

ISHMAEL SACRIFICED GRASSHOPPERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of biblical verses and narratives is apparent already in the Bible itself. Certainly by the Second Temple period exegetical explanations and expansions of the biblical verses and stories were part of the Jewish culture. Such expansions and exegesis, perhaps a result of the work of small study groups, are prevalent in much of the Second Temple and Late Antique literature, such as Pseudepigrapha or the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of this material found its way into the rabbinic literature.¹

In the Tannaitic period, exegetical motifs are often used as an argument in a halakic debate. The motifs vary in terms of antiquity and origin. While some stem from oral traditions that were passed on from teacher to disciple since the Second Temple period, others might be late creations constructed to serve as proof-text for a current halakic-exegetical issue. Exegetical motifs, a term coined and developed by Kugel,² is an idea of how to explain a particular biblical verse, which is pointed out by the rabbis as needing an explanation. The classical structure of an exegetical motif is a short explanation, supported by a narrative unit which expands the biblical scene. This narrative unit is called in midrash studies a “gap-filling story.” It illustrates the situation that is not told in the biblical text.

¹ The rabbinic culture is believed to be the heir of the Pharisaic culture of the Second Temple period. It gained a place of prominence once the Temple was destroyed and the priestly class lost its ruling status which gave it authority over the Holy Text. See, e.g., C. Werman, “Oral Torah vs. Written Torah(s): Competing Claims to Authority,” in *Rabbinic Perspectives: Rabbinic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. S.D. Fraade, A. Shemesh, and R.A. Clemens; Leiden 2006), 105–107; J.L. Kugel, “Two Introductions to Midrash,” *Proof* 3 (1983): 131–155.

² The term was coined by Kugel. In Kugel’s words, “An exegetical motif is the underlying idea about how to explain a biblical text.” Further descriptions of this and other terms in Kugel’s narrative method can be found in J.L. Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 1–11, 247–270; J.L. Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob: Ancient Interpretations of the Biblical Story of Jacob and His Children* (Princeton 2006), 4–7.

Such exegetical motifs with narrative expansions are found in the rabbinic literature with regard to Hagar.

The story of the expulsion of Hagar posed a difficulty for the rabbis. The Bible tells that "... Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing" (Gen 21:9), and that Sarah then demanded the expulsion of Hagar and her son. Simply "playing" did not seem to the rabbis to be a good enough reason for expulsion. The rabbis chose, then, to expound the biblical story by explaining the meaning of the word "playing" in this passage. In the Tosefta, we find the word "playing" explained as indicating a grave sin committed by Ishmael, and this sin deservedly causes him and his mother to be expelled.

In one passage in chapter 6 of the tractate *Sotah* in the Tosefta, we find four such explanations, four different sins, which are four exegetical motifs of the word "playing" in the verse from Genesis. These are: that Ishmael was an idol-worshiper; that Ishmael's behavior was incestuous; that Ishmael was a murderer, and that Ishmael competed with Isaac on the inheritance. Each of the sins is an appropriate reason for Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael. One of these motifs, namely the claim that Ishmael was an idol-worshiper, appears in the previous chapter of the Tosefta as well, in chapter 5 of the same tractate.

In this article I will study the structure and the meaning of the two passages about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael found in the two chapters of the Tosefta. As to the motif that shows Ishmael as an idol-worshiper, which appears in two separate chapters, I will try to decide which of the two contexts was the original.

2. TOSEFTA SOTAH 6:6

2.1. *The Passage in Context*

The verse about Hagar, which is interpreted in the *t. Sotah* 6:6 is Gen 21:9: "and Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing." Three exegetical motifs for this verse are said to come from sages of the school of R. Akiba. Alongside R. Akiba's interpretation, we find also those of R. Eliezer, the son of R. Yose the Galilean, and R. Yishmael. All these Akibian interpretations are challenged by R. Shimon son of Yochai (henceforth Rashbi), who offers his own interpretation which is the fourth exegetical motif of this verse.

The passage begins with the statement that "R. Shimon son of Yochai said: 'Four things R. Akiba explained [about the text] but my opinion

[about the verse] makes more sense than his,” and then it runs as follows:³

1. Rabbi Akiba explained the verse “and Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian which she bore to Abraham playing,” the [word] “playing”⁴ used here, means “idol worshiping.”
[We learn this from the narrative about the golden calf] which says (Exod 32:6): “the people sat down to eat, and they drank, and they rose to play.”
2. This teaches that Sarah our mother saw Ishmael building *bemas*,⁵ and hunting grasshoppers and sacrificing and burning incense to an idol.
3. Rabbi Eliezer, the son of R. Yose the Galilean says: “The [word] ‘playing’⁶ means incest.”
[We learn this from the narrative about Joseph with Potiphar’s wife] which says (Gen 39:17): “the Hebrew slave [which you brought to us] came to me [to play].”⁷
4. This teaches that Sarah saw Ishmael conquering the roofs and abusing the women.
5. Rabbi Yishmael says: “The word ‘play’ refers to manslaughter.”
[We learn this from the verse] which says (2 Sam 2:16): “[and Abner said to Joab:] ‘Let the young men rise and play⁸ before us.’ And Joab said: ‘Let them rise.’ And they rose and passed by the number, and held each other’s head, and [each] his sword at the side of the other, and they fell [dead] together.”

³ The translation here is of the Vienna mss; see S. Lieberman, *The Tosefta, according to Codex Vienna, with Variants from Codices Erfurt, Genizah Mss. and Edition Princeps (Venice 1521)* (New York 1973) (Hebrew). The differences between the Erfurt ms and the other textual witnesses have no bearing on what is said in this article. Other studies about this passage are J. Heinemann, *Aggadah and Its Development* (Jerusalem 1974), 189–190 (Hebrew); J. Fraenkel, *The Ways of the Aggadah and the Midrash* (Tel-Aviv 1996), 1:89–92 (Hebrew); R. Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven 1986), 402 (Hebrew); J.N. Epstein, *Introduction to Tannaitic Literature: Mishna, Tosephta and Halakhic Midrashim* (Jerusalem 1957), 261 (Hebrew).

⁴ In the passage under discussion, the Hebrew root צחק (“to laugh”/“to play”/“to engage in a sexual act”) is used interchangeably with the root שחק (of a similar meaning). These two roots are phonetically close, or even identical, in rabbinical Hebrew.

⁵ The word *bema* is of Greek origin; it means (as in Greek) a high place intended for sacrifice.

⁶ R. Eliezer is using the word שחק.

⁷ The text does not quote the final word of the verse, but it obviously refers to this word in particular. This happens many times in midrashic texts.

⁸ In the Bible the root here is שחק.

6. Teaching [us] that our mother Sarah saw Ishmael take bow and arrow and shoot it toward Isaac, as it says (Prov 26:18–19): “as a madman who throws firebrands . . . so is the man who deceives [his neighbor and says ‘I am only playing!’]”⁹ etc.
7. But I say [i.e., Rashbi]: “God forbid that there will be such in the house of this pious man! Is it possible that in the house of the one about whom it is told, ‘for I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord’ (Gen 18:19) etc., there will be idol worshiping, incest and manslaughter?
Therefore the ‘laughing’ which is mentioned here is about inheritance:
8. When our father Isaac was born to our father Abraham, everyone was glad, and said: ‘A son is born to Abraham, a son is born to Abraham, he will inherit a double portion of the inheritance!’ And Ishmael was laughing in his mind and saying, ‘Do not be fools, do not be fools, I am the first-born, and I get the double portion.’¹⁰
9. From the continuation of the [narrative] I learn [it], as it says: “and she said to Abraham, ‘send away this slave-woman and her son, so that the son of the maid servant will not inherit’ etc.”

In his interpretation, R. Akiba (§ 1) studies the usage of the word “playing” (*metsaheq*) in another biblical verse, namely in Exod 32:6. In Exodus the word “to play” (*letsaheq*) describes the Israelites’ act of worshiping the golden calf. Rabbi Akiba learns the meaning of the word “playing” in our verse from the manner in which the word is used in the golden calf narrative. He therefore concludes that also in Genesis, the word “playing” refers to idol worshiping as it did in Exodus. We learn that Ishmael was an idol-worshiper, and therefore the expulsion of him and his mother was justified.

Rabbi Akiba then offers a gap-filling story (§ 2)¹¹ that describes Ishmael’s idolatrous custom: Ishmael built altars, hunted grasshoppers, sac-

⁹ In the Bible the root here is קחש.

¹⁰ The description of Ishmael as “laughing” seems to parallel Isaac’s name: while Abraham names his second son “laugh” (קחש), assuming that he will be the heir, the older son (Ishmael) laughs unexpectedly, and by so doing reveals his conviction that he is the lawful heir. I thank Reuven Kiperwasser for pointing this observation out to me.

¹¹ A gap-filling story is a narrative, constructed by the rabbis, that fills in what is conceived as a gap in the biblical story. These help explain the wider context of the biblical narrative or add more details about it. Such narratives could take the form of a

rificed and burnt incense to idols. Hunting grasshoppers in itself, and even eating them, is not forbidden in the Jewish culture,¹² but the idea of sacrificing grasshoppers to idols is puzzling; we don't know of such a custom.¹³ However, while the nature of act is not clear, the meaning of it in the passage is obvious.

In the next sections (§§ 3–6) we find two other interpretations of the word “playing,” by two other Tannaitic sages, R. Eliezer son of R. Yose the Galilean and R. Yishmael. They interpret the word “playing” using an interpretive technique similar that of R. Akiba, i.e., understanding the word in our verse according to its usage in another verse, and offering a gap-filling story expanding the biblical narrative using the new meaning of the verse.¹⁴

Rabbi Eliezer the son of R. Yose (who lived one generation after the Bar Kokhba revolt)¹⁵ interprets the word “playing” as referring to an incestuous act. He learns it from the word *letsaheq* in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:17), where the word refers to a sexual play. His gap-filling story relates Ishmael's incestuous behavior.¹⁶

The other sage, R. Yishmael (of the same generation as R. Akiba), understands the word as referring to manslaughter. The biblical narrative which R. Yishmael invokes is the young men of Joab and of Abner

description of events which are not mentioned in the biblical text, or a dialogue between characters, which is not quoted in the Bible. The gap-filling stories are in fact a very common interpretive technique in rabbinic literature. See Fraenkel, *Ways of the Aggadah*, 287–322; J. Levinson, “Literary Approaches to Midrash,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (ed. C. Bakhos; Leiden 2006), 207–208; D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (ISBL; Bloomington 1994), 39–49.

¹² See, e.g., *m. Hul.* 8:1 or *m. Abod. Zar.* 2:7 for eating and *t. Shabb.* 12:5 for hunting. Maimonides even decided that sacrificing grasshoppers was not forbidden, see: *Mishne-Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim*, 3:4, and Rabad's critical remark there. I thank Prof. Admiel Kosman, Prof. Jon Levinsohn, Prof. Menahem Kellner, and the (partially) anonymous K. Hain for helping me on this point.

¹³ In the Talmud this act is presented as a childish game on the part of Ishmael mimicking a real sacrifice, while using grasshoppers instead of larger animals; see *b. Abod. Zar.* 51a where the context is a condemnation of grasshoppers sacrifice. Lieberman thinks that what is meant here is real idol worshiping and not a childish game; see Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 665.

¹⁴ Some scholars think that the opinions of the two other rabbis are a late addition. Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 671 does not accept this conjecture. *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, which has this passage as well, only has R. Akiba's interpretation.

¹⁵ G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis 1996), 22, 23.

¹⁶ The idiom “conquering the roofs and torturing the women” refers to anal copulation with both male or female partners, the women being not married to him. See Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 670.

who “played” (in fact, fought) until death. The gap-filling story which R. Yishmael provides tells how Ishmael was throwing arrows at Isaac.

In this last gap-filling story, we find an extra detail absent in the others; this story has a prooftext, a verse from Proverbs (26:18–19): “as a madman who throws firebrands and death, so is the man who deceives his friend and said: ‘I am only playing (*metsaheq*).’”

In section §7 Rashbi criticizes the interpretations of the other Tannaitic sages. He is not arguing directly against their interpretive method, but against the conclusions which stem from these interpretations; it cannot be imagined, says Rashbi, that such grave sins were committed in the house of Abraham, about whom it is said (Gen 18:19) “for I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.” From this verse we learn that Abraham was a good educator and a good manager of his household, and one cannot imagine having idol worshiping, incestuous behavior or manslaughter in his house. Rashbi’s alternative interpretation (§8) is not based on comparing the use of the word “playing” in the Genesis verse to other biblical narratives. He understands (§9) the verse in Gen 21:9 from its immediate textual context, i.e., the verse following it (Gen 21:10) that reads: “for the son of this maidservant will not inherit together with my son.” Since the next verse talks about inheritance, says Rashbi, we can assume that our verse also talks about inheritance. Here Rashbi offers his own gap-filling story, describing Ishmael’s thoughts and intentions concerning Abraham’s inheritance.

2.2. *Methods of Interpretation*

Rabbi Akiba’s method of interpreting biblical verses, as it appears in the Tosefta passage just studied, involves understanding verse A by pointing to a similar lexical component in verse B, and then interpreting verse A according to the semantic field of this lexeme in verse B. This is an early rabbinic method of interpretation, which is called “analogy” (*gzera shava*); it is attributed to Hillel.¹⁷ The method of analogy ignores, in the

¹⁷ W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* (2 vols.; Hildesheim 1990), under various entries; M. Kahana, “The Halakhic Midrashim,” in *The Literature of the Sages II: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (ed. S. Safrai et al.; CRINT 2.3b; Assen 2006), 13–26. The term usually used as a name of this method is “analogy” (*gezera shava*) in Hebrew; however, see regarding the problematic nature of the concept and this expression in Y. Bergman, “Gzera Shava Mahi?,” *Sinai* 71 (1972): 24–30 (Hebrew).

first instance, the context of the lexical components, and relies on the phonetic similarity. Later the contexts are brought into consideration. Because of this initial stage, this method can be called, using the (not very accurate but hopefully indicative) term, the “deconstructive method.” The other examples of Akiba’s interpretive methods are not necessarily analogies, but they also exhibit the use of a single aspect in the verse as a source for non-contextual understanding of the verse in question, thus they are also deconstructive.

These examples of the deconstructive method are actually not extreme ones, certainly not the most extreme deconstruction that R. Akiba is said to be capable of. Rabbi Akiba is known not only to take a word out of its context; he can make “mountains of interpretations” based on one letter.¹⁸

Rashbi, on the other hand, proposes a method of interpreting the text, which does not deconstruct it, but on the contrary, understands the meaning of a sentence from its immediate context. This method has ended up being known as “a matter understood by its context” (*davar halamed me’inyano*), or “a matter understood by its end” (*davar halamed misofo*), in the traditional lists of rabbinic interpretive techniques.¹⁹ This method seems not to be popular in rabbinic literature; it occurs considerably fewer times in the literature than do other methods of interpretation.²⁰

2.3. *The Archeology of t. Sotah 6*

The three interpretations of the school of R. Akiba put together, result in Ishmael committing what is conceived of as three grave sins of the Jewish culture: idol-worshipping, incest, and manslaughter.

These sins are part of the list of seven sins, which not only Jews but also Gentiles are expected to avoid, but they also constitute a “short list” on their own. In Tannaitic literature they are usually said to be committed by a whole society, not by a single person, and in most cases, by Gentiles (only in one case also Israelites of the early period commit them).²¹ The

¹⁸ T. B. *Metzi’a* 29b.

¹⁹ Bacher, *Exegetische Terminologie*, 1:142; Kahana, “Halakhic Midrashim,” 14.

²⁰ A very superficial check resulted in 27 occurrences of “a matter understood by its context/end” in rabbinic compilations of the late antique and early byzantine period, as opposed to around 300 occurrences of “analogy” and some 650 occurrences of “*a minori ad majus*” (Hebrew: *Kal va-Homer*) in the same corpus.

²¹ These three sins appear three times in the Tosefta. In (*t. Sanh.* 6:6) the Sodomites committed them, and as a result they have no share in the world to come. The Israelites of the First Temple period also sinned these three sins, and were punished by being expelled

gravity of the sins is made obvious by the seriousness of the calamities that befell the sinners. When associating Ishmael with such sins, the Tosefta presents him not only as a foreigner, a Gentile, but as a sinful one as well.

It is not necessary for Ishmael to commit all three sins in order to be declared unwanted in the house of Abraham. The existence of these three exegetical motifs certainly is an “overkill.”²² It seems that the reason behind piling up all these explanation is a literary one: constructing a list of three offenses that together form a well-known list, at least one which is known in other parts of the Tosefta. Such an accumulation creates a literary tension, which is waiting to be solved.

And indeed, following these three interpretations, we find the fourth one, that of Rashbi, which overpowers all previous interpretations and serves as the solution of the literary tension created before. It is the climax of the passage. The Tosefta passage is, then, a well structured literary text.

A closer look at the “building blocks” of the passage reveals a discrepancy in the apparent symmetry. The three exegetical motifs are not of the same exegetical value.

The second exegetical motif explains the word “playing” as an incest, an act belonging to the semantic field of negative sexual activity. Although the most common meaning of the root *קחק* or *קחש* in biblical Hebrew is to laugh, to sport or to play, this root does appear in the biblical text in a sexual connotation as well. One such case is the verse alluded to by R. Yosei (Gen 39:16); another case where the sexual connotation is also very obvious is Gen 26:8: “Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac fondling (*metsaheq*) Rebekah his wife.” We see, then, that the interpretation of R. Eliezer, the son of R. Yosei the Galilean, is not very innovative, perhaps not an interpretation at all, but almost a straightforward understanding of the verse.

The third exegetical motif leads us in a different direction. We already noted above that the gap-filling story of this motif, unlike the others in this passage, is supported by a biblical verse from Proverbs. A more careful look reveals that the verse that is supposed to support the story

from their country (*t. B. Metzi'a* 13:22). It is emphasized that these sins were committed in the past only, and that later, in the Second Temple period, not these but other sins caused the expulsion (namely loving money and hating each other). In the *Mek.* the three sins are attributed to Gentiles only (*Mek. Beshalach*, *Vayehi*, *Ptichta*, concerning the nations of the world; *Mek. Jethro*, *BaChodesh* 2, concerning the Egyptian). See also *t. Avodah Zarah* 8:4 (as part of the seven sins of the sons of Noah).

²² About “overkill” in midrashic motifs see Kugel, *Ladder of Jacob*, 121–122.

and thus explain it is in itself quite obscure. The verse “As a madman who throws firebrand arrows, and death so is the man who deceives his neighbor and says ‘I am only playing’” presents an unusual simile likening a warlike technique of throwing firebrand arrows executed by a madman to a person deceiving a neighbor without admitting it. Why should this verse be a proof text for the gap story which talks about Ishmael? Is it not enough that Sarah saw Ishmael throwing normal arrows at Isaac?

The connection between the gap-filling story and the verse would be more obvious if we reverse the order, and consider that we have here an exegetical motif that explains the verse from Proverbs as referring to the story of Isaac and Ishmael. The practice of showing that verses from the later books of the Bible refer to events from the Pentateuch, is common in rabbinic culture,²³ and it could be that this is what we have here. The Tosefta, then, is reversing the order of this explanation in order to incorporate it into the passage about Gen 21:9, in order to create the literary construction of three exegetical motifs pronounced by three sages of the Akibian school showing Ishmael sinning in the three grave sins.

But the most surprising explanation, in my view, is the first exegetical motif, told by R. Akiba, explaining the word “playing” as idol-worshipping. One can conjecture a remote semantic connection if one thinks of the word “playing” as referring to singing and dancing, and connects this to the singing and dancing which probably took place in the event of worshipping of local gods. But what textual proof do we have that this is the meaning of the word in this case? Rabbi Akiba’s exegetical move here is innovative. He points to the word “playing” in Exod 32:6 where the singing and dancing of the Israelites is in a close nexus to the worshipping of the golden calf. The exegesis is brilliant and serves well the issue at hand: Hagar, the Gentile woman, and her son Ishmael, the idol-worshiper, should be expelled, lest Isaac will learn from them their bad customs. Rabbi Akiba’s interpretation is innovative, focused, and offers a real solution to the discrepancy in the narrative.

It seems, then, that the editor/author of this passage created the literary tension by piling three exegetical motifs of the school of R. Akiba, the first is probably an original exegesis by R. Akiba, the second, an almost banal one, which could have been created ad hoc for this passage, and a third which is originally an exegesis of a verse in Proverbs, explaining

²³ This custom was termed “back referencing” by Kugel (Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House*, 261).

it as referring to the Isaac-Ishmael story. To these three arguments the editor/author added a fourth one, which criticizes the previous three interpretations, and serves as the literary and ideological climax of the passage.

The issue at hand in the Tosefta is the question of exegetical strategies; Hagar and Ishmael are considered only in as much as their case serves the discussion about exegesis. The focus on exegetical techniques becomes even clearer when we consider the context in which we find the passage just studied, which is a sequence of four interpretations of biblical verses,²⁴ over which R. Akiba and Rashbi differ in their exegetical strategy. This larger textual unit is, in turn, quoted within the discussion of the water of bitterness.²⁵

Why was this discussion over exegetical strategies inserted into the text of the Tosefta? In order to answer this question it will be useful to check the parallel passage in the Mishnah.

3. MISHNAH SOTAH 5

In the parallel chapters in the Mishnah the sequence of the four exegetical issues over which R. Akiba and Rashbi differ is absent. However, we do find in the middle of the discussion about the water of bitterness a different digression; one which presents some of R. Akiba's interpretations to biblical verses.²⁶

Here is a summary of this digression:²⁷

²⁴ The three other verses are Num 11:22; Ezek 33:24; Zech 8:19. Since the other three verses are not concerned with Hagar, I will not discuss them here.

²⁵ According to the biblical rule of the "water of bitterness" (Num 5:12–31), if a woman is suspected by her husband of being unfaithful, she is tested by ritualistically drinking water of bitterness; if the water causes her bitter pain and some other symptoms, she is accused as being unfaithful. According to the rabbinic rule the woman is then forced to divorce without receiving the compensation to which she is entitled as a divorcée; if the water does not harm her, she is acquitted of the blame. About this rule and its application in rabbinic culture see M. Halbertal, *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making: Values as Interpretive Considerations in Midrashe Halakhah* (Jerusalem 1997), 94–113 (Hebrew); I. Rosen-Zvi, "The Tractate of Jealousy: A Forgotten Tannaitic Polemics about Marriage, Freedom of Movement and Sexual Control," *JSIJ* 5 (2006): 21–48. Online: <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/5-2006/Rosen-Zvi.pdf> (Hebrew).

²⁶ I mostly follow the analysis of the chapter as was presented in I. Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover the Dust from Your Eyes: *Mishnah Sota* 5 and R. Akiva's Midrash," *Tarbiz* 75 (2006), 95–127 (Hebrew).

²⁷ *M. Sotah* 5.

1. Within the halakic discussion over what is an unfaithful wife, R. Akiba introduces a new personage besides the husband and the wife: the lover. The lover, says R. Akiba, should also be tested by the water of bitterness. Rabbi Akiba learns this by using a sophisticated exegetical strategy on verses from Numbers (5:11–31), learning from an appearance of the same word twice in one biblical passage. Rabbi Yehoshua and R. Yehuda the prince both make reference to opinions of earlier sages which agree with R. Akiba's conclusions. The agreement with established authorities imparts authority to R. Akiba's interpretation. This passage has an introductory nature, and it is a later addition to a list of Akibian interpretations.²⁸
2. Next, R. Akiba states a halakic rule that a loaf of bread which was in an impure vessel is itself impure. This rule agrees with what was known already to R. Yochanan son of Zakai, a rabbi of great authority who lived one generation earlier, but it contradicts straightforward halakah found in a biblical verse (Lev 11:33). Rabbi Akiba again uses a sophisticated interpretive move to show that the rule is, in fact, based on a biblical verse. Rabbi Yehoshua is happy with R. Akiba's interpretation.
3. Rabbi Akiba explains a contradiction between two biblical texts regarding the distance that one is allowed to walk on a Shabbat. The halakic rule is a known one, and it is not dependant on any biblical verse; R. Akiba's innovation in this passage is connecting the rule with the biblical verse.²⁹
4. Rabbi Akiba uses a sophisticated interpretation of an apparently surplus word in the biblical text to explain how the "song of the sea" (Exod 14:1) was performed: Moses was pronouncing one sentence, explains R. Akiba, and the Israelites repeated it. In opposition to R. Akiba's interpretation R. Nehemia claims that both leader and people were singing together at the same time. The implication of R. Nehemia's opinion is that a Holy Spirit descended on the Israelites as much as it did over Moses; otherwise how could they have known what to sing alongside Moses?³⁰

²⁸ Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 118–122.

²⁹ The state of affairs is somewhat more complicated; for a full description see Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 102–104.

³⁰ The fact that the Holy Spirit descended on the Israelites is not mentioned in the Mishnah, only implied. I emphasized it here because this topic will come up in the Tosefta, as a reaction to the Mishnah. See Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 105n51, 113n87.

5. Yehoshua son of Hyrcanus, who is presented as a pupil of R. Akiba,³¹ interprets a verse from Job proving that Job worshiped God out of love, and not out of fear as was understood by R. Yochanan son of Zakkai. R. Yochanan learned it from a straightforward reading of a verse in the book of Job. Yehoshua's interpretation is sophisticated and follows the Akibian method of interpretation.

In his study of this mishnaic chapter, Rosen-Zvi concluded that the intention of the digression from the halakic topic was to show and to praise R. Akiba's method of interpreting the Scriptures. What is perhaps implied, but not specified in Rosen-Zvi's article, is that the important factor in R. Akiba's innovation is not his method of interpretation, but the fact that he insists on having a biblical support for the halakic rules.³² The necessity to support the halakah with biblical quote is so great in R. Akiba's view, that one may even use "extreme" interpretive methods to reach this goal. Chapter 4 of the Mishnah is, then, a celebration of the Akibian method as a peak of interpretive virtuosity, which was not surpassed before or after R. Akiba, all with the purpose of combining halakah and Scripture into one cultural unity.³³

The currently accepted scholarly view of the development of rabbinic culture is that by the end of the Second Temple period the Pharisaic law developed into an independent body of halakic rules, while the priestly culture was more closely linked with the biblical text. In the Tannaitic culture, which inherited the Pharisaic one, the urge to connect the halakah with Scripture rose, apparently in the proximity of R. Akiba, whether initiated by him or brought by him to a new level.³⁴

Seeing the chapter of the Mishnah in light of this cultural trend, it is all the more interesting to see what the focus and the aim of the parallel chapter in the Tosefta are.

In the parallel passage in the Tosefta the compiler seems to react against the glorified image of R. Akiba portrayed in the Mishnah, by

³¹ Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 117.

³² Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 101, 102 near n. 36, and in many other places where "tradition" vs. "midrash" is mentioned.

³³ The praising of R. Akiba's system is done mainly through the voice of R. Yehoshua, who is a senior of R. Akiba, which is probably also the voice of the editor of the Mishnah. See Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 123–126, and in his previous analysis of particular passages.

³⁴ Except for Rosen-Zvi's work about this, see also Werman, "Oral Torah," 105–107; A. Yadin, "4QMMT, Rabbi Ishmael, and the Origins of Legal Midrash," *DSD* 10 (2003): 131.

making every possible move to downplay the greatness of R. Akiba. In the parallel Tosefta passage, we find the following steps. The introductory passage, where R. Akiba is praised at great length, is omitted in the Tosefta. Also omitted is R. Yehoshua's praise of R. Akiba in the ruling about impurity. Rabbi Akiba's name is omitted from the ruling about the Shabbat-distance. With regard to "the song of the sea": in the Tosefta it is accepted that the Holy Spirit entered all of the Israelites (this is the opinion, which, in the Mishnah, was supported by R. Akiba's opponent). To this the Tosefta adds a wealth of opinions regarding the manner of singing, and, by so doing, the opinion of R. Akiba becomes but one of many possible ones, and not the preferred one as it was in the Mishnah. With regard to Job's faith, in the Tosefta we find the opinions of two other rabbis, not of R. Akiba, which prove that Job's faith was based on love, not on fear; R. Akiba's name is again omitted.

Here is a schematic representation of the sequence of the two corpora, The Mishnah and the Tosefta:

<i>Mishnah Sotah 5</i>	<i>Tosefta Sotah 6</i>
1. An introductory halakic passage about the unfaithful wife, with a ruling by R. Akiba who is using his interpretation of a verse to proof a halakah.	[the whole passage is missing or omitted]
2. Rabbi Akiba is ruling regarding impurity; R. Yehoshua is praising the ruling.	The same ruling of R. Akiba as in the Mishnah. Rabbi Yehoshua's praise is omitted.
3. Akiba's ruling about the Shabbat-limit; the mixture of halakah and Scripture is not accepted by R. Eliezer son of Yose, who is younger than R. Akiba, hence presenting R. Akiba's uniqueness in his exegetical abilities (because the sages of the next generation cannot produce a better one). ³⁵	The same ruling of R. Akiba as in the Mishnah, but said in the name of another sage (Yehuda son of Petiri); R. Eliezer's opinion is also presented as referring to Scripture, so R. Akiba's virtuosity loses its uniqueness.
4. Rabbi Akiba's sophisticated interpretation of the singing of "the song of the sea" is contrasted with R. Nehemia's method, which is a	[Appears as the last passage in the Tosefta] After stating that the Holy Spirit descended on the Israelites in

³⁵ Rosen-Zvi, "Who Will Uncover," 104.

simple understanding of the verse, but implies that the Holy Spirit impregnated all the Israelites in the event.

the desert (as was the opinion of R. Nehemia in the Mishnah, who opposed R. Akiba), the Tosefta brings a wealth of opinions about the manner of singing “the song of the sea,” reducing R. Akiba’s opinion to merely one of many.

5. Rabbi Akiba’s interpretation of the Job story: he worshiped out of love, not fear.

[Appeared before “the song of the sea” issue in the Tosefta, in order to enable a longer discussion of the “song of the sea” later on?] The discussion here does not include R. Akiba’s interpretation at all; it is attributed to another sage.

The chapter is finished; next is a new chapter about a new halakic issue regarding jealousy.

Here the text about the four issues about which R. Akiba and Rashbi differ is added. This text is criticizing fundamentally R. Akiba’s interpretive method.

In the Tosefta, then, R. Akiba’s opinion is omitted from as many passages as possible and, when not omitted, his is reduced to one among many other opinions or, at the very least, it is not praised.

In contrast to what is found in the Mishnah, the compiler of the Tosefta seems to take for granted the fact that a halakah has to be supported by an interpretation of a biblical verse, an issue which was represented in the Mishnah as R. Akiba’s novelty. What is being criticized in the Tosefta is the particular, sophisticated, de-constructive method of interpretation, a method that was presented in the Mishnah as necessary in order to find a biblical support for halakah which is not rooted in the biblical text. Rabbi Akiba needed the sophisticated de-constructive method in order to bridge the gap between the halakah which he held as valid, and the Scripture, which he also took as authoritative. For Rashbi the connection between the halakah and Scripture is un-questionable, but the sophisticated method of interpretation does injustice, as he shows, to the authoritative biblical figure Abraham. Rashbi, therefore, rejects the Akibian method of interpretation.

This is true not only with regard to the story of the expulsion of Hagar, but with regard to the other three interpretive issues that appear in the Tosefta as well.³⁶

³⁶ Of the other three biblical verses on which we find a debate between R. Akiba and

The passage about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael is not halakic, but narrative. The motive behind the debate over it is not legal, but concerns cultural narrative—how can we, the rabbinic culture, accommodate the character of the father of the nation as it appears in the biblical text? It is therefore less institutionalized, but has more to do with portraying the cultural identity and its nature. But in other aspects it does tackle the same issue as the halakic debate, which is—what kind of exegetical strategies are accepted, and what is the rabbinic view of R. Akiba's exegetical activity and his readiness to resort to extreme exegetical technique in order to combine halakah and Scripture, or in this case, halakah and cultural narrative?

So far we have dealt with the exegetical motif about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, knowing that the real issue at hand was in the exegetical method itself. But once accepted as part of the authoritative literature, this exegetical motif, together with its literary context, was reused in other contexts. Such is the case with the exegetical motif of Ishmael the idol-worshiper which found its way to another discussion in the Tosefta, where the household of Abraham is the focus.

4. TOSEFTA SOTAH 5: IS THIS A TEXT?

The image of Ishmael as an idol-worshiper, which was a motif exemplifying the interpretive method of R. Akiba, is found at another place in the Tosefta, just one chapter before the one discussed above. This occurs while the same general halakic topic is discussed: the drinking of the water of bitterness by an unfaithful woman (*t. Sotah* 5–6).

The Tosefta discusses the question after what kind of family arguments the woman has to drink the water of bitterness (*t. Sotah* 5:1–5), along with some other domestic issues (*t. Sotah* 5:6–11). Following this discussion, the text refers to one particular type of domestic quarrel about which the rabbis refrain from making any judgment. This is the case in which a woman asks heaven to mediate between herself and her husband. An

Rashbi, which are not discussed here, two are narrative issues, and the last is halakic. It could be that we witness here the midrashic tendency of “increasing in importance”: the three first issues, which are narrative, serve as introductions to the “real” issue, which is the halakic one, in this case, a calendric one. See also Lieberman's remark (Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 669), when talking about one of the manuscripts of this *parasha*: “And the meaning is that Rashbi did not debate with R. Akiba about *legal* issues, only in the case of the fast of the tenth [month], and the other things are *merely* narrative.”

example of such a quarrel is the one between Abraham and Sarah, about the expulsion of Hagar. In the Bible Sarah asks for heavenly intervention when she says: “May the Lord judge between you and me” (Gen 16:5). The quarrel between Abraham and Sarah, as it is represented in this rabbinic passage, does not focus simply on the request for heavenly intervention, rather the accent is on the fact that each of the parties promotes his or her line of action by invoking the argument “if we do not do as I suggest, the name of heaven will be desecrated.”

The deviant topic, and the self-coherence of the passage, suggest that we have here an independent textual unit that was incorporated into the Tosefta. This passage appears in all witnesses of the Tosefta, including a genizah fragment. For our purpose this passage is interesting because it uses the exegetical motif of Ishmael being an idol-worshiper.

Here is the passage, *t. Sotah* 5 (according to the Vienna manuscript):

1. If a woman says to her husband: “Heaven will [decide] between my [opinion] and yours,” they [i.e., the couple] will ask for [a heavenly intervention] between them.
2. As we find regarding our mother Sarah, who said to our father Abraham: “May the Lord judge between you and me.”
3. Indeed she said this to him: “Expel this made-servant and her son.” This teaches that our mother Sarah saw Ishmael building *bemas*, and hunting grasshoppers and sacrificing and burning incense to an idol.
4. She said: “Lest my son Isaac will learn this, and will go and worship in this manner, and the name of heaven will be desecrated by this.”
5. He [i.e., Abraham] said to her: “After one acquits a person, one convicts him?
After we made her a queen and we made her a lady and we brought her into this greatness, we will send her away from our home?
What will people say about us?
Will not the name of heaven be desecrated?”
6. She said: “Since you say that this is a desecration of heaven and I say that this is a desecration of heaven, God will decide between my words and yours.”
7. God decided between her words and his, as it says: “Everything that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice.”
8. ³⁷Why is it written, “everything”?

³⁷ I am skipping the sentence “it is not written ‘everything’ (*she’eyn talmud lomar kol*),”

This teaches that [God] decided in the second instance as he did in the first instance: as in the second instance it was a testimony regarding Hagar, so in the first instance it was a testimony regarding Hagar.³⁸

Following the initial statement about the nature of the dispute and its heavenly solution (§ 1),³⁹ the discussion between Abraham and Sarah regarding Hagar is brought as an example of such a dispute (§ 2). We find then (§ 3) a gap-filling story telling how Sarah saw Ishmael worshipping idols. The description of Ishmael's action is similar to R. Akiba's formulation in ch. 6, which was discussed above. An additional narrative (§ 4) tells how Sarah wants to keep the bad influence away from Isaac, lest the name of heaven be desecrated by Isaac's worshipping foreign gods. Abraham, on his part, claims (§ 5) that since he and Sarah raised Hagar to the status of a lady and a mistress (i.e., a legitimate wife), sending her away would give a bad impression, apparently referring to people who will speak evil about Abraham's family and as a result also about the God of this family, and as a result, in this case also, the name of heaven will be desecrated. Since both parties invoke the argument of sacrilege, Sarah suggests (§ 6) letting God make the decision. And indeed, says the Tosefta (§ 7), God intervened, and commanded that Sarah's opinion should be followed. God's decision is made clear in Gen 21:12, where he tells Abraham: "Everything that Sarah tells you, hearken to her voice."

So far, the narrative of this Tosefta passage seems fluent and logical, the arguments seem complete, and there is no need for any further remarks. But at this point we find an additional sentence (§ 8): why does it say "everything that Sarah says"? Is Abraham supposed to obey Sarah in everything? The answer given is that "everything" here means that Sarah's opinion with regard to Hagar should be followed in the first instance as it was in the second.

which I think is a comment made by a later scribe or a reader wondering about the nexus which the midrash creates between Gen 16:5 and Gen 21:12, a nexus that will be discussed later.

³⁸ The textual versions that read "about Hagar," instead of "a testimony about Hagar," are unnecessary corrections. See Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 665. Sarah's claims against Hagar are taken as a testimony made by a woman, which is usually not accepted as a valid testimony except in cases that concern her own body and some domestic issues. In this case the testimony was accepted by God.

³⁹ See also *m. Ned.* 11, 12, a similar demand on the part of the woman, which was explained differently in later sources. See references to such sources in Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 663–664.

At this stage the reader is reminded, if he or she did not realize it before, that in the biblical narrative there are two stories where Hagar found herself in the desert, the one in Gen 16, and the other in Gen 21. In the first instance, she ran away to the desert because, after treating Sarah with disrespect, Hagar was tortured by Sarah and eventually escaped to the desert. In the second instance, Hagar was expelled by Abraham following Sarah's request, after seeing Ishmael "playing." Having this knowledge the statement in the section § 8 of the Tosefta is clear: Just as God instructed Abraham to obey Sarah regarding the expulsion of Hagar in the second instance (Gen 21), so should Abraham have accepted the expulsion of Hagar to the desert in the first instance (Gen 16), which is what Abraham actually did.

In the previous paragraph I was trying to "make sense" of a passage in the Tosefta. But the truth is that the argument is not smooth and the narrative is not fluent. In Gen 16, where the first time Hagar went to the desert is recounted and where we find the verse, "Let God judge between me and you," Ishmael was not yet born, so it is hardly probable that Sarah would see him building an altar and sacrificing grasshoppers to idols. Furthermore, Isaac had also not yet been born, so Sarah could not have been worried about the effect of the unborn Ishmael's customs on the un-conceived Isaac.⁴⁰

It is possible to conjecture that §§ 3 and 4 are a later addition to the argumentation, added by an unlearned scribe or editor. But, if we omit §§ 3 and 4 from our narrative, we will lose Sarah's argument for the whole textual unit, namely, the desecration of the name of heaven.

It is more plausible to conjecture that originally Sarah used a different argument to support the expulsion of Hagar, perhaps an argument that proves that, if Hagar stays in the house, a sacrilege will result. This would parallel nicely with Abraham's argument, that sending Hagar away (by letting Sarah torture her) would also result in sacrilege, making the dispute undecidable, and in need of heavenly intervention. Such an intervention is called for by Sarah with the words "May the Lord judge between me and you."

⁴⁰ Lieberman expends much effort to explain the existence of this passage here. Many early sources quote the Tosefta passage as is found here, and most don't react to the discrepancy described above (except one source, a genizah fragment, which declares that Sarah saw Ishmael sacrificing grasshoppers in a vision; see Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 664–665).

If this analysis/conjecture is true, we can assume that the original passage was a combination of two exegetical motifs. The first is an exegetical motif concerning the words of Sarah, “May the Lord judge between me and you,” explaining these words as referring to a dispute that Abraham and Sarah had concerning Hagar. The two arguments brought up by the two parties (the one by Sarah, which is lost, and the one of Abraham) are the gap-filling stories, that is, describing a scene not told in the biblical text.

In the latter part of the passage we see a second exegetical motif, focused the verse Gen 21:12: “Everything which Sarah says, hearken to her voice.” The word “everything” is explained as referring to the two times Hagar was sent/escaped to the desert.⁴¹

Once Sarah’s proper argument was replaced by the argument that Ishmael was an idol-worshiper, the narrative became incoherent. But the fact that it was replaced shows that this exegetical motif about idol worshiping gained a status of authority, at least in the eyes of the scribe or the editor who chose to replace the original argument with this one. The lexical similarity between the “idol-worshiping” motif here and in ch. 6 of the Tosefta, suggests that it was influenced by the phraseology found in ch. 6 of the Tosefta.⁴²

This article studied some exegetical motifs in the Tosefta about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael to the desert. We saw how these motifs are used by the early sages to illustrate arguments in a debate about exegesis and authority. Although the exegetical motifs are not the focus of attention of the Tosefta, their visibility and vitality in the culture of the sages is very obvious. It seems that the knowledge of exegetical motifs, and the creation of new ones, was a natural part of the culture of these sages.

⁴¹ In *Sifre on Numbers* the same question “should Abraham obey Sarah in *everything*?” is answered by saying that the dot above the word “between you” (MT: בֵּינֶיךָ) means that Abraham’s obedience is only required in the case of Hagar. This seems to be a secondary use of this Tosefta passage, which is avoiding the discrepancies in the biblical text which the passage here suffers, as will be explained henceforth.

⁴² It is possible that this exegetical motif existed separately, and was incorporated independently into both passages of the Tosefta which were studied above. I tend to think that this is the less likely possibility. The exegetical debate between R. Akiba and Rashbi might have been an independent textual unit, as can be argued from its existence, albeit in a different formulation, in *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, passage 357 on chapter 34 (L. Finkelstein, ed., *Siphre ad Deuteronomium* [New York 1969], 425).

The exegetical motif of Ishmael as an idol-worshiper received an authoritative status and became a fixed textual unit. This, in turn, was used by an unlearned copyist to replace an original argument of Sarah, which is now lost, rendering a whole Tosefta passage incoherent.

HAGAR IN TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN

Florentino García Martínez

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will present the figure of Hagar as described in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, a late Targum, but one which has preserved several of the traditions built around the figure of the maidservant of Sarah, the mother of Ishmael.¹ Some of these traditions may be much older, as they are partially attested to in the Qumran texts, in *Jubilees*, or in the New Testament.² I have grouped the information gathered in my reading of the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* under three headings: the origins and status of Hagar, the description of Ishmael, and the dispute between Ishmael and Isaac.

2. THE ORIGINS AND STATUS OF HAGAR

The information provided by the two biblical texts which deal with the origins and status of Hagar (Gen 16:1–16; 21:9–20) is scanty. They provide the name Hagar and state that she is an Egyptian maidservant or slave (שפחה מצרית). Hagar's Egyptian origins are thus established in the biblical text.³ However, as always, the haggadah tries to be more precise by building upon the scarce data provided by the biblical

¹ I will use the edition of the *Tg. Ps.-J.* in Genesis, Volume 50.1 of *Biblia Polyglotta Matritensia. Series IV: Targum Palestinense in Pentateuchum. Additur Targum Pseudo-jonatan ejusque hispanica versio* (ed. A. Díez Macho; Madrid 1988).

² Although *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* is closely related to the *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* and most of the traditions are common to both compositions (including naming the preferred wife of Mohammed, Adisha [Ayisha], and his daughter, Fatima, as the wives of Ishmael; cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.*, Gen 21:21; *Pirqe R. El.* 30:3), I will refrain from using the *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* as an illustration of the developments of the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*.

³ See M. Görg, "Hagar, die Ägypterin," *BN* 33 (1980): 17–20 and in more detail, S.J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (San Francisco 1990).