoubtedly, the original version (Tarsians) remained available in that period, that is, the days of the Ritba, of the compiler of Yalqut Makhiri, and of the scribe who worked on the Leiden manuscript of Sheqalim. By that time, however, other changes in and additions to the legend about R. Abbahu and the account of the torn Torah had already taken place. Such changes took place quickly in talmudic times and over a relatively short period of time — no more than a generation or two.

It must be admitted that the actual process conceals more than it reveals. Often we do not know for certain who did what and why. Moreover, we lack basic and important information regarding the process itself. For example, we know next to nothing about the condition or shape of the accounts before they were combined, or whether they were preserved orally or in writing.64 Even so, the ways

in which the details have been inserted into the story tell us much about this process. These are the “lesser steps” about which I spoke at the outset of this paper.

The realia themselves, and more precisely, what is left of them, are buried underground, waiting for the excavators’ shovels to reveal them. No less important, however, ancient texts also require careful “excavation.” This is particularly important since archaeological findings are inanimate by nature and, therefore, cannot inform us how the inhabitants of the past regarded them. Written texts provides us with precious evidence to learn about how the people of antiquity confronted the realities of every day’s life, what they thought and believed, and what ideas they had. The study of where and how humans meet and interact with the material world forms the core of daily life research.

The study of the realia and of daily life — although related in many ways to other areas of research such as anthropology, archaeology, and history and social studies — has an important function in the study of literary tradition as well. This is because the “historical truth” of ancient texts, especially legends, is not always easy to ascertain. On the basis of the discussion presented in this paper, I would like to propose two new terms: the “realia truth” and the “daily life kernel” of a text.65 Historical truth, realia truth, and daily life kernel do not necessarily coincide. Rather the inform one another. Thus, close attention to realia and to aspects of daily life may produce tangible results where a reconstruction of the “historical truth” would otherwise not be possible.

Finally, rabbinic literature of the kind analyzed in this paper provides us with interesting and useful raw material for the study of daily life in the Talmudic period. Such literature should be studied in the full awareness of the various “evolutionary” stages that have shaped its development. When studied in the fashion proposed here, new insights can be gained with regard to the question of the historicity of rabbinic literature.