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Gallus, Julian and Anti-Christian Polemic in Pesikta Rabbati

It is generally accepted that there is little Rabbinic material relating to the Jewish revolt in Palestine during the reign of Gallus (351 C.E.),¹ and even less pertaining to the attempt of the Emperor Julian to restore the Temple and Jerusalem (361–363 C.E.).² There is also considerable disagreement as

¹ See B. G. Nathanson, *The Fourth Century Jewish "Revolt" During the Reign of Gallus*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke 1981, and the bibliography cited there. See also J. Geiger, *The Last Jewish Revolt Against Rome: A Reconsideration*, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 5 (1979/80) 250–257; *idem*, *The Revolt During the Days of Gallus and the Building of the Temple During the Time of Julian*, in: Z. Baras, S. Safrai, Y. Tsafir and M. Stern (eds.), *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem 1982 I, 202–208 (Hebrew); P. Schäfer, *Der Aufstand gegen Gallus Caesar*, in: J. W. Van Henten *et al.* (eds.), *Tradition and Re-Interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, Leiden 1986, 184–201. Cf. S. Lieberman, *Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries*, *JQR* 36 (1945/46) 340–344. Lieberman's theory that the revolt was simply a local incident connected with a Roman usurper and supported by the Jews of Sepphoris is almost universally rejected. Schäfer doubts whether any revolt actually took place. We shall comment further on Schäfer's view below.

² The literature on Julian the Apostate is vast. See the convenient bibliographic guide of M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Jerusalem 1980 II, 511–512. On the plan to restore the Temple and Jewish Jerusalem see Stern, 506–511, and the literature cited there.

to which Rabbinic sources actually reflect these events.³ It is our intention to re-examine a source which has been understood by some scholars as referring to the revolt. For some reason, however, many scholars who dealt with this tradition, both those who believed it refers to the revolt and those who denied it, did not study it in its entirety. A re-examination of the tradition will hopefully show that it reflects not only the period of Gallus, but also the situation in Jerusalem under Julian ten years later.

The tradition we shall examine is found in *Pesikta Rabbati*, a collection of Palestinian Rabbinic discourses, each one based on a Biblical lesson appropriate for a particular Sabbath or festival. Although there has been much discussion concerning the date of the work, the consensus now seems to be that it is a composite work compiled or edited in the late Byzantine period in Palestine, but containing earlier material.⁴ It is also important to note that *Pesikta* included passages of anti-Christian polemic. Some of those passages are direct in their criticism of Christians and Christianity, while others are more oblique in their attacks on Christian doctrine or belief. Discourses in *Pesikta* attack the concept of the Son of God as paschal lamb, Rome's missionary activity, the idea of an intermediary between God and mankind and the cross.⁵ *Pesikta* also attacked the Christian 'adoption' of Jerusalem and particularly Christian appropriation of Jewish Temple or Jerusalem

³ On the Rabbinic traditions supposedly referring to the time of Gallus see the literature cited in n. 1. No Rabbinic source describes the actual revolt and at best the Rabbinic traditions are peripheral to the events to which they theoretically refer. Likewise, no Rabbinic source explicitly refers to Julian's building plans regarding Jerusalem. W. Bacher, *Die Agada der Palästinensischen Amoräer*, Strassburg 1899 III, 111–112, claimed that the comment of the mid-fourth century C.E. sage R. Aḥa in Palestinian Talmud (= PT) *Maaser Sheni* V 56a that the future Temple would be built before the coming of the messiah referred to the period of Julian. Cf., however, E. E. Urbach, *Cyrus and His Declaration in the Eyes of the Sages*, *Molad* 19 (1961) 373–374 (Hebrew), for a different interpretation of R. Aḥa's view. See also S. Lieberman, *The Martyrs of Caesarea*, *Annuaire de L'Institut de Philologie et D'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 7 (1939/44) 412 ff.; *idem*, *The Martyrs of Caesarea*, *JQR* 36 (1945/46) 243–246. According to Lieberman, the reference in *Kohelet Rabbah* 9:10 to the 'shame of Lulianus' pertains to Julian and reflects the sentiment of the Rabbis after the ultimate failure of Julian. Cf. M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine* New York 1976, 197–198, for a number of additional sources which, according to Avi-Yonah at least, might reflect Julian's activities.

⁴ See N. J. Cohen, *The London Manuscript of Midrash Pesiqta Rabbati: A Key Text Witness comes to Light*, *JQR* 73 (1983) 209–210 n. 1.

⁵ See W. G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts and Special Sabbaths*, New Haven 1968 I, 11–12.

motifs.⁶ We shall try to show that the Gallus-Julian tradition we shall examine in *Pesikta Rabbati* belongs to a series of anti-Christian discourses pertaining to Jerusalem.

I. To Search Jerusalem With Lamps

The Biblical verse which serves as the basis for the passage under consideration is Zeph 1:12: "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with lamps." The verse is part of Zephaniah's description of the impending 'Day of the Lord' (Zeph 1–2:15) and the doom and destruction attendant upon divine judgment. God will be especially severe with the residents of Judah and Jerusalem who had forsaken Him for false deities and idolatrous practices (Zeph 1:4). The 'Day of the Lord' will bring about agony and despair, especially in Jerusalem (1:10–11). Zeph 1:12 cited above relates the impossibility of escape. God or His agents⁷ will diligently seek out and punish all who have sinned. There is, to the best of our knowledge, agreement among classical Bible commentators, both Jewish and Christian, as well as among modern exegetes that Zeph 1:12 should be interpreted in a negative sense.⁸ God's search with lamps will bring little good to the residents of Jerusalem. The exception is *Pesikta Rabbati*.

⁶ See J. Schwartz, *The Encaenia of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple of Solomon and the Jews*, *ThZ* 43 (1987) 265–281.

⁷ Ps.-Jonathan on Zeph 1:12, apparently in an effort to avoid anthropomorphic depictions of God reads: "At that time I shall order searchers to search out Jerusalem just as one searches with a candle." See also S. R. Driver, *The New Century Bible: The Minor Prophets*, Edinburgh 1906, 118. Driver cites v. 13 ("Therefore their wealth shall become a booty etc.") as proof that divine agents of punishment are foreign conquerers. We shall elaborate on this point further on in the course of our discussion.

⁸ See, for example, the comments of Rashi (= Solomon b. Isaac of Troyes, 1040–1105), Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) and David Kimḥi (1160–1235) in the standard printed editions of the Prophets with classical Jewish commentators. We shall discuss the comments of Jerome and other Church Fathers later on. For more modern views see, for example, J. M. P. Smith *et al.*, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, ICC, Edinburgh 1911, 201; G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets Commonly Called the Minor*, New York and London 1929 II, 53; L. Sabottka, *Zephania: Versuch einer Neuübersetzung mit philologischem Kommentar*, Rome 1972, 47.

Pesikta Rabbati has a number of comments on Zeph 1:12. We shall examine many of them during the course of our study. The comment which interest us at the moment reads as follows:⁹

“‘And it shall come to pass at that time etc.’ Not by the light of the moon, nor by the light of the sun. We know that at Passover the search for leaven which must be removed is not made by the light of the moon, nor by the light of the sun: because of Passover’s coming, lamps are lighted to search out the leaven. The Holy One blessed be He, will do likewise; using only lamps, He will search Jerusalem to remove idolatry from it and to root out the impulse to evil. Hence it is said ‘I will search Jerusalem with lamps.’”

The discourse, so far, apart from introducing the Passover simile in order to illustrate the efficacy of a search by lamp or candle light, adds little which is not understood from the plain meaning of the verse. Idolatry will be removed from Jerusalem.

The continuation, however, deviates from the plain meaning of the text:

“Israel asked: Master of the Universe, when wilt Thou do this? He replied: After I have first done what is written in the preceding verse: ‘And in that day, saith the Lord, Hark etc.’ (Zeph 1:10–11). ‘Hark! a cry from the fish gate,’ namely from the (shore city of) Acco set in the very midst of fish; ‘and a wailing from the *mishneh* (Hebrew: lit. second),’ namely from Lod, second in importance only to Jerusalem;¹⁰ ‘and a great crashing from the hills,’ that is from Sepphoris set on hills; ‘wail, ye inhabitants of the *maktesh* (Hebrew: lit. mortar or depression),’ that is, of Tiberias, set in a mortarshaped depression.”

It is clear that the anonymus author of the *midrash* departs at this point from the plain meaning of the verses in Zephaniah. In Zephaniah, the ‘fish gate’, ‘*mishneh*’, ‘hills’, and ‘*maktesh*’ all clearly refer to geographic entities in late Biblical period Jerusalem. The author of Zephaniah mentions points increasingly distant from his vantage point in the Biblical city of David.¹¹ The

⁹ Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 8. The translation is from Braude (see n. 5), I, 148–149. The standard Hebrew edition is that of M. Friedmann (Vienna 1880). See pp. 29 a–b. Reference will be made occasionally to variant readings found in Ms. Parma 1240 (a microfilm of which was examined at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem). Our *piska* does not appear in Ms. Casanatense 3324 or Ms. London.

¹⁰ Wien, National Bibliothek, Einband Fragmente, B. 40 2b: “Lod, which is superior (*rishonah*) to Jerusalem.” A different scribe erased *rishonah* and substituted in its place *mishneh* which is in keeping with the verse in Zephaniah. The version ‘*rishonah*’, however, would conceivably reflect a time when the center at Lod was at its height. See J. Schwartz, Jewish Settlement in Judaea after the Bar-Kochba War until the Arab Conquest, Jerusalem 1986, 237 n. 36 (Hebrew).

¹¹ See N. Avigad, Discovering Jerusalem, Nashville 1983, 54–55. See his map on p. 58.

fish gate reflects the city wall.¹² The *mishneh*, located in the northwest hill was the residential quarter of the upper classes.¹³ Further on were the more distant hills. The *maktesh* was the commercial and industrial area located near the central Tyropoeon Valley.¹⁴ The Pesikta chose to associate all these Jerusalem terms with various Palestinian cities. Interestingly enough, other midrashic traditions which also departed from the plain meaning of the texts identified these sites in terms of Jerusalem.¹⁵

Gallus

This unusual *midrash* aroused the interest of scholars. Grätz called attention to the fact that three of the sites mentioned in Pesikta, Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias, were also mentioned by Jerome in his Chronicon (albeit Lod as Diospolis and Sepphoris as Diocaesarea) as having been destroyed during the revolt against Gallus.¹⁶ This, according to Grätz, could hardly be coincidence and, therefore, he concluded that the *midrash* reflects the time of Gallus.¹⁷ Grätz's view was more or less accepted by such scholars as Dubnow¹⁸, Klein¹⁹, Braude²⁰, Avi-Yonah²¹ and M. Stern²². Geiger²³, Nathanson²⁴

¹² See Y. Tsafrir, The Walls of Jerusalem in the Period of Nehemiah, *Cathedra* 4 (1977) 31–42 (Hebrew).

¹³ II Kings 22:14. See Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁴ Avigad, *ibid.*

¹⁵ See, for instance, Ps.-Jonathan on II Kings 22:14 who explains *mishneh* as house of study (*byt 'wlpn'*)

¹⁶ Hieron. Chronicon a. 355 (GCS 47:238). Jerome adds that many towns were also burned. Rabbinic literature refers to some kind of repression in Tiberias and Sepphoris at this time. See, for example, PT Yebamot XVI 15c (= PT Sotah IX 23c); Genesis Rabbah 31:11 (p. 283, ed. Theodor-Albeck). For a unique interpretation of these traditions removing them from any connection whatsoever with a revolt against Gallus see Schäfer (see n. 1), 194–198. We shall comment later on regarding his view of Pesikta.

¹⁷ H. Grätz, *Geschichte der Juden*, Leipzig 1908 IV, 455. Grätz associated another tradition in Pesikta Rabbati with this revolt. See Piska 15 (79a, ed. Friedmann, translation 340, ed. Braude): “Who will settle for you with Edom-Natrans the supreme guardian.” This claim, however, has been universally rejected. See Nathanson (see n. 1), 181.

¹⁸ Dubnow, *Die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Orient*, Berlin 1926 III, 219–220.

¹⁹ S. Klein, *A History of Jewish Settlement in Eretz Israel*, Tel-Aviv 1935, 20 (Hebrew); *idem*, *Eretz Yehuda*, Tel-Aviv 1939, 187.

²⁰ Braude (see n. 5), 148–149, n. 13.

²¹ Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine* (see n. 3), 179.

²² Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors* (see n. 2), II, 501.

²³ Geiger, *The Last Revolt*, (see n. 1), 251; *idem*, *The Revolt*, (see n. 1), 204.

²⁴ Nathanson, 181–182.

and Herr²⁵, felt that the chronological framework of the *midrash* was far from clear and advised caution in connecting the tradition of Pesikta to events in the mid-fourth century. Frankel²⁶, Lieberman²⁷ and Schäfer²⁸ rejected any possibility of relating the *midrash* in Pesikta to the time of Gallus.

Jerusalem

This particular *midrash*, however, does not conclude with the suffering in Acco, Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias. Rather, it ends with reference to Jerusalem:

“And the Holy One, blessed be He, went on to say: After I shall have executed judgment in those four places for that which idolaters wrought in them, then ‘I will search Jerusalem with lamps’.”

The *midrash* as a whole describes the following course of events: There will be great suffering in the four cities mentioned above – Acco, Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias. God will then wreak his vengeance on the idolaters responsible for that suffering. After all of this has taken place, God will seek out and destroy the idolaters in Jerusalem.

The conclusion of the *midrash* concerning Jerusalem was all but ignored by the majority of scholars.²⁹ The few who were sensitive to it produced rather lame explanations. Grätz pleaded ignorance on account of the ‘si-

²⁵ M. Herr, *The History of Eretz-Israel, The Roman-Byzantine Period: The Mishna and Talmud Period and the Byzantine Rule (70–640)*, Jerusalem 1985, 65–66 (Hebrew).

²⁶ Z. Frankel, *Der Aufstand in Palästina zur Zeit des Gallus*, MGWJ 16 (1867) 151, n. 5.

²⁷ S. Lieberman, *Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries*, JQR 36 (1945/46) 338, n. 72.

²⁸ Schäfer, *Der Aufstand*, (see n. 1), 194–195.

²⁹ See the references to Dubnow, Klein (*Eretz Yehuda*), Avi-Yonah, Nathanson, Herr and Schäfer cited above. Geiger, *The Revolt*, 204 cites the *midrash* in full but makes no comment on the Jerusalem aspect. Lieberman and Frankel comment on the *midrash* without citing it *verbatim*. They make no reference to the Jerusalem element. Interestingly enough, ignoring the conclusion of the teaching is not a modern phenomenon. The medieval exegetes Rashi and Kimḥi (see n. 8) cite the *midrash* in their commentaries on Zephaniah, but not the final Jerusalem section, even though it is based on a verse in Zephaniah(!).

lence' of the *midrash* itself.³⁰ Braude, who accepted a historical background for the first part of the teaching in *Pesikta* did not attribute any historical content to the Jerusalem section. Rather, the final section was in accordance with the "time-honored strategy of military invaders, who, when attacking Palestine invade Jerusalem last."³¹ The *midrash*, however, states the reason for this order of events, as we have just seen. God is not proceeding according to the logic of standard warfare, but exacting first revenge on idolaters who harassed and destroyed Jewish communities in the cities mentioned above. There is a logic to the order, but, as we shall see, the logic is also historical. Klein, who also claimed that the *midrash* reflects the period of Gallus, likewise refrained from assigning any historical significance to the conclusion.³² According to Klein, the vengeance of God will initiate the messianic period. Unlike the execution of divine justice in the Gallus section, the extirpation of idolatry in Jerusalem will be postponed to the age of the messiah. We shall try and show that the author of this *midrash* may have envisioned a messianic age somewhat closer to his own time and that the Jerusalem section refers to the heady years of messianic fervor in Jerusalem during the reign of Julian.

The Four Cities

Before dealing with the reference to Jerusalem, however, it is necessary to return briefly to the section of the teaching mentioning the four cities. Our interpretation of the Jerusalem reference is possible only if that previous section actually does pertain to events in the reign of Gallus, even if the tradition was composed or written at a later date. We shall, therefore, examine the arguments of those scholars who rejected the Gallus connection as well as explanations for the *midrash* which remove it from a mid-fourth century context.

As is the case in any *midrash*, it is always possible to claim that the tradition is simply a response to a Biblical lection and for all sakes and purposes totally devoid of historical content. Acco, 'set in the very midst of

³⁰ Grätz (see n. 17), for some reason, quotes the *midrash* through the phrase "for that which idolaters wrought in them" and omits the verse from Zephaniah pertaining to Jerusalem. He is, however, aware of the end of the teaching and states: "als sie über Jerusalem durchaus schweigt."

³¹ Braude, 149, n. 14.

³² Klein, *A History of Jewish Settlement* (see n. 19), 20.

fish' is similarly described in other Rabbinic traditions and, in fact, this seems to be a commonplace motif in Rabbinic literature regarding that site.³³ This would conceivably explain the lack of reference to Acco in any other source dealing with events in the time of Gallus.³⁴ Likewise, the Rabbis also mentioned in other traditions that Sepphoris was located on hills³⁵ and that Tiberias was found in lowlying terrain.³⁶ The problem with this theory, however, is Lod. Rabbinic literature does not refer to Lod as *mishneh* or second to Jerusalem in other traditions.³⁷ This then is not a common motif and it is difficult to see this reference to Lod as simply a response to a verse.³⁸ It would seem more likely that this identification reflects a particular situation or event.³⁹

The reference to Lod in this manner would also seem to indicate that the tradition is Judaea oriented.⁴⁰ Both Sepphoris and Tiberias were also important centers of Rabbinic learning during the late Roman period and Palestinian Talmudic literature, for the most part emanating from the Galilee, would normally stress the status of one or both of these two Galilean centers, rather than the center at Lod.⁴¹ This Judaeian orientation is quite important since, as we shall see, Julian's plans regarding Jerusalem met with little support from the Galilean centers of Jewish life and what little Palestinian support that there was for his undertakings apparently derived from Judaea in general and from Lod in particular.⁴² In any case, the reference to Lod

³³ See, for example, Sifrê Deuteronomy 39 (79 ed. Finkelstein); Genesis Rabbah 13:16 (125, ed. Theodor-Albeck); Exodus Rabbah 9:6 (211, ed. Shinan).

³⁴ Avi-Yonah's reconstruction of military campaigns in the Acco region is, in any case, somewhat far-fetched. See *The Jews of Palestine* (see n. 3), 179–180. Cf. Schäfer (see n. 1), 195.

³⁵ See Babylonian Talmud Megillah 6a.

³⁶ See the comments of S. Klein, *Eretz Ha-Galil*, Jerusalem 1967, 95.

³⁷ On Lod in the Roman-Byzantine period see J. Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement in Judaea after the Bar-Kochba War until the Arab Conquest*, Jerusalem 1986, 69–80 (Hebrew).

³⁸ See the somewhat different version of the *midrash* cited in Kimḥi's commentary on Zeph 1:10 (see n. 8): “‘And a wailing from the *mishneh*’ – this is Luz, which is a neighbor of Jerusalem.” Some scholars do feel that Talmudic or midrashic references to Luz in general refer to Lod. See, for example, Klein, *Eretz Yehuda*, 261–262. Kimḥi's version removes the status issue entirely from the source and transforms the Luz (Lod) reference into a geographic motif in accordance with the rest of the section.

³⁹ See n. 16.

⁴⁰ See n. 10 above on the version that reads that Lod was “superior” (*rishonah*) to Jerusalem.

⁴¹ See Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement* (see n. 37), 233–239.

⁴² See our discussion below. See also Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement*, 188.

would seem to negate the possibility that the *midrash* is simply a response to Biblical verses.

The reference to Lod also serves to date the historical framework of the *midrash*. Both Frankel and Lieberman rejected the Gallus association, claiming that the *midrash* may refer to events that happened centuries after the mid-fourth century⁴³. The reference to Lod, though, would make absolutely no sense if such were the case. In fact, Rabbinic tradition ceases to refer to Lod as a center of Rabbinic teaching at just about the mid-fourth century.⁴⁴ Rabbinic tradition does, however, refer to the residents of non-Jewish Lod (= Christian Lod) harassing the inhabitants of neighboring Ono.⁴⁵ In 415 C.E., there was even a church synod which met in Lod (Diospolis).⁴⁶ Although a Jewish community continued to exist in that city throughout the Byzantine period⁴⁷, this would hardly be the time to stress Lod's status as a Rabbinic center. However the *midrash* is to be interpreted, the reference to Lod would seem to provide a *terminus ad quem* of the mid-fourth century C.E.

Nathanson, who also rejected the Gallus connection, offered a tentative suggestion for explaining the *midrash*, which does not take us too far afield from that chronological framework. Noting that Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias were destroyed in the earthquake of 363 C.E., Nathanson proposed that the *midrash* may refer to the destruction of those cities at that time.⁴⁸ However, these were not the only cities destroyed and such other sites as Beth Gubrin, Beisan, Sebastê, Ascalon, Antipatris, Caesarea, Paneas, Azotus, Gophna *et al.* apparently also suffered damage or were destroyed during that earthquake.⁴⁹ Moreover, the *midrash* explicitly states that the suffering

⁴³ See nn. 26–27.

⁴⁴ Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement*, 76–79.

⁴⁵ *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:17 (46a, ed. Buber).

⁴⁶ Augustinus, *de Gestis Pelagii* XXXV, 62 (PL 44:355); Augustinus, *Adv. Julianum* I, 5, 19 (PL 44:652–653).

⁴⁷ See n. 44.

⁴⁸ Nathanson, 181–182. Schäfer, *Der Aufstand*, 200, cites a similar explanation regarding the destruction of Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias as recorded in the *Chronicon* of Jerome (see n. 16). Our objections to Nathanson's thesis apply likewise to Schäfer. Why should Jerome have mentioned only these three cities when so many others were destroyed? Jerome does state that many other towns were burned down (*plurimaque oppida igni tradidit*), but it is difficult to imagine that this refers to such cities as Caesarea, Ascalon, Sebastê etc. (see above), while Tiberias, Lod and Sepphoris were so important as to merit being named by Jerome. In any case, we disagree with Schäfer as to the reliability of Jerome's comment. See our discussion below.

⁴⁹ See K. W. Russel, *The Earthquake of May 19, A.D. 363*, *ΒΑΣΩΡ* 238 (1980) 51.

and destruction in Acco, Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias were caused by idolaters.

There still remain other ways to explain the *midrash* in a manner not linked to Gallus. Lieberman, for instance, claimed that it may refer to some kind of general opposition at the hands of Gentiles.⁵⁰ This, however, is not in accordance with the tradition itself which ties the suffering in particular cities as well as divine vengeance to a specific timetable. The mentioning of individual sites would seem to vitiate theories regarding “general” opposition.

One might also postulate that the *midrash* reflects some unknown event which, as we have shown above, would have occurred by the mid-fourth century. This, however, brings us back to Jerome who stated that Lod, Sepphoris and Tiberias were destroyed during the revolt at the time of Gallus.⁵¹ In spite of some scholars’ skepticism regarding the accuracy of Jerome’s statement,⁵² Jerome, who arrived in Palestine in 386 C.E., was not far removed from the events of the mid-fourth century. He visited, for instance, both Lod⁵³ and the Galilee⁵⁴ and apparently also Tiberias.⁵⁵ His works contain much reliable (and uncontested) information regarding both Jews and Palestine.⁵⁶ It is hard to prefer some unknown, forgotten or unrecorded event, to a more specific one seemingly reflected in similar references in both Jerome and Pesikta.

⁵⁰ See n. 27.

⁵¹ See n. 16.

⁵² Nathanson, 62; Schäfer, 190. Schäfer wonders how Lod, Tiberias and Sepphoris could have been destroyed during the time of Gallus and seemingly shortly afterwards have functioned once again. Schäfer exaggerates the extent of the ancient destruction of cities. There are numerous instances of cities theoretically being burned or destroyed yet existing once again within an extremely short period. Lod, for instance, was burned down by Cestius Gallus on his way to Jerusalem in 66 C.E. (Josephus, *Bellum Iudaicum* II: 515–516). Two years later, however, Vespasian had to conquer the apparently resurrected city (*Bellum Iudaicum* IV:444). “Relative destruction” might also explain the lack of clear-cut archaeological evidence pertaining to the destruction, assuming that the lack of such evidence in sites which have not been completely excavated, or in the case of Lod, which have scarcely felt the archaeologist’s spade, might be construed as discrediting Jerome (and the Rabbis). Schäfer also wonders why the Rabbis do not mention the destruction of important Jewish sites, yet disregards the source which does just that, at least in our opinion.

⁵³ Hieron., *Comm. in Abacuc* (PL 25:1301); *Praef. in Job* (PL 28:1140).

⁵⁴ Hieron., *In Naum Prolog.* (PL 25:1232).

⁵⁵ *Praef. I Librum Paralipomenon* (PL 29:401).

⁵⁶ Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement*, 195–200.

Our discussion has, I hope, shown that the revolt under Gallus offers by far the best context for the *midrash*. Thus, we return full-circle to Grätz's hypothesis that this section of the *midrash* reflects events during the time of Gallus. True, the reference to Acco is unclear and Avi-Yonah's reconstruction of military campaigns in the Acco region would seem to be unfounded.⁵⁷ However, our sources for the revolt are fragmentary; that Acco was somehow involved cannot be excluded. Let us now proceed to the final section of the *midrash*.

Julian

To recapitulate, the final part of the *midrash* states that God will avenge the suffering in the cities previously mentioned and then cleanse Jerusalem. The resolution of the *midrash* clearly has messianic overtones. The question is, however, whether the vengeance and cleansing were consigned by the author to some distant messianic future, or whether the divine purpose was understood to have been accomplished at some earlier date.

Many Jews in Palestine undoubtedly would have considered the reign of Julian, at least at the beginning, as a herald to the messianic era.⁵⁸ Julian, after all, decreed that the Jews could "return to their native land, to rebuild the Temple and to set up the rule of their ancestral ways."⁵⁹ He abolished the decrees of Hadrian and Constantine forbidding Jewish settlement in Jerusalem and promised support for the rebuilding of the Temple.⁶⁰ The Jews began to return to Jerusalem and large-scale pilgrimage was renewed.⁶¹ They built a synagogue near the Temple Mount⁶² as well as additional buildings in the city.⁶³ The messianic fervor of the time may have been expressed in the

⁵⁷ See n. 34.

⁵⁸ See Geiger, *The Revolt*, 214. Julian's drastic reduction of the tax burden would have also added to his popularity. See Geiger, 213.

⁵⁹ Gregorius Nazianzenus V, 4 (PG 35:668). There is no need to revive the now superfluous discussion as to the authenticity of Julian's letters. See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors* (see n. 2), II, 506–511 and the literature cited there.

⁶⁰ See Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement*, 186–188. It is not clear to what extent these decrees were actually observed. See *Jewish Settlement*, 183–184.

⁶¹ Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I, 38 (PL 21:505). According to Rufinus, many of these Jews came from abroad.

⁶² Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII, 9a (GCS 21:95–96).

⁶³ Cf. S. Brock, *The Rebuilding of the Temple under Julian*, PEF 108 (1976) 103–107; *idem*, *A Letter Attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem on the Rebuilding of the Temple*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 40 (1977) 270–275.

inscription on the Western Wall under Robinson's Arch, discovered in Mazar's excavations and dated to this period.⁶⁴ The inscription is a somewhat altered version of Isaiah 66:14 which expresses such basic messianic beliefs as consolation, return and redemption.⁶⁵

There was also revenge and Jews apparently participated in acts of violence against Christians. Ambrose, for instance, relates that Jews in Ascalon and Gaza burned churches.⁶⁶ Even though it was the dwindling pagan community in Palestine that instigated and lead the bloodbath against the Christians at that time,⁶⁷ it is doubtful that the Jews were terribly upset by this course of events.

The conclusion of the *midrash* should be seen in light of these events. We do not know, of course, what happened in each and every city in Palestine. We already saw that there was Jewish participation in anti-Christian violence. The revolt, ten years before, during the reign of Gallus may not have been caused by religious factors and the suppression of that revolt may not have been governed by religious considerations. Yet, for all sakes and purposes it was Christian against Jew. Now, during the reign of Julian there was a chance for revenge. It is hard to imagine that the Jews of Lod would have let such an opportunity pass, particularly since one of their own sages, R. Aḥa was one of the few Rabbis to support Julian's plans.⁶⁸ The Jewish residents of Lod could only gain with the restoration of the spiritual primacy of Jerusalem and Judaea.

The Jews of Galilee may have been wary of Julian's plans regarding the Temple and Jerusalem, which after all would have effectively abolished

⁶⁴ See B. Mazar, *Excavations Near the Temple Mount*, Qadmoniot 5 (1972) 85 (Hebrew). Cf. M. Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, New York 1985, 219.

⁶⁵ The inscription reads: And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice and their bones shall flourish like young grass. The Bible reads "your" bones (instead of "their" bones). See Ben-Dov, 219, for an attempt to explain this change. See also the interesting *midrash* on this verse in *Aggadat Bereshit*, ch. 23 (46–47, ed. Buber): "'And when ye shall see this . . . etc.' Another comment: they see the messiah growing and going forth from the gates of Rome and they are happy." See the comments of Buber *ad loc.* 66. Ambrosius, *Epist.* XL, 66 (PL 16:1154).

⁶⁶ Ambrosius, *Epist.* XL, 66 (PL 16:1154). On pagan violence against the Christians in the southern coastal region of Palestine see Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement*, 141–142; 149–150.

⁶⁷ See Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine*, 190.

⁶⁸ See our discussion above. See also R. Aḥa's comment in PT Maasaer Sheni V 56a: "the Temple will be built before the establishment of the Kingdom of David (= messiah)."

Galilean hegemony and control⁶⁹, but could hardly have objected to the anti-Christian reaction of the time. In fact, the Byzantine ethnographer Stephanus Byzantius refers to a letter written by Julian to Tiberias and it is reasonable to assume, with M. Stern, that this letter of Julian was addressed to the mainly Jewish city against the background of Julian's policies towards the Jews.⁷⁰ It is not unlikely, therefore, that the Jews of Tiberias and Sepphoris avenged themselves against local Christians. The same would perhaps be true of the coastal city of Acco.

The revenge in Jerusalem must have been sweet. The Jews had seen Jerusalem slowly turn into a Christian city, yet at the same time adopt Jewish motifs concerning the city and Temple and claim the heritage of Israel as their own.⁷¹ Julian's policies would provide for a clean sweep of Christians or "idolaters" who had defiled the city.⁷² It indeed must have seemed to the newly-returned residents of that city that God was searching "Jerusalem to remove idolatry from it", even if the situation was not yet ideal.⁷³

If our understanding of the *midrash* is correct, *Pesikta's* interpretation of Zephaniah is quite ironic. As we remember, God, according to the verse would punish the Jewish idolaters of Jerusalem by sending foreign armies to conquer that city.⁷⁴ According to *Pesikta*, God will indeed uproot idolatry from Jerusalem. The victims of God's wrath, however, are not Jews, but

⁶⁹ Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement*, 188. Moreover, the abolishment of the "apostolê" the levy collected by emissaries of the Patriarch from Jews of the diaspora, could not have been too popular in certain Galilean circles. See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors II*, 559. In fact, the fate of the patriarchal circle and the Rabbis would have become uncertain: would Julian set the Patriarch up as ultimate authority over the Temple and high priesthood? Would the Rabbis control the reconstituted court? Moreover, local Jewish aristocrats in Tiberias and Sepphoris may have anticipated depopulation of their cities, departure of patriarchal and Rabbinic courts and a consequent decline in the wealth and prestige of their cities.

⁷⁰ Stern, 570–571.

⁷¹ See Schwartz, *The Encaenia*, (see n. 6).

⁷² See B. Mazar, *The Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Near the Temple Mount-Second Preliminary Report 1969–70*, *Eretz Israel* 10 (1971) 20–21 (Hebrew). Mazar claims to have discovered Constantinian period structures near the western wall which were burnt, apparently by Jews, according to Mazar, preparing the groundwork for the construction during the time of Julian. See also R. Jonas, *Titus (Flavius Vespasian) and (Flavius Claudius) Julian: Two Gem Portraits from the Jerusalem Area*, *PEQ* 103 (1971) 9–12. The gem portrait of Julian, from Jerusalem or its environs was, according to Jonas, owned by a pagan.

⁷³ In spite of everything, according to the Church Fathers, Christians remained in Jerusalem during Julian's short rule.

⁷⁴ See n. 7.

Christians. Those same Christians who claimed to have inherited a “New Jerusalem” and to have become *Verus Israel* will be searched out and expelled from the city. Even more ironic, the agents of punishment remain the same: a foreign army or force. Julian would attempt to expunge Christianity from Jerusalem.

The renaissance of the Jews in Jerusalem was, of course, somewhat short-lived and this could cause some difficulty for our interpretation. However, we have already stated above that *Pesikta Rabbati* often contains anti-Christian motifs.⁷⁵ It is our contention that the *midrash* we have examined belongs to a series of such *midrashim* in *Piska* 8 of *Pesikta Rabbati*. In the final analysis, then, Klein, who relegated the cleansing of Jerusalem to the messianic era may have been right. The *Gallus-Julian midrash* must be read on two levels. On an independent and undoubtedly earlier level it reflects the time and events we have attempted to describe. After Julian’s death, the *midrash* now had to be understood as referring to the messianic future. The editor of *Pesikta Rabbati* probably found it appealing because it contained popular anti-Christian motifs. In any case, in order to understand the polemical nature of other *midrashim* in this *piska*, it is necessary to draw attention briefly to certain aspects of the Christian exegesis of Zeph 1:12.

II. To Search Jerusalem With Lamps – A Christian View

Chapter 1 of Zephaniah, we recall, describes the destruction of Jerusalem as part of the judgment of the ‘day of the Lord’. The destruction of Jewish Jerusalem was an important motif for Christian writers⁷⁶ and the first chapter of Zephaniah would seem to provide ample material for just such a motif. Jerome, for instance, when writing to Paulinus of Nola to convince him to make a diligent study of Scripture refers to a few ideas or verses from each book of the Bible. The core of Zephaniah, according to Jerome, is Zeph 1:10–11 – the cry from the fish gate, etc. – or in other words, the destruction of Jewish Jerusalem.⁷⁷

According to Jerome, God would indeed search Jerusalem with lamps, but He would do so when Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians or Romans.⁷⁸ Even though Jerome cites two possibilities for the execution of

⁷⁵ See nn. 5–6.

⁷⁶ Schwartz, *The Encaenia*, (see n. 6).

⁷⁷ Hieron., *Ep.* LIII, 8 (CSEL 54:459).

⁷⁸ Hieron., *Commentaria In Sophoniam* I, 12 (CCSL 76A:669).

divine justice he seems to prefer the second, claiming to cite Josephus and writing how “important men, princes, the powerful and priests were dragged out of sewers and caves and pits and tombs in which they had hidden themselves for fear of death.”⁷⁹ The same motif is found in Cyril of Alexandria’s (d. 444 C.E.) commentary on Zephaniah.⁸⁰ To many Christians, then, the fulfillment of God’s search with lamps was the destruction of Jewish Jerusalem and the expulsion of the Jews from that city.

Jerome offered another explanation for Zeph 1:12, which would have been only slightly less offensive to the Jews. Jerusalem, according to Jerome, is identified with the Christian Church and the verse serves as a call to repentance in Jerome’s own time.⁸¹ This second explanation is not anti-Jewish *per se*, but the identification of Jerusalem with the Church, especially in light of the general tendency on the part of Christians to adopt Jewish Jerusalem motifs for their own, could not have made the Jews very happy.

III. Polemics and Pesikta

We can now return to Piska 8 and see how this *piska*, centered around Zeph 1:12, reflects the Jewish-Christian polemic of the Byzantine period. We do not claim, of course, that the authors or editors of the individual or composite traditions or that the editors of *Pesikta Rabbati* were familiar with the particulars of Christian interpretation. They were, however, undoubtedly aware of the general trends and currents of Christian thought and exegesis, especially on such a sensitive issue as Jerusalem.

As we have already seen, *Pesikta Rabbati* is unique in interpreting the first chapter of Zephaniah in a positive sense. The springboard for this

⁷⁹ *Legamus Iosephi historias, et ibi reperiemus scriptum, de cloacis quoque et speluncis, et antris et sepulcris, extractos principes et reges potentes et sacerdotes, qui se in eis metu mortis absconderat.*

⁸⁰ Cyrili Alexandrini, *Commentaria In Soph. Prophetam* I, 9 (PG 71:961). There was not much Byzantine Christian commentary on Zephaniah. Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), an important proponent of the Antiochene School of Biblical exegesis, usually commented along a more literal line, and his explanation of Zeph 1:10–12 is no exception to the rule and adds nothing, therefore, to our discussion. See his commentary in PG 66:456–457. Theodoretus (d. before 466), occupying somewhat of a middle position between the literalism of Theodore and the more symbolic and allegorical interpretation of the Alexandrian School, likewise does not add new information for our study. Cf. his commentary in PG 81:1842–1844.

⁸¹ Hieron., *In Sophoniam* I, 12 (CCSL 76A:670).

interpretation is the “lamps” of Zeph 1:12 which are associated with the Ḥanukkah lamp, which serves as the first midrashic motif in Piska 8.⁸² Ḥanukkah in the Byzantine period was pregnant with symbolism for both Christian and Jew.⁸³ It is obvious that a festival celebrating the conquest of Jerusalem by the Maccabees, the cleansing of the Temple and its re-dedication should be of great importance for Jews, since they now had neither Jerusalem nor Temple. However, since Ḥanukkah and its symbolic baggage was occasionally usurped by Christian theology, usually pertaining to “New Jerusalem”, the festival took on added importance.

Thus, for example, certain scholars have suggested that Ḥanukkah served as a precedent for the annual eight day celebration of the *Encaenia* or dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁸⁴ Moreover, the prescribed reading for the *Encaenia* was a passage from John (10:22–42) referring to this festival⁸⁵. It was important for the Jews to maintain their claim to the festival and block Christian adoption of their motifs. Zeph 1:12 provided such an opportunity. In fact, it has even been suggested that the first chapter of Zephaniah was read as a *Haftarah* or reading from the Prophets on one of the Sabbaths of Ḥanukkah.⁸⁶ This would have been the height of irony, especially if the Jews were basically familiar with Christian interpretation, as we claim. A Biblical chapter which was interpreted by the Christians as relating to the destruction of Jewish Jerusalem is recast by the Jews as fortelling the eventual liberation of Jewish Jerusalem and re-dedication of the Temple. The ritual chanting of this *Haftarah* would combat the Christian interpretation and re-affirm the Jewish possession of Ḥanukkah.

This is also the explicit message of the first teaching in Piska 8. The teaching begins with a discussion of certain aspects of the Ḥanukkah lamp and concluded with the following message:

⁸² See Friedmann, 28b–29a (translation 145–146, ed. Braude): “Let our master teach us: Is a man permitted to kindle for a Ḥanukkah lamp which is to be used for a secular purpose? In keeping with the tradition of the Amoraim, as R. Aḥa stated in the name of Rab . . . From what usage is the inference drawn that it is permitted to kindle one Ḥanukkah lamp from another? From a usage – so taught R. Jacob ben Abba in the name of R. Aḥa – sanctioned in the tending of the lampstand in the Temple, etc.”

⁸³ See Schwartz, *The Encaenia*, 269–270.

⁸⁴ See M. Black, *The Festival of Encaenia Ecclesiae in the Ancient Church with Special Reference to Palestine and Syria*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5 (1954) 84.

⁸⁵ *Armen. Lect.* 67 (ed. Renoux, *Patrologia Orientalis*, XXXV, fasc. 3).

⁸⁶ See Friedmann’s comments in his edition of *Pesikta Rabbati* (see n. 9), 28b n. 1. Zephaniah is not read as a *Haftarah* on a Sabbath in present-day synagogues. See Babylonian Talmud Megillah 31a and cf. Tractate Soferim 20:10.

“The Holy One, blessed be He said: Even as lamps used to be kindled in my holy House⁸⁷ in this world, so once again shall I have them kindled when I rebuild Jerusalem. And the proof? The verse in the lesson from the Prophets⁸⁸ which quotes God as saying, ‘When I free⁸⁹ Jerusalem (it shall be) with lamps’.”⁹⁰

Once again, we remember Christian interpretation. The verse in Zephaniah foretold the destruction of Jewish Jerusalem by the Romans. The Jews, however, saw it as ultimate proof that they would once again rule Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

In light of what we have discussed above, these motifs should be quite familiar and it might not be too far-fetched to suggest that the *Ḥanukkah* section may also have originally reflected the messianism of the period of Julian. Later on, after his death and the failure of his plans it would have been recast in its present form to reflect the hope for future redemption. This would also be in keeping with the two levels of redaction which we suggested regarding the Gallus-Julian *midrash* above. Interestingly enough, the author of the *Ḥanukkah* section, at least the beginning regarding the kindling of the *Ḥanukkah* lamp (see n. 82), is none other than R. Aḥa who apparently sympathized with Julian (see above). Unfortunately, it cannot be determined whether he was also the author of the final section of the *Ḥanukkah midrash*, although as we shall soon see, the play on words *’ḥs-’ḥpš* which replaces the “search” with “freedom” and which is taken for granted in the *Ḥanukkah* section is later on attributed to the same R. Aḥa. This play on words was also of importance within the framework of the anti-Christian polemic.⁹¹ Such explanations, dependent upon the “Oral Law”, were used by Jews as proof that only they could arrive at the true meaning of Scripture and, consequently, all Christian arguments and interpretations based on the Bible were invalid.⁹²

As we have just stated, *Pesikta* tells us that it was R. Aḥa who was the author of the *ḥps-ḥpš* play on words, which replaced a divine search with a divinely granted freedom:

⁸⁷ As Braude correctly points out (164 n. 3), this is the reading in Ms. Parma. The Prague edition and subsequent printed editions read: “in the House of the Holy of Holies”, undoubtedly incorrect, since no lights were kindled there.

⁸⁸ Hebrew: *mmh šmšlym*. This is the basis for Friedmann’s claim (see n. 86) that Zephaniah was read as a *Haftarah* on one of the Sabbaths of *Ḥanukkah*.

⁸⁹ The *midrash* reads not *’ḥps* or search but *’ḥpš*, meaning free. See our discussion below.

⁹⁰ Piska 8, 29a, ed. Friedmann. Translation 146, ed. Braude.

⁹¹ See, for example, *Pesikta Rabbati*, Piska 6 and Schwartz, *The Encaenia*.

⁹² See *Pesikta Rabbati*, Piska 5 (14b, ed. Friedmann, 93, ed. Braude). See also Schwartz, *The Encaenia*, 278 n. 72.

“Another comment: In keeping with R. Aḥa’s suggestion that here the word *hps* should be pronounced as if spelled not with a *samekh* but with a *šin*, the words are rendered ‘And it shall come to pass at that time I will free (*’hpš*).’ Accordingly, ‘*’hpš* Jerusalem’ means that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I shall let her go free (*’hpš*), in keeping with the ordinance which I caused to be written in the Torah: ‘And if a man smite the eye of his bondman, and destroy it, he shall let him go free (*hfsy*) (Exodus 21:26)’. Since I have smitten both eyes of My children, as it is said ‘For the Lord hath poured out upon them the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed their eyes (Isaiah 29:10)’, is it not right therefore that they go forth into freedom? Hence, in ‘I will free (*’hpš*) Jerusalem’,”⁹³

Pesikta continues to explain Zeph 1:12 along ironic lines. Instead of God punishing Israel because they sinned against Him, He will free Jerusalem because of His own sins against Israel, as it were. The use of Isaiah 29:10 is also ironic. The spirit of deep sleep is seen in Isaiah as a punishment for sinners of little faith. In Pesikta it becomes an unwarranted divine visitation which ultimately will awaken God’s spirit of justice (not mercy!) which will cause Him to free Jerusalem. It is also interesting to note the reference to servitude and eventual freedom, an important motif in one of Julian’s letters to the Jews.⁹⁴ Julian also offered the Jews both freedom and Jerusalem.

The continuation of the above-cited *midrash* in Pesikta elaborates further upon the servitude-freedom motif as it pertains to Jerusalem:⁹⁵

“Scripture (also quotes God as saying), I shall let her go free because of what I caused to be written in the Torah: ‘If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free (*hfsy*) (Exodus 21:2)’. As for the word ‘six’, it refers to Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media, Greece, Edom-six in all after whose downfall the prediction ‘And in the seventh he shall go out free’ will come to pass. Hence ‘I will free (*’hpš*) Jerusalem’.”

Israel will serve six masters. The last master is Edom, commonly identified with Rome and later with Christianity.⁹⁶ The downfall of Christianity will herald the freedom of Jerusalem.

The “freedom” of Jerusalem, however, was not simply a matter of Jerusalem, or even of the Temple. Rather, according to Pesikta, almost every important religious and even national element inherent in Judaism was

⁹³ Friedmann, 29b; Braude, 149.

⁹⁴ See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors II*, 559–560. Julian makes reference to freeing the Jews from “the yoke of your slavery”.

⁹⁵ The following is based upon the reading in Ms. Parma. The printed editions have a different text. See Friedmann, p. 29b and Braude’s comment, p. 149 n. 18.

⁹⁶ See, for example, *Exodus Rabbah*, 35:5.

dependent upon this “freedom of Jerusalem”. Thus, *Pesikta* also explains Zeph 1:12 in the sense that God will free Jerusalem “for the sake of lamps”. The lamps were interpreted as being: the “congregation of Israel”, the Sabbath, the Patriarchs (= Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Kohath, Amram, Moses and Aaron), seven commandments set down in the Torah (= offerings to priests, tithes to levites, tithes to poor, sabbatical years, Jubilee years, circumcision, filial respect and the study of Torah), the seventy elders of the Sanhedrin, the annointed priests and the annointed king.⁹⁷ *Pesikta* concludes this teaching with the following comment:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, said: In order that My declaration through Zephaniah shall not appear trivial to Israel, let them remember that I will free Jerusalem for the sake of these:⁹⁸ ‘And it shall come to pass at that time that I will free (*’hpš*) Jerusalem for the sake of the lamps’.”⁹⁹

God will free Jerusalem for the sake of His “lamps”. Needless to say, the Christians had none of these lamps and apparently, as far as the author of *Pesikta* was concerned, never really had Jerusalem either.

IV. Conclusion

We began our discussion with a *midrash* pertaining to specific historic events and reflecting the revolt during the time of Gallus and the short-lived reign of Julian. The events of 361–363 must have generated a considerable flurry of Jewish triumphalistic sermons, like the one we have discussed. Some of these, suitably stripped of historic references and recast as sermons about the messianic age or as part of anti-Christian polemic must have been included in midrashic collections such as *Pesikta Rabbati*. In many cases, probably, the real events which generated these *midrashim* can no longer be discerned – the recasters did too good a job. Sometimes, though, it is possible to reveal the kernel of history hidden within such a *midrash* as we have seen in our study.

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⁹⁷ Friedmann, 29b–30a.

⁹⁸ The ‘congregation of Israel’, Sabbath, Patriarchs, etc. mentioned above.

⁹⁹ Friedmann, 30a; Braude, 152.