Shared Worlds: Rabbinic and Monastic Literature*

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> In the place where penitents stand even the wholly righteous cannot stand. (R. Abahu)[1]
>
> I prefer a man who hath sinned and done wickedly and repented to the man who hath not sinned and hath not manifested repentance; for the former possesseth a humble mind and the latter esteemeth himself in his thoughts a just man. (Abba Poemen)[2]

In what follows, I explore a number of stylistic, thematic, and other connections between rabbinic and monastic sources. My goal is to show that the quantity and quality of analogies between rabbinic and monastic sources is strongly suggestive of mutual knowledge and a common worldview. This survey sets the stage for a closer analysis of specific parallels. And, indeed, in other places I have argued for an actual literary connection between the Babylonian Talmud and a few Christian monastic texts.[3] However, it is only after having established the common ground of rabbinic and monastic culture that we can proceed to a careful examination of

* This article is based on parts of a chapter of my dissertation, Mikhal Bar-Asher, "Literary Analogies in Rabbinic and Christian Monastic Sources" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2010) and passages from my book *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). I am grateful to Harold Attridge, Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal, Steven Fraade, Christine Hayes, and Richard Kalmin for their many useful comments and to Tzvi Novick for his help with some of the English translations of the rabbinic sources. Translations of rabbinic sources are based on English translations such as the Soncino Talmud, but with major revisions based on manuscript evidence and my own considerations.

[1] According to *b*. *Berakot* 34b.

[2] According to ʿÂnân Îshô of Bêth ʿÂbhê, *The Wit and Wisdom of the Christian Fathers of Egypt: The Syrian Version of the* Apophthegmata Patrum (trans. Ernest A. Wallis Budge; London: Oxford University Press, 1934) 181–82.

[3] Bar-Asher, "Literary Analogies," 143–249.

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examples that appear especially close.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to illustrate the closeness of two worlds—the rabbinic and the monastic—as manifested in their respective literatures. Thanks to the anthological nature of both corpora, it is possible to find a range of statements and opinions on, and usages of, a given topic, idea, or even literary image. Among these statements, opinions, and usages are intriguing analogues suggesting that monks and rabbis both viewed the world around them in a similar fashion and phrased these observations of it in similar literary forms.

The *Apophthegmata Patrum*

I have chosen to focus on a specific set of early monastic literary traditions as preserved in "the most important and widely diffused source for the transmission of the ideals of the early Egyptian tradition"[4]—the *Apophthegmata Patrum,* or *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.[5] The great majority of the stories found in the *Sayings* emanate from everyday life in the monastic communities of Scetis in Lower Egypt, which were mostly eremitical and semi-eremitical. Douglas Burton-Christie observes that "this text does not originate from theorizing or speculating on the nature of the spiritual life or holiness but, like ancient Wisdom sayings, is born from experience and gives practical, earthy, and specific advice on how to live."[6] Furthermore, Burton-Christie defines the importance of the *Sayings* for research when he writes that the *Sayings*

> provides us with some of the earliest testimony from that world. . . . Unlike some of the other major early monastic texts of the fourth and fifth century which come to us from the perspective of outsiders, the *Sayings* often presents a valuable "insider's view" of early monastic life and its concerns. In short, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* provides one of the best possible places to observe and analyze the hermeneutic of the early desert movement and its effects upon the monks' ongoing quest for holiness.[7]

Scholars assume that *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* "was collected and edited anonymously in Palestine in the second half of the fifth century and later enlarged, re-organised, and re-edited in all the languages of early Christianity."[8] As an anthology, it represents a rich variety of personalities, geographical locations,

[4] Samuel Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism, I: Eastern," *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 2, *Constantine to c. 600* (ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 649.

[5] For bibliography on the *Apophthegmata Patrum,* see William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 183–86.

[6] Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 95.

[7] Ibid., 6.

[8] Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism," 649. For a Palestinian original redaction, see Lucien Regnault, "Les Apophtegmes des Pères en Palestine aux V^e^-VI^e^ siècles," *Irénikon* 54 (1981) 320–30 and references in Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Oxford

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and genres. The materialization of monasticism in Palestine, where the work was collected, "was deeply influenced by the Egyptian tradition."[9] Among the reasons for this influence were stories told by Egyptian monks relocating to Palestine in the first half of the fifth century and by visitors coming back from Egypt.[10] Making a huge impact on the formation of local religious communities, they brought with them their literary traditions, codified in the stories and adages of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Thus, the monasticism of Egypt became known to the wider Christian world through the translations of these traditions.[11]

The transmission of the individual *Sayings* was done at first "almost entirely by word of mouth."[12] We do not know exactly when the *Sayings* was written down, "but there is some evidence that by the end of the fourth century there were small written collections of sayings in circulation."[13] The two major[14] (Greek) arrangements of the *Sayings* are the systematic and alphabetical,[15] and this collective nature of the *Sayings*, alongside its great popularity, especially in the East, is part of what makes the *Sayings* an attractive corpus to examine in relation to the rabbinic texts.

While this article is not the first to conduct a parallel examination of monastic and rabbinic texts, the topic of comparison between the early ascetics and the rabbis has been fraught with preconceived notions on both sides of the equation. This recalls Jonathan Z. Smith's observation, made in an examination of the analogies between ancient Christianity and pagan mystery religions. He observed that often the rhetoric of similarity "swallowed up the differences that would render such a chain of comparisons interesting" while the language of uniqueness attaches

University Press, 1993) 9–17. Regnault asserts that the Palestinian origin of the collections would easily explain their rapid propagation in all the languages of Christendom.

[9] Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism," 653.

[10] Ibid.

[11] James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999) 92 n. 12.

[12] Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 77.

[13] Ibid., 79.

[14] There is also an anonymous collection edited by François Nau in *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 10 (1905); 12–14 (1907–1909); 17–18 (1912–1913).

[15] The relationship between the two is disputed. See Jean-Claude Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des* Apophthegmata Patrum (Subsidia Hagiographica 36; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962). Guy argued that the two arrangements arose independently in earlier stages and that a partial merger took place in later editions of the texts. These two roughly contemporaneous works are basically editorial compilations, and our research, as well as that of others, studies literary units within them. See, e.g., Ruth F. Frazer, "The Morphology of Desert Wisdom in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1977). Scholars assume the priority of the Greek language for the literary tradition of the collections of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, prompting its use in this article as well. The Greek Alphabetical Collection text can be found in Patrologiae Graecae (ed. J.-P. Migne; 162 vols.; Paris, 1857–1866) vol. 65 (1864), cols. 72–440. Quotations are given as translated in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (trans. Benedicta Ward; London: Mowbray, 1984).

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"ontological meaning to an historical one" and attributes supreme value to one religion over another.[16]

Two examples will suffice in order to demonstrate the need to avoid general descriptions of the relationship between any two religions. While Peter Brown criticized previous research that tended to generalize monastic phenomena and thus ignore important differences between types of holy men in the Syrian versus the Egyptian regions, his few generalized remarks on the contemporary rabbis suffer from a similar problem. For example, Brown's observation that describes the holy man as one whose powers are entirely self-created while the rabbis draw their powers from the Torah is refuted by careful examination of a Talmudic tale.[17] His assertion that there is a lack of grave veneration in rabbinic Judaism is likewise challenged by Rubenstein's work on the story of the death and burial of R. Eleazar ben R. Shimon bar Yohai.[18]

An additional example of a generalization is the following remark by Catherine Hezser:

> In general, the desert fathers tend to deal with abstract concepts such as virtues, the quietness of one's heart, sorrow and conscience, while the rabbis are much more interested in the practicalities of everyday life and ritual.[19]

While this statement conveys a broad description of what is found in the literature, its careful phrasing is probably justified. On the one hand, rabbinic literature can be shown to share common conceptions with the writings of the desert fathers regarding issues such as the desired virtues. For example, the preoccupation with repentance both in Christian monastic sources and in rabbinic sources bears many similarities, even on the conceptual level (as seen, for example, in the quotations at the beginning of this article).[20] On the other hand, from time to time *The Sayings*

[16] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 42–43.

[17] See, e.g., the story about Rashbi, whose scholastic skills were greatly improved by his stay in a cave for 13 years (Bar-Asher, "Literary Analogies," 143–201, and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "The Making of a Monk-Rabbi: The Background for the Creation of the Stories of R. Shimon bar Yohai in the Cave," *Zion* 76 [2011] 279–304 [Hebrew]).

[18] Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "A Rabbinic Translation of Relics," in *Ambiguities, Complexities and Half-Forgotten Adversaries: Crossing Boundaries in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Kimberly Stratton and Andrea Lieber; forthcoming).

[19] Catherine Hezser, "*Apophthegmata Patrum* and Apophthegmata of the Rabbis," in *La Narrativa cristiana antica. Codici narrativi, strutture formali, schemi retorici*; *XXIII incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana: Roma, 5–7 maggio 1994* (SEAug 50; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1995) 453–64, at 461.

[20] See, e.g., Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "Ethics and Identity Formation: Resh Lakish and the Monastic Repentant Robber," in proceedings of a conference held in Aix-en-Provence, France, June 2011, *Identity through Ethics: New Perspectives on the Shaping of Group Identities in the Greco-Roman World* (forthcoming, 2012).

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of the Desert Fathers deals with practicalities and demonstrates interest in the everyday issues of a monk's life.

This dichotomy, often described by scholars, suggests a lack of sensitivity to the nuances and multivocality both in rabbinic and in Christian texts. Especially in anthological works such as the Babylonian Talmud and the *Sayings*, one should expect to find multiple views reflecting both the composite nature of the societies from which they arose and their relationship to one another. Indeed, for the purposes of this study, the main reason for choosing the *Sayings* as the primary resource for monastic traditions was its anthological and still "rough" literary nature, which served to preserve the different views of early ascetics, side by side, very similarly to what we find in the rabbinic anthologies. As Burton-Christie puts it, the desert fathers' sayings "are left, in all their bewildering variety, to stand next to one another, relatively free of commentary. This exuberant polyphony of words is one of the real strengths and charms of the *Sayings*."[21] I would add that this is true of the rabbinic literature as well.

Joshua Schwartz's studies of material culture further prove the importance of careful comparative work as well as demonstrate the kind of detail that can be learned from it.[22] He observes that "a substantial amount of Christian material on everyday life from the Byzantine period in the Land of Israel . . . is found in the *vitae* of the various monks who were active in Palestine and its environs."[23] While aware of the methodological problems associated with comparing such different types of literature, Schwartz claims that "Christian material can provide a general realistic background for understanding the Jewish material and *vice versa*."[24] For example, most of the rabbinic sources he discusses regarding clothes "espoused an approach diametrically opposed to that of the Christian-monastic world": while clothing of the poor was the ideal model for the clothing of monks, most rabbinic sources convey the opposite idea.[25] While the monks were known for their ragged and torn clothes, "the Jews did not see poverty as a model and those who found themselves caught in this world, whether regarding clothing or anything else, sought to extricate themselves from it."[26] Schwartz quotes *b*. *Shabbat* 114a (MS Oxford 366):

[21] Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 94.

[22] Joshua Schwartz, "Material Culture in the Land of Israel: Monks and Rabbis on Clothing and Dress in the Byzantine Period," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Joshua Schwartz and Marcel Poorthuis; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 121–38; idem, "Material Culture and Rabbinic Literature in the Land of Israel in Late Antiquity: Beds, Bedding and Sleep Habits," in *Retsef u-temurah. Yehudim ve-Yahadut be-Erets Yiśra'el ha-Bizanṭit-Notsrit* (ed. Lee I. Levine; Jerusalem: Yad Yitsḥaḳ Ben-Tsevi, 2004) 197–209 [Hebrew].

[23] Schwartz, "Material Culture in the Land of Israel," 121–22.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 135.

[26] Ibid., 128.

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> R. Yohanan said: It is a disgrace for a scholar to go out with patched shoes . . . R. Hiyya b. Abba said in R. Yohanan's name: Any scholar upon whose garment a stain is found is worthy of death.

According to Schwartz, the prevailing rabbinic view on the issue of clothing differs significantly from the monastic view. He does find, however, a different viewpoint in *Avot de Rabbi Natan* A, 11 (MS JTS *Rab*. 25):

> If one degrades oneself [for the sake of Torah and] eats pomegranates and carobs and wears clothing soiled with excrement and sits and guards the entrance way of sages, every passer-by will say: is this a fool? But in the end you will find the entire Torah is with him. [27]

This source aligns clearly with monastic attitudes on the topic of proper attire. Schwartz concludes that "it is possible that in the course of time, the prevalence of monastic custom regarding clothes of poverty also influenced certain Jewish circles."[28]

I will continue in the footsteps of Schwartz by providing further evidence of the problematic nature of broad generalizations, especially if one is insufficiently cognizant of subtle details and multivocality. I believe that general enquiries such as "Was rabbinic Judaism ascetic?"[29] are, for the most part, unhelpful. Instead, the results of this article's survey should lead one to ask: Are there similarities between some rabbinic sayings and some sayings of the early desert fathers on this topic? Are there differences?

Before we begin, a few remarks on the nature of our source material are in order. My aim is to offer a broader look at the connections between the rabbinic world and early monastic texts as evidenced in both Palestinian and Babylonian sources. In some cases, the clear analogies to early monastic texts are found first and foremost in Palestinian sources and even in the earlier strata of these sources, the Tannaitic material. One can easily make the case for literary relations in Palestine between monastic and later rabbinic sources. As a few scholars have

[27] Ibid., 135. In line with this example, I found a few striking analogies between *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, the later midrash on *Pirkei Avot* (lit., the "sayings of the [rabbinic] fathers"), and the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, on which I gave a talk entitled "Avot de-Rabbi Natan and the Monastic Literature: A Comparative Study," presented at the conference "Midreshei Aggadah in Eretz Israel and Their Proliferation," organized by Yad Yitsḥaḳ Ben-Tsevi and The Hebrew University (June 2011). I intend to publish an article to address this specific literary connection between these corpora.

[28] Schwartz comments that "there are, in our view, a goodly number of 'ascetic' traditions in Talmudic literature which might have drawn upon or have been influenced by the Christian or monastic world" ("Material Culture in the Land of Israel," 135). He cites as an example *m*. *Avot* 6:4.

[29] See, e.g., Ephraim E. Urbach, "Asceticism and Suffering in the Talmudic and Mishnaic Sources," in *Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume* (ed. Salo Baron et al.; Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel, 1960) 48–68 [Hebrew]. For a discussion on the complex notion of asceticism, see Steven Fraade, "Ascetic Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (ed. Arthur Green; New York: Crossroad, 1986) 253–88; and Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 6–10.

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shown, relationships between Christian and Palestine Jewish literary materials range from parallel development of religious sentiments to direct borrowing.[30] My own research, as I stated previously, is directed especially at one anthology of monastic texts, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, which not only shows some connection to Palestinian rabbinic sources but, more surprisingly, contains a number of parallels to the Babylonian Talmud as well. We must be careful, however, not to oversimplify these connections. As Steven Fraade writes:

> The danger with drawing an overly linear schematization of tradition transformation is that it tends to exaggerate and dichotomize the differences between "early" and "late," either within single texts or among clusters of texts, muting the extent of dialectical complexity (even contradiction) within and among those texts, at the redacted textual stage at which they are performatively and dialogically engaged by their readers/auditors.[31]

Therefore, the broader look offered here surveys literary parallels between the *Sayings* and the various strata and corpora of the rabbinic literature more generally and in so doing seeks to illuminate, rather than to mute, "the extent of dialectical complexity" within and among the texts.

Moreover, this article will not attempt to determine the exact nature of the relationship between monastic texts and each rabbinic text examined. The reason for this is well stated by Peter Dembowski when he writes:

> In typologically oriented literary criticism . . . similarities have been called (narrative) motifs, patterns, parallels, emblematic situations, commonplaces, (structural) archetypes, allomorphs, motivemes, narremes, etc. If this terminology, like so much literary-critical terminology, presents diffiulties [*sic*], it is because the process it attempts to name is in itself complex. It becomes more complex if we realize that similarities matter most when they coexist with differences. *Repetitio cum varitione* [*sic*], or reversal, transformation, or displacement in similar narrative situations is what gives real importance to the study of recurring patterns in narration.[32]

Jonathan Z. Smith's assertion that any textual comparison will always need to be formulated as "multi-term statement of analogy and difference" will guide us in this article.[33] I take this route because I find it almost impossible, and perhaps even unnecessary, to determine if the points in common are "the result of 'the psychic unity' of humankind, or the result of 'borrowing'."[34] One possible outcome of such an approach is to disregard the analogies themselves and their complexity. Instead

[30] See, e.g., Stephen Gero, "The Stern Master and His Wayward Disciple: A 'Jesus' Story in the Talmud and in Christian Hagiography," *JSJ* 25 (1994) 287–311.

[31] Steven D. Fraade, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization," *AJSR* 31 (2007) 1–40, at 39.

[32] Peter F. Dembowski, review of *Roads to Paradise: Reading in the Lives of the Early Saints*, by Alison Goddard Elliott, *Comparative Literature* 43 (1991) 294–97, at 294–95.

[33] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 51.

[34] Ibid.

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I have chosen to present to the reader a vast array of examples of similarity from the *Sayings* and from rabbinic literature to which no simple characterization can be applied. Some examples are relatively easy to label as proof of some kind of literary connection between the composers of the traditions. Other examples are less obvious, however, and depend very much on the subjective judgment of the reader. In order to avoid imposing a unified theory or an all-encompassing label to characterize my findings, I will present the examples in broad outline.

Due to the limitation of space, I will avoid the (otherwise necessary) in-depth look at each parallel in itself. Likewise, I will steer clear of referring to past incarnations of each topos or concept presented in the parallel texts. I am not claiming that, in each case, the concepts are unique to these parallel texts or that they appear there for the first time. Far from it—whereas a diachronic comparison may look for common origins or causes of these phenomena, I intend to concentrate on a synchronic comparison, categorizing phenomena typologically at only one point in their developmental history. This will allow me to cover more examples and to enable the reader to profit from the wide range of topics and shared issues between the two literatures. I believe that presenting the texts side by side will enrich our understanding of both corpora and will shed a light on texts that have not yet been studied in this comparative way previously.

I do not claim to have presented here the full range of similarities and dissimilarities between rabbinic and monastic texts, as an exhaustive project of that kind is beyond the scope of this article. My intentions instead are twofold: First, I wish to convey the range and variety of the connections between the literatures and to provide a sense of their shared motifs and ideas. The wealth of examples suggests similar ways of looking at the world and paints the neighboring societies in similar colors. Second, while this article does not answer the question of why the rabbinic and the Christian materials share similar motifs but merely proposes that they do, the many similarities listed here—in style, form, and theme—suggest the main point of this article, that monks and rabbis often thought alike and expressed themselves in similar manners.

Literary Similarities

Style

There are several stylistic similarities between texts such as *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and the rabbinic anthologies. First, early monasticism, like the rabbinic anthologies, as Rubenson writes, "drew heavily upon the Greek philosophical tradition."[35] "Philosophy was primarily understood as the pursuit and teaching of the perfect way of life, the precondition for pure knowledge and

[35] Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism," 639. See, e.g., Antoine Guillaumont, "Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique," *RHR* 181 (1972) 29–56.

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illumination by the divine."[36] Along the same lines, "a philosophical life was thus a life characterised not only by intellectual activity but also by detachment from social and political affairs and freedom from concern for wealth or bodily pleasure."[37] We thus find "parallels and interaction between Christian monastic literature and pagan philosophical literature," and "many early monastic texts are based on the models used in classical rhetorical education."[38] Rubenson notes that the *Sayings* has "parallels in collections of aphorisms, as well as in the exercises of rhetorical education."[39]

Second, the *Sayings*, like part of the rabbinic material, belongs to the literary genre of "*chreia*, *apophthegma*, or pronouncement story."[40] According to Catherine Hezser's formulation: "This originally Hellenistic literary form consists of a narrative setting which leads to a climactic ending in the form of a striking 'pronouncement' or action attributed to the main protagonist."[41] She describes the function of the *chreia* in the ancient world:

> The *chreia* seems to have been a formidable means of propagating the world-view and life-style of marginal figures with circles of followers, such as scholars, saints, and philosophers, and seems to have been transmitted by these sages' students. They juxtapose the teachers' wisdom and exemplary behaviour with the values and practices of mainstream society. The stories had both an ethical and an epideictic function: they elevated the reputation of the teacher and transmitted his teachings to later generations.[42]

[36] Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism," 639.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid, 640.

[39] Hezser, "Classic Rabbinical Literature," 126. Rubenson, "Asceticism and Monasticism," 640. Additionally, one finds parallels between the *Sayings* and the works of Eastern Church fathers like Evagrius.

[40] "Hezser Classical Rabbinic Literature," 126. On the *chreia* in the Greek education, see *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric*: *The Progymnasmata* (ed. Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O'Neil; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986); *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises* (ed. eidem; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002). For recent studies on the *chreia* in the *Sayings*, see, e.g., Lillian I. Larsen, "The Apophthegmata Patrum and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition," in *Studia Patristica: Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003* (ed. Frances M. Young, Mark J. Edwards, and P.aul M. Parvis; Louvain: Peeters, 2006) 409–16; eadem, "Pedagogical Parallels: Re-Reading the 'Apophthegmata Patrum'" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006); Kathleen E. McVey, "The *Chreia* in the Desert: Rhetoric and the Bible in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," in *The Early Church in its Context: In Honor of Everett Ferguson* (ed. Abraham J. Malherbe, Frederick W. Norris, and James W. Thompson; NovTSup 90; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 245–55. On the *chreia* as a powerful literary tool in the three cultural worlds—Greco-Roman, Rabbinic, and Christian—see Marion C. Moeser, *The Anecdote in Mark, the Classical World and the Rabbis* (London: Sheffield, 2002).

[41] Hezser, "Classical Rabbinic Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (ed. Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, and David Sorkin; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 453–64, at 126.

[42] Ibid.

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Furthermore, Hezser's important article compares rabbinic literature and the *Sayings*.[43] The stories in each collection share a similar structure in which "opponents are rare," "colleagues and students of the protagonist are the most frequent subordinate figures," and the protagonist's "spiritual superiority" is highlighted.[44] Apophthegms such as these are common to both rabbinic literature and the monastic collections. Hezser also noticed that both corpora result from similar redactional processes—the anonymous anthology.[45] The nature of the material used is similar as well. In the words of Jean-Claude Guy, the *Sayings* is "an artificial gathering of brief conversations and particular episodes, whose connection is at first sight elusive."[46] As Hezser concludes, both the *Sayings* and the rabbinic literature contain earlier traditions, which probably circulated orally but were never fully integrated homogeneously.[47]

Form

There are formal similarities in the way the monastic and rabbinic corpora organize "traditions of various origins and forms, which were transmitted in the course of two or more centuries."[48] The *Sayings* clusters traditions according to an alphabetical principle and according to subject matter. Rabbinic literature is organized similarly, in theme-based tractates that include clusters of sayings by the same sage.[49]

Hezser also points out the traces of oral tradition in the *Sayings* in the form of attributions—"Abba X said," "Abba X the student of Abba Y said," and "Abba

[43] Hezser, "*Apophthegmata Patrum*."

[44] Hezser suggests that this lack of opponents might indicate that, unlike the early Christians who transmitted the Jesus stories, the transmitters of the monastic and rabbinic apophthegms were not interested in creating group identity by separating themselves from a particular group of others. Ibid., 459–63.

[45] Hezser stresses the point that whereas most Greco-Roman and Christian writings were written by a single author who identified himself explicitly, the rabbinic and the monastic collective works were composed by a number of editors who often remained anonymous (*Apophthegmata Patrum*, 459). While Hezser is obviously well aware of the Greco-Roman background of this literary genre, others have only stressed the "uniqueness" of the *Apophthegmata*; see, e.g., Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 250. Nonetheless, anthologies of sayings are known from the ancient Near East, are recommended in Plato's writings, are found commonly in Hellenistic school texts, in second century rhetorical manuals, in the writings of Plutarch, and in others. For a survey and bibliography, see Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 120–51, esp. 120–21. Larsen claims that statements such as Harmless's ignore the late antique Graeco-Roman milieu of these corpora of which they are a natural product ("The Apophthegmata Patrum and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition").

[46] Jean-Claude Guy, "Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers," *ECR* 6 (1974) 44–51, at 44, quoted in Hezser, "*Apophthegmata Patrum*," 457.

[47] Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 424.

[48] Hezser, "*Apophthegmata Patrum*," 457.

[49] For a few interesting examples, see David Rosenthal, "Arikhot Kedumot ba-Talmud ha-Bavli," in *Mehkerei Talmud* (ed. David Rosenthal and Yaakov Sussmann; 3 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990) 1:155–204, esp. 201–2 [Hebrew].

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X said that Abba Y said"—which are comparable to the use of attributions in rabbinic sources.[50] To this we can add that an earlier version of the *Sayings* in Ethiopic[51] shows that originally the *Sayings* preserved sayings in the first person as well as a chain of transmission at the head of several sayings, such as: "A brother said to me: Abba Isaac of Harahu said to me, I visited Abba Sisoes of Petra, the disciple of Abba Antony and I asked him. . . "[52] As William Harmless writes: "For the compiler of the Ethiopic *Collectio*, recording each link in the chain of transmission was crucial. These links served as a touchstone of the authenticity and antiquity of the saying and linked his generation to the precious wisdom of a bygone golden age."[53] These chains of transmission appear in rabbinic literature as well, especially in the later Talmudic corpora. Finally, the shift into written form left its mark in the formalization of the *Sayings* into set literary formulae[54] which most likely apply to rabbinic literature as well.[55]

Concerning this third point, we may also add that, within a thread of sayings by a single Abba, we often find the opening formula ἔλεγεν in Greek in the imperfect to express the habituality for "he used to say."[56] This expression is translated into Syriac with the periphrastic formula consisting of a participle and the conjugated verb h.w.y "to be": ܐܡܪ ܗܘ (ʾmr hw "they used to say"). Similarly, in rabbinic literature, the same grammatical and lexical elements appear in threads of multiple sayings by the same sage: הוא היה אומר ("he used to say"). In all these, the use of a pronoun or of verbal agreement, rather than a proper name, indicates the same speaker. Just as we find in rabbinic literature, occasionally the same monastic saying is recorded with minor changes in different clusters of sayings.[57] Also, just as in rabbinic literature, sometimes the same question is asked and treated by two different sages, and sometimes an Abba will convey a saying in the name of another Abba.[58] Galit Hasan-Rokem's category of ethnographic literature is useful

[50] Hezser, *"Apophthegmata Patrum,"* 457.

[51] *Collectio Monastica* (ed. Victor Arras; CSCO 238–239; 2 vols. in 1; Louvain: Peeters, 1963). For this collection, see William Harmless, "Remembering Poemen Remembering: The Desert Fathers and the Spirituality of Memory," *CH* 69 (2000) 483–518. The authenticity of these sayings is asserted by Lucien Regnault, "Aux origines des collections d'Apophtegmes," StPatr 18.2 *Critica, Classica, Ascetica, Liturgica* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989) 61–74; Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 20–24

[52] *Collectio Monastica* 14.64, quoted both in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 249 and in Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert,* 78.

[53] Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 249–50.

[54] Ibid., 78–80.

[55] See, e.g., Avraham Walfish, "Literary Method of Redaction in Mishnah Based on Tractate Rosh Ha-Shanah" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2001).

[56] Such as in Abba Anthony 23 (PG 65:83; Ward, *Sayings*, 6) and John the Eunuch 4 (PG 65:233; Ward, *Sayings*, 105).

[57] Such as Macarius the Great 11 (PG 65:268; Ward, *Sayings*, 130) and 35 (PG 65:277; Ward, *Sayings*, 136) and Poemen 63 (PG 65:337; Ward, *Sayings*, 175) and 164 (PG 65:361; Ward, *Sayings*, 189).

[58] Poemen 21: "Abba Joseph put the same question to Abba Poemen" (PG 65:328; Ward, *Sayings*,

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in this regard, insofar as she points to oral speech terms as well as collectivity as characteristics of such literature.[59]

Tripartite instruction or the enumeration of three things—a feature of wisdom literature—is found frequently in both rabbinic and monastic apophthegms. The entire first chapter of Tractate Avot is built around the number three, and in the rest of the tractate there are many examples of numerical sayings, mostly instructional, with most citing the number three and exhorting the reader to do three things.[60] The *Sayings* uses this literary formula often. For example, Anthony 3:

> Someone asked Abba Anthony, "What must one do in order to please God?" The old man replied, "Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it. Keep these three precepts and you will be saved."[61]

Compare this to the rabbi's advice in *m. Avot* 2:1: "Apply your mind [lit., look] to three things and you will not come to sin: know what there is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are written in a book."

This short survey of the literary structure and form of rabbinic and monastic anthological works is intended to suggest that they shared a common literary framework for the propagation of common ideas and traditions.

The Pious Life

The closeness between the outlooks of the two corpora of texts can be demonstrated nicely in the treatment of various aspects of pious life. We begin with prayer.

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170); Poemen 89: "the same brother put the same question to Abba Sisoes who said to him" (PG 65:344; Ward, *Sayings*, 179); Poemen 101: "a brother asked Abba Poemen . . . the old man replied: 'Abba John the dwarf said'" (PG 65:345; Ward, *Sayings*, 181).

[59] Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Narratives in Dialogue: A Folk Literary Perspective on Interreligious Contacts in the Holy Land in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First–Fifteenth Centuries CE* (ed. Arieh Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa; Jerusalem: Yad Yitsḥaḳ Ben-Tsevi, 1998) 110.

[60] On triadic statements, as well as entire triadic Sugiyot in Rabbinic literature, see Shamma Friedman, "Some Structural Patterns of Talmudic Sugyot," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (6 vols., Jerusalem: ha-Igud ha-'olami le-mada'e ha-Yahadut, 1977) 3:391–96 [Hebrew]; idem, "A Critical Study of *Yevamot X* with a Methodological Introduction," *Mehkarim u-mekorot. Me'asaf le-mada'e ha-Yahadut* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978) 316–19; and Jeffrey Rubenstein, "Some Structural Patterns of Yerushalmi Sugyot," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* (ed. Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 3:303–13. Richard Hidary suggests that "the context of classical rhetoric may help explain why tripartite structures are so prevalent" ("Classical Rhetorical Arrangement and Reasoning in the Talmud: The Case of Yerushalmi Berakhot," *AJSR* 34 [2010] 53–54 n. 79).

[61] PG 65:75; Ward, *Sayings*, 2. See also Andrew: "Abba Andrew said, 'These three things are appropriate for a monk: exile, poverty, and endurance in silence'" (PG 65:136; Ward, *Sayings*, 37). As well, see Gregory the Theologian 1: "Abba Gregory said, 'These three things God requires of all the baptized: right faith in the heart, truth on the tongue, temperance in the body'" (PG 65:145; Ward, *Sayings*, 45).

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Prayer

While researchers have pointed to the differences between the two traditions on the topic of prayer, a closer look reveals similarities in the details as well.[62] Prayer naturally occupies an important place in both rabbinic literature and in the monastic sources. Among the texts describing the practices of the monastic communities, we find sundry prayer practices, which vary in times, frequency, location, etc.[63] But a few passages from the *Apophthegmata* allow for a comparison with rabbinic literature. Hezser discusses prayer in rabbinic and monastic literature and concludes that "while the desert fathers discuss the benefits of prayer as such, the rabbis deal with the particularities of prayer formulas and times."[64] The following remarks are based on this statement, but they attempt further refinement on both the rabbinic and monastic sides.[65]

As may be expected, we find that rabbinic as well as monastic texts deal with the problem of intention in prayer and how to attain constant and full engagement in prayer without distraction.[66] There are further similarities regarding spiritual preparation before prayer. For example, in Poemen 32: "It was said of Abba Poemen that every time he prepared to go to the *synaxis* he sat alone and examined his thoughts for about an hour and then he set off."[67] Σύναξις, a Greek term meaning "meeting," was used in early monastic writings to designate the gathering of monks for the purpose of common prayer. In the sources of Lower Egypt, however, the use of this word does not necessarily imply that the prayer was done in common and may refer also to monks praying in their own cells.[68] In this case, Abba Poemen is described as preparing for his prayer by means of a meditation (the monastic ἡσυχία, the "quiet"[69]) for a period of one hour prior to

[62] For more on this topic, see Yishai Kiel and Yonatan Feintuch, "Reflections on Prayer in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Literature" (forthcoming).

[63] For a short survey and bibliography, see Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 32; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995) 229–31.

[64] Hezser, "*Apophthegmata Patrum*," 461.

[65] The topic of prayer in rabbinic and monastic literature, as I have discovered, is too large for the current article. I present here just a few points in common while I intend to explore this topic at length in a separate article dedicated to this theme.

[66] See, e.g., *b. Berakhot* 29b. Regarding the desert fathers, see, e.g., Agathon 9 (PG 65:112; Ward, *Sayings*, 21): "For every time a man wants to pray, his enemies, the demons, want to prevent him, for they know that it is only by turning him from prayer that they can hinder his journey." See also David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[67] PG 65:329; Ward, *Sayings*, 172.

[68] "In the Apophthegmata, "synaxis" is synonymous with "office," or a period or place of prayer, and "to do the synaxis" (*ballein ten synaxin*) is used indifferently for common assemblies as well as for the prayer of solitaries" (Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1986] 71).

[69] On the constant struggle of the monks to reach that state of inner quiet, see, e.g., Anthony the Great 10 (PG 65:77; Ward, *Sayings*, 3): "He said also, 'Just as fish die if they stay too long out

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the prayer service itself. Similarly we find in *m*. *Berakhot* 5:1 that: "One should not stand up to pray save in a reverent frame of mind. The pious men of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might concentrate their thoughts (lit., hearts) upon God." This passage describes the practice of certain pious men to prepare mentally before engaging in prayer. Interestingly, the pious men in the two sources require the same amount of preparation time—an hour.

Both texts discuss the obvious difficulty of retaining the high state of spirituality achieved during prayer. We find a clash between a view that acknowledges the requirements of daily life and the need to pause from prayer and a view that pushes towards constant prayer. For example, Epiphanius 3 says:

> The blessed Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus, was told this by the abbot of a monastery which he had in Palestine, "By your prayers we do not neglect our appointed round of psalmody, but we are very careful to recite Terce, Sext and None." Then Epiphanius corrected them with the following comment, "It is clear that you do not trouble about the other hours of the day, if you cease from prayer. The true monk should have prayer and psalmody continually in his heart."[70]

While this passage describes the custom of praying at fixed times during the day at the hours of Terce, Sext and None, Epiphanius stresses that ideally a "true monk should have prayer and psalmody continually in his heart." The passage clearly conveys a tension between ideal constant prayer and setting times for fixed prayer. Inspired by 1 Thess 5:16–18: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,"[71] the concept of "unceasing prayer" is a central theme in monastic literature, early and late.[72] And as is clear in one of its earlier examples, *The Life of Antony*, it serves as "one of the most obvious weapons against demons and bad thoughts."[73] At the same time, Taft shows that by the end of the fourth century, two daily synaxes—at the beginning and at the end of the day—were practiced in Egypt. They are mentioned in several sayings such as Arsenius 24 (PG 65:93; Ward, *Sayings*, 13),

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of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace [ἡσυχία]. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness.'" For ἡσυχία, see the broad survey in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 228.

[70] PG 65:164; Ward, *Sayings*, 57.

[71] NRSV. Compare to Eph 6:18: "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints"; Col 4:2: "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving."

[72] See Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours*, 57–74; Columba Stewart, "John Cassian on Unceasing Prayer," *Monastic Studies* 15 (1984) 159–77; Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "Demons and Prayers: Spiritual Exercises in the Monastic Community of Gaza in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," *VC* 57 (2003) 200–21; Lucien Regnault, "La priere continuelle 'monologistos' dans la litterature apophtegmatique," *Iranikon* 47 (1974) 467–93; Irénée Hausherr, *Hésychasme et prière* (= Orientalia Christiana Analecta 176; Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum, 1966) 255–306.

[73] Bitton-Ashkelony, *Demons and Prayers*, 211.

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Macarius 33 (PG 65:276; Ward, *Sayings*, 134–36) and an Abba of Rome 1 (PG 65:386; Ward, *Sayings*, 208).[74]

The tension between set times for prayer and the ideal unceasing prayer can be found in rabbinic sources as well, *b. Berakhot* 21a (MS Oxford 366): "R. Yohanan said, . . . 'Would that a man would go on praying the whole day!'" In the same tractate (31a) we find a *baraita* attested in the Tosefta (3:8): "Perhaps a man should pray the whole day? It has already been expressly stated by Daniel, 'Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed and gave thanks before his God' (Dan 6:11)."[75]

The rabbis derive multiple answers to the question of how long to pray from verses describing Moses's biblical appeals to God. For instance, *b. Berakhot* 34a (MS Oxford 366) reads:

> Our rabbis taught: Once a certain disciple went down before the Ark in the presence of R. Eliezer, and he lengthened his prayer overmuch. His disciples said to him: "Master, how longwinded this fellow is!" He replied to them: "Is he drawing it out any more than our master, Moses, of whom it is written: 'I prostrated myself before God for forty days and forty nights' (Deut 9:25)?" Another time it happened that a certain disciple went down before the Ark in the presence of R. Eliezer, and he cut the prayer very short. His disciples said to him: "How concise this fellow is!" He replied to them: "Is he any more concise than our master, Moses, as it is written: 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee' (Num 12:13)?"

The rabbis also argue about the usefulness of an extended prayer. On the one hand, there are views that extol lengthy prayer, such as *b. Berakhot* 32b; on the other hand, we find objections to long prayers, such as *b. Berakhot* 54b–55a. The rabbis also talk about the "short prayer" that should be used in time of danger or when a man cannot pray the entire length of a prayer.[76] The concept of a very short prayer in time of need is present in the monastic *Sayings* as well. Macarius 19 reads:

> Abba Macarius was asked, "How should one pray?" The old man said, "There is no need at all to make long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one's

[74] Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours*, 57–74.

[75] Later midrashic sources such as *Tanhuma Mikketz* 9 (MS Cambridge Add. 1212) assert an explicit contempt for "too much praying": "Therefore one may not pray more than three prayers in a day. And R. Yohanan said: 'Would that a person would pray continuously all day.' . . . Antoninus asked our holy Rabbi: 'May one pray at all hours?' He said to him: 'It is forbidden.' He said to him: 'Why?' He said to him: 'Lest one act with levity toward the Power.' He was not persuaded (lit., did not receive from him). What did he (= Rabbi) do? He came to him early in the morning and said to him: 'Lord, hail!' Soon afterward he entered his presence and said to him: 'Emperor!' Soon afterward he said to him: 'Peace unto you!' He (= Antoninus) said to him: 'How you slight the throne' (lit., the kingship)! He said to him: 'Let your ears hear what your mouth says! If you, flesh and blood, when someone inquires after you at all hours you say he slights the throne, all the more so should one not hassle at all hours the King, King of Kings, the Holiness blessed be He.'"

[76] See, e.g., the discussion in *b. Berakhot* 29b–30a.

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> hands and say, 'Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.' And if the conflict grows fiercer say, 'Lord, help!' He knows very well what we need and he shows us his mercy."[77]

So both the rabbinic and monastic texts contain paragraphs testifying to the existence of a "shortcut" in prayer practices, every bit as worthy as lengthier prayers. *Pace* Hezser, we find in monastic texts a discussion of prayer formulae and the obligation to pray at certain times. Of course, both the rabbinic and the monastic texts are clearly an anthology of multiple views from different sources. They are not, therefore, uniform, but it is still interesting to observe the spectrum of views regarding prayer and the similarities one finds within that variety.

Fear of Mundane Conversation

The desire to keep the mind focused on spiritual matters and to avoid distractions is a natural corollary of the ascetic way of life. The monks wished to avoid the distraction presented by mundane conversations. For example, Ammoes 1 reads:

> It was said of Abba Ammoes that when he went to church, he did not allow his disciple to walk beside him but only at a certain distance; and if the latter came to ask him about his thoughts, he would move away from him as soon as he had replied, saying to him, "It is for fear that, after edifying words, irrelevant conversation should slip in, that I do not keep you with me."[78]

For their part, the rabbis labeled such "irrelevant" and "profane" speech as a sin; for example, *b. Yoma* 19b (MS Munich 6) contains the following paragraph:

> Raba said: "One who engages in profane talk transgresses a positive command, for it is written: 'And thou shalt speak of them' (Deut 6:7), of them, but not of other matters." R. Aha b. Jacob said: "He transgresses against a prohibition, for it is said: 'All things toil to weariness; man cannot utter it' (Eccl 1:8)."

Some boast of their success in avoiding irrelevant and profane speech, as in *b. Sukkah* 28a (MS Oxford e.51 [2677]):

> [R. Eliezer:] During all my life [I may tell you] . . . no man was earlier than myself in the House of Study. I never slept or dozed in the House of Study, nor did I ever leave a person in the House of Study when I went out, nor did I ever utter profane speech, nor have I ever said a thing which I did not hear from my teacher.

Famously, the monks saw danger in being distracted not only by conversations but also by their own thoughts. The following story, Abba Silvanus 4, provides

[77] PG 65:269; Ward, *Sayings*, 131.

[78] PG 65:125; Ward, *Sayings*, 30. The extreme side of this fear is found in the many sayings that promote total isolation such as Theodore of Pherme 5 (PG 65:188; Ward, *Sayings*, 74) and Arsenius 13 (PG 65:92; Ward, *Sayings*, 11). For a broad survey of the texts, see Gould, *Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 107–9.

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one such example:

> One day while Abba Silvanus was living on the mountain of Sinai his disciple Zacharias went away on an errand and said to the old man, "Open the well and water the garden." The old man went out with his face hidden in his cowl, looking down at his feet. Now at that moment a brother came along and seeing him from a distance he observed what he was doing. So he went up to him and said, "Tell me, abba, why were you hiding your face in your cowl while you watered the garden?" The old man said to him, "So that my eyes should not see the trees, my son, in case my attention should be distracted by them[79]

Nature, and especially trees, is viewed as distracting the monk from the spiritual work of his mind. A similar view is conveyed in a rabbinic passage, *m. Avot* 3:7:

> R. Jacob said: "If a person is walking on the road and recites [his studies, = שונה] and breaks off from his recitation, saying, '[H]ow fine is this tree,' '[H]ow fine is this newly ploughed field,' they account it to him as if he had committed a capital offense."

It is remarkable not only that the view of nature as a distraction is expressed in both the rabbinic and monastic texts but also that a strikingly similar example is described to illustrate the danger: A sage learns/meditates/recites while walking or working in the fields (not in the usual isolated cell or study house); he lifts his gaze; he sees trees (the same natural element), and he becomes distracted by their beauty. Both the rabbinic and the monastic texts fear the same danger for their protagonists once outside their secure environment.

Both corpora describe the devotion to study as so consuming that it can cause monks and rabbis alike to lose track of time, to fail to notice the passing of night and the arrival of morning. And so we find in Abba John the dwarf 26:

> One day a brother came to Abba John's cell. It was late and he was in a hurry to leave. While they were speaking of the virtues, dawn came without their noticing it. Abba John came out with him to see him off, and they went on talking until the sixth hour. Then he made him go in again. After they had eaten, he sent him away.[80]

In the same way, a rabbinic passage in the Passover haggadah tells of a few rabbis sitting together and talking about the exodus from Egypt all night long, losing track of time so that they nearly miss the recitation of the morning Shema.

Anger and Laughter

As for the holy man's struggle with the evil inclination, as well as expressions of levity and anger, the rabbinic and monastic corpora contain a similar range of views. For example, there is a complex attitude towards the יצר (= [evil?]

[79] PG 65:409; Ward, *Sayings*, 223.

[80] PG 65:213; Ward, *Sayings*, 91.

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inclination) in rabbinic literature. While attesting to its dangers, some paragraphs in the literature also make it clear that the יצר is a vital part of men, "without which men would not have formed families, built communities, or undertaken to earn a living."[81] We read in *b. Sanhedrin* 107b (MS Yad HaRav Herzog): "R. Simeon b. Elazar says: 'An [evil] inclination, a child, and a woman—the left hand should reject them and the right hand should draw them near'." Jeremy Cohen summarizes this source: "through the study of God's Torah and the observance of the divine commandments, men can subjugate their evil inclinations to their desires to do good, making themselves worthy of heavenly reward."[82] In a sense, the evil inclination is needed as part of one's quest for righteousness. The same sentiment is found in some monastic texts. While most of the monks' stories tell of their fight against evil inclinations and temptations in the images of demons, we still find sayings such as Evagrius 5: "He also said, 'Take away temptations and no one will be saved.'"[83]

In what follows I want to examine two instructions, one concerning anger and the other concerning laughter. These two are linked, interestingly, in both literatures. So in the Babylonian Talmud, both anger and laughter are coupled in the evaluation of a man's character, *b. Eruvin* 65b (MS Vatican 109): "R. Ila said: By three things may a person's character be determined: By his cup, by his purse, and by his anger; and some say: by his laughter also." And one saying in the *Apophthegmata* connects laughter and anger together as undesirable to monks, when Abba Nisterus said: "Swearing, making false oaths, lying, getting angry, insulting people, laughing, all that is alien to monks."[84]

Monastic rules famously critical of laughter appear in many sources. Already in the earliest surviving monastic rules—those of Basil, archbishop of Caesarea (370–379 C.E.), composed in Greek—laughter was prohibited.[85] In the *Sayings*, laughter is not among the behaviors of admired men. For example, Pambo 13: "They said of Abba Pambo that his face never smiled."[86] Though much less

[81] Jeremy Cohen, "Original Sin as the Evil Inclination—A Polemicist's Appreciation of Human Nature," *HTR* 73 (1980) 495–520, at 502; see also *b. Yoma* 69b. Ishay Rosen-Zvi's studies of different aspects of the יצר as portrayed in early and later rabbinic sources are also important in this respect, particularly his discussion of the different character of the inclination in the Babylonian Talmud's later layers and of the parallels to Christian writers. See Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: "Yetzer Hara" and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[82] Cohen, "Original Sin," 501.

[83] PG 65:176; Ward, *Sayings*, 64.

[84] Nisterus 5 (PG 65:308; Ward, *Sayings*, 155).

[85] *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* (ed. John Philip Thomas, and Angela Constantinides Hero, with the assistance of Giles Constable; trans. Robert Allison et al.; Dumbarton Oaks Studies 35; 5 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000) 1:24, and references to later monastic rules in n. 13.

[86] PG 65:371; Ward, *Sayings*, 197.

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prevalent in the rabbinic literature, we do read of the occasional great sage who refrained from laughter. In *b. Berakhot* 31a (MS Oxford 366) we find:

> R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: "It is forbidden to a man to fill his mouth with laughter in this world." . . . It was related of Resh Lakish that he never again filled his mouth with laughter in this world after he heard this saying from R. Yohanan his teacher.

Similarly, in both literatures we find a negative view of anger in great men. Rabbinic literature in a few places cautions against anger. For example, *m. Avot* 2:10 warns a man not to be easily provoked (אל תהי נוח לכעוס), and *b. Shabbat* 105b equates a man who acts in anger to a man who worship idols since both are ruled by their evil inclination. Also, we find the explicit view according to which a great man, clearly capable of great things, it is deemed unworthy once he is angry. Thus, *b. Pesahim* 66b (MS JTS 271) reads:

> Resh Lakish said: "As to every man who becomes angry, if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him." . . . R. Mani b. Pattish said: "Whoever becomes angry, even if greatness has been decreed for him by heaven, is cast down."

As Graham Gould[87] and Peter Brown[88] have both pointed out, while we often imagine sexuality as the monk's chief spiritual battle, in fact anger appears more frequently in the monastic sources as the utmost challenge.[89] Abba Poemen said: "A monk does not complain of his lot, a monk does not return evil for evil, a monk is not angry."[90] As in the rabbinic sayings, in the monastic *Sayings* we have an explicit indication that anger distances one from God. In the words of Abba Agathon: "The same Abba said a man who is angry, even if he were to raise the dead, is not acceptable to God."[91] According to both traditions, even when men have reached greatness, once they allow themselves to become angry, their greatness is no longer acceptable to God.

[87] Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 112.

[88] Peter Brown writes: "anger, a sin of human relations, bulked larger with the ascetics than did the 'demon of fornication,' which lurked in their bodies" (*The Making of Late Antiquity* [Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1978] 88). Brown has suggested a connection between these views on anger and those that promote isolation from human relations, on the one hand, and the desire of property owners to escape the socio-economic tensions of third and fourth century Egyptian villages (83–90). But see the criticism offered in Colm Luibhéid, "Antony and the Renunciation of Society," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 52 (1986) 304–14, and Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 113.

[89] The two—anger and fornication—are often connected. See, e.g., Poemen 115 (PG 65:348; Ward, *Sayings*, 184): "A brother asked Abba Poemen, 'What shall I do, for fornication and anger war against me?' The old man said, 'In this connection David said: "I will pierce the lion and I will slay the bear" (1 Sam. 17:35); that is to say: I will cut off anger and I will crush fornication with hard labour.'"

[90] Poemen 91 (PG 65:344; Ward, *Sayings*, 180). See also Isidore 2 and 7 (PG 65:221; Ward, *Sayings*, 97).

[91] Agathon 19 (PG 65:113; Ward, *Sayings*, 23).

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Asking Forgiveness

In addition to Hezser's general observation that the *Sayings* has a tendency to avoid minute details and instructions for the monks and instead to concentrate on more general themes, a handful of sections show a preoccupation with such, more specific, matters. This preoccupation is elaborated in late monastic rules that are beyond the scope of this article, but traces of it are evident in the following example, that may be compared to rabbinic literature.

The *Sayings* discusses the obligation to ask forgiveness of a person one has offended and what to do when the offended party does not agree to forgive:

> Abba Bitimius asked Abba Poemen, "If someone has a grievance against me, and I ask his pardon but cannot convince him, what is to be done?" The old man said to him, "Take two other brothers with you and ask his pardon. If he is not satisfied, take five others. If he is still not satisfied by them, take a priest. If even so he is not satisfied, then pray to God without anxiety that he may himself satisfy him, and do not worry about it."[92]

Abba Poemen mandates that three attempts should be made to pacify an offended party. The level of effort in each attempt is increased, signaled in the number of people involved in the process. After three failed attempts, the offender should no longer worry. He has done his share and has no more obligations towards his offended friend.[93]

In a passage in *b*. *Yoma* 87a (MS Munich 6), we find a similar preoccupation with the question of forgiveness and a corresponding reference to the extent of the effort one must make in asking for forgiveness:

> R. Isaac said: "Whosoever offends his neighbor, even if only through words, must pacify him. . . ." R. Hisda said: "He should endeavor to pacify him through three rows of three people each, as it is said: 'He cometh before me and saith: I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not' (Job 33:27)." R. Yose b. Hanina said: "One who asks pardon of his neighbor need do so no more than three times, as it is said: 'Forgive. I pray thee now . . . and now we pray thee' (Gen 50:17)." And if he [against whom he had sinned] had died, says Yosef b. HBY-ŠMYA says R. Abbahu, "[H]e should bring ten persons and make them stand by his grave and say: 'I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and against this one, whom I have hurt.'"

[92] Poemen 156 (PG 65:359; Ward, *Sayings*, 189).

[93] This text bears some resemblance to Matthew 18:15–18, but the differences are noteworthy. First and foremost, the monastic text deals with the attempt on the part of the offender and not the one who was offended. It deals with the measures one needs to take to absolve one's sins towards his friends and not with the admonishing of others. The monastic text also appears to be much more structured—the numbers three and five are very specific and gradual, as opposed to the general "two or three" in Matthew. Finally the innovation in the monastic text, in comparison to the NT text, is that there is a limit, not to the opportunities one gives to a sinner but rather to the right of the offended party, to stay offended.

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R. Hisda deduces the need to approach the offended party through three people from the verse in Job in which the root (ישר) is playfully interpreted to suggest the need for a row (שורה) of people. The number three may be proposed because it is the minimum number required to form a row[94] or because "three" is present in the nearby verse in Job (33:29): "God does all these things to a man twice, even three times." Alternatively, a different version of the verse, no longer available to us, may have contained three occurrences of the root (ישר).

R. Yose b. Hanina stresses that if the offended party proves unwilling to accept the apology, one should ask forgiveness just three times, after which the responsibility no longer rests with the offender. The verse used to prove his statement is taken from the brothers' plea to Joseph in Gen 50:17, and is probably based on the threefold occurrence of the particle נא(א) in the verse: כה תאמרו ליוסף אנא שא נא פשע אחיך וחטאתם כי רעה גמלוך ועתה שא נא לפשע עבדי אלהי אביך.

In comparison, in the monastic text, the first group consists of three people, just as in the rabbinic text. Of course the texts are different in that the monastic text requires an extra effort—five people in the second attempt and a priest in the third. But in both the rabbinic and the monastic texts we see that the total number of times one needs to ask for forgiveness is three, after which the problem is left between the offended party and his God.

This case is even more interesting when we compare it with a parallel passage in the Palestinian Talmud, *y. Yoma* 45c:

> Samuel said: "One who offends against his friend must say, 'I have sinned against you.' And if he accepts it, that is good. And if not, he brings people and petitions him before them. This is what is written, 'He declares [ישר] to men'—he makes a line (שורה) of men—'I have offended; I have perverted what was right; but I was not paid back for it' (Job 33:27). If he does so, concerning him Scripture says, 'He redeemed him from passing into the pit; he will enjoy the light' (Job 33:28). If he dies, he must petition him at his grave and say, 'I have sinned against you.'"

This passage shares the following elements with the passage in the Babylonian Talmud: It first addresses the need to ask for forgiveness, then it addresses the possibility of a refusal on the part of the one offended. It suggests that an additional attempt should be made in front of additional people. Lastly, it deals with a situation in which the person who was offended died before the pardon was given and requires an admission of guilt at the grave. But the differences between the passages are telling. While the Palestinian Talmud cites only Samuel as dealing with the issue, the Babylonian Talmud mentions three sages. More important for our purposes is the addition of numerical details. The Babylonian Talmud specifies how one is to ask for forgiveness and how many people are to

[94] See Rashi on Job 23:27.

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be present, both when the offended party is alive and when the person is dead. These details are missing in the Palestinian Talmud, but they are similar to details in the monastic text. One might even say that the *Sayings* has a *halakhic*, nuanced discussion, much like the discussion in the Babylonian Talmud.

This last example fits in nicely with my overall argument elsewhere regarding a possible connection between the Babylonian Talmud and *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.[95] I contend that in cases such as this one, the comparison between the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmuds calls to attention possible Christian literary connections, especially in the Babylonian versions of paragraphs paralleled in Palestinian rabbinic sources.

Scripture

In addition to the frequent use of biblical verses in rabbinic literature, monastic attitudes towards the study of Scripture have also recently attracted the attention of scholars.[96] In addition to similar common introductory formulae for verses, such as שנאמר or דכתיב and τὸ γεγραμμένον[97] (and in the Syriac translation: ܗܟܝܬܒ ,ܡ) for "it is said/written," further points of contact are present in passages with a scriptural orientation. We turn to a consideration of a few of these similarities now.[98]

Forbidden Sections of the Bible

Both the rabbinic and monastic corpora contain sayings that express a fear or even a prohibition of studying certain biblical verses. For example, Copres 3:

> One day, the inhabitants of Scetis assembled together to discuss Melchizedek and they forgot to invite Abba Copres. Later on they called him and asked him about this matter. Tapping his mouth three times, he said "Alas for you, Copres! For that which God commanded you to do, you have put aside, and you are wanting to learn something which you have not been required to know about." When they heard these words, the brothers fled to their cells.[99]

The biblical figure of Melchizedek was somewhat controversial in the early church because of disagreements over his identity and significance.[100] Abba

[95] Bar-Asher, "Literary Analogies"; Bar-Asher Siegal, "The Making of a Monk-Rabbi."

[96] On the use of Scripture in the *Sayings,* see especially Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*; Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Per Rönnegård, *Threads and Images: The Use of Scripture in Apophthegmata Patrum* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

[97] For the Greek see, e.g., John the Dwarf 38 (PG 65:216–217; Ward, *Sayings,* 93).

[98] Other analogies are not considered in this paper. See, e.g., Moulie Vidas, "Talmudists, Reciters and Identity in Late Ancient Mesopotamia," ch. 3 of, "Traditions and the Formation of the Talmud" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2009) 134–92.

[99] PG 65:252; Ward, *Sayings*, 118.

[100] See, e.g., Fred L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Society of New Testament

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Copres believed there was a divine prohibition against studying the biblical text concerning Melchizedek.[101]

Prohibitions regarding the study of certain passages in the Bible are present in rabbinic literature as well. For example, in *m. Hagigah* 2:1 we find:

> The [subject of] forbidden sexual relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation in the presence of two, nor [the work of] the chariot in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge. Whosoever speculates upon four things, it would be better for him had he not come into the world. [Those four things are:] what is above, what is beneath, what before, what after.

While Melchizedek is not the topic here, still the perception that some biblical passages might lead one to deal with issues beyond the reader's grasp and therefore to formulate undesirable theological conclusions, is similar.

The Sinfulness of Biblical Protagonists

While many passages in both corpora depict the biblical characters as exemplars,[102] the rabbis and the desert fathers show a similar ambivalence over the closeness engendered by constant study of biblical narratives—which led to "dialogue with" or even criticism of biblical figures—and the sense of awe inspired by biblical characters when viewed as exemplars.[103] One such example is Agathon 22:

> Abba Agathon and another old man were ill. While they were lying in their cell the brother who was reading Genesis to them came to the chapter where Jacob said, "Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more and thou dost take Ben-

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Studies Monograph Series 30; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Mathias Delcor, "Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JSJ* 2 (1971) 115–35; Stephen E. Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," *JSJ* 18 (1987) 26–39; and Eric F. Mason, *'You are a Priest Forever': Second Temple Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (STDJ 74; Leiden; Brill, 2008).

[101] This prohibition might have stemmed from the exegetical dispute as explained in another passage in the *Sayings*, Daniel 8 (PG 65:160; Ward, *Sayings*, 54). There the topic discussed is whether Melchizedek is the son of God or a human, and Cyril, the archbishop of Alexandria, teaches another monk that the later should be the correct answer. On this passage, see David Frankfurter, "The Legacy of the Jewish Apocalypse in Early Christian Communities: Two Regional Trajectories," in *Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler; Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996) 129–200, at 183–84; Nicholas Marinides, "Religious Toleration in the Apophthegmata Patrum," *JECS* 20 (2012) 235–68, at 243.

[102] See, for instance, the examples from both literature and art brought by Elizabeth S. Bolman, "Joining the Community of Saints: Monastic Paintings and Ascetic Practice in Early Christian Egypt," in *Shaping Community: The Art and Archaeology of Monasticism; Papers from a Symposium Held at the Frederick R. Weisman Museum, University of Minnesota, March 10–12, 2000* (ed. Sheila McNally; British Archaeological Reports International Series 941, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2001) 41–56. For an extreme of following biblical exemplars (child sacrifice after the sacrifice of Isaac), see Caroline T. Schroeder, "Child Sacrifice in Egyptian Monastic Culture: From Familial Renunciation to Jephthah's Lost Daughter," *JECS* 20 (2012) 269–302.

[103] Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 169.

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> jamin away from me; thou wilt bring my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave" (Gen 42:36–38). The other old man began to say, "Are not the ten enough for you, Abba Jacob?" but Abba Agathon replied, "Let it be, old man. If God is the God of the righteous, who shall condemn Jacob?"[104]

The old man "addressed the patriarch as though he were sitting beside him," while Agathon reminds him that, at least to him, Jacob should be "above reproach. . . . Awe and intimacy are both seen as natural responses to the biblical predecessors."[105]

Rabbinic literature preserves the same ambivalence towards biblical figures. When the Bible is explicit about a character's mistakes or sins, the Talmud often addresses the issue head on. One well-known example is that of David and Bathsheba,[106] as we find in *b. Sanhedrin* 107a (MS Yad haRav Herzog): "Rab Yehudah said in Rab's name: 'One should never [intentionally] bring himself to the test, since a great man [= David] did so, and fell.'" In some cases the Talmud even exaggerates the severity of the biblical sin, as in the same passage, which reads: "Rab Yehudah also said in Rab's name: 'David wished to worship idols.'" Of course, the wish to worship idols is not mentioned in the biblical account of the life of David.

But at the same time, in another paragraph, in *b. Shabbat* 55–56 (MS Oxford 366), the Talmud lists a few biblical characters—sinners in the biblical accounts—but rejects the negative portrayal the Bible gives them: "R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in R. Yohanan's name: 'Whoever says that Reuben/the sons of Eli/David/Samuel's sons sinned is in error.'"

The Prayers of David

When formulating ideal prayer practices, both the rabbis and the monks drew heavily on the book of Psalms and on what it tells of David, its author according to tradition. Epiphanius 7 reads:

> The same old man [= Epiphanius] said, "David the prophet prayed late at night. Waking in the middle of the night he prayed; before the day, at the dawn of day, he stood before the Lord. In the small hours he prayed. In the evening and at midday he prayed again, and this is why he said 'seven times a day I praised you' (Ps 119:164)."[107]

David's rigid prayer practices—his interrupted sleep, his repeated prayers both day and night, and especially his night prayer starting at midnight—are probably based on verses from the Psalms, especially Ps 119:164: "Seven times a day I

[104] PG 65:116; Ward, *Sayings*, 23.

[105] Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 169.

[106] See, e.g., Steven Fraade, "Sifre Deuteronomy 26 (ad Deut 3:23): How Conscious the Composition?," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983) 245–301; Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999) 83–93; James Arthur Diamond, "King David of the Sages: Rabbinic Rehabilitation or Ironic Parody?" *Prooftexts* 27 (2007) 373–426.

[107] PG 65:166; Ward, *Sayings*, 58.

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praise you" and Ps 119:62: "At midnight I rise to praise you." These rigorous nightly prayers are also referred to in *b. Berakhot* 3b (MS Oxford 366):

> R. Oshaia, and some say R. Elazar in the name of R. Oshaia, said: "David said: 'Midnight never passed me by in my sleep.'" R. Zera said: "Till midnight he used to slumber like a horse, from thence on he rose with the energy of a lion." R. Ashi said: "Till midnight he studied the Torah, from thence on he recited songs and praises. . . ." Levi and R. Isaac, the one says, "[Thus spoke David before God] 'Am I not pious? All the kings of the East and the West sleep to the third hour [of the day], but I, 'at midnight I rise to give thanks unto thee' (Ps 119:62)."

Prayer, night study, and minimal sleep are all attributed to David, who is seen as an exemplar to both rabbinic and monastic holy men.

Biblical Geography

In Babylonian rabbinic texts we see a tendency, seen also among Persian monastics, to link biblical events to specific places in Babylonia. Monasteries were often founded in places identified as biblical sites, such as the monastery of the ark in Qardu.[108] The rabbis identified biblical places in Persia as well, probably as part of their patriotism. For example, the same Qardu is identified in the Babylonian Talmud with Abraham's place of imprisonment.[109]

Literary Motifs

So far we have discussed similarities between monastic and rabbinic texts in style, form, and themes, as well as some specific sayings. We turn now to the common use of specific literary images to express shared notions and concepts, which testify to a shared cultural world.

Water

The first image, water, is employed in contexts that discuss the core notion of life devoid of the essential elements of religious life—monastic solitude and Torah study, respectively. The word of God as the "saving water of life" is a common motif in both rabbinic and monastic literature.[110] Both the monks and the rabbis use the image of fish out of water to describe a life outside that of the ideal religious environment. So we find in Anthony the Great 10:

[108] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (CSCO 184; 3 vols [184, 197, 500]; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1958–1988) 1[184]:305 n. 75).

[109] See *b. Bava Batra* 91a. For other biblical localities identified in Babylonia in the Babylonian Talmud, see Isaiah M. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A Social and Cultural History* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1990) 119–21 [Hebrew].

[110] See, e.g., Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1989) 76–78, at 76.

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> He said also, "Just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness."[111]

The cell, and the world of inner peace it offers to its inhabitants, is likened to the water that a fish needs to survive. Outside of it the fish dies. The sages employ the same motif in discussing life without the Torah. In *b. Berakhot* 61b (MS Oxford 366), R. Akiva explains why he continues his studies despite the punishment he risks for violating the Roman prohibition of Torah study:

> [R. Akiva replied:] "I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of the sea, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: 'From what are you fleeing?' They replied: 'From the nets cast for us by men to capture us.' He said to them: 'Would you like to come up on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors?' They replied: 'Are you the fox that they call the cleverest of animals? You are not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, if we come up on to the dry land, how much more in the element in which we would die!' So it is with you. If such [is our condition] when we study the Torah, of which it is written, "For that is your life and the length of your days," if we sit idle how much worse off we shall be!"[112]

The image appears in another passage in *b. Avodah Zarah* 3b (MS Paris 1337):

> Rab Yehudah says in the name of Samuel: "Why is it written, 'And Thou makest man as the fishes of the sea' (Hab 1:14)? Why is man compared to the fishes? To tell you, just as the fishes of the sea, as soon as they come on to dry land, die, so also men, as soon as they abandon the Torah and the precepts, die."

The study of Torah, as difficult as it is, offers the only livable environment, without which one dies.

In addition, the qualities of water as seen in nature are referred to in elaborations of the metaphor. Thus we find in both literatures the notion that, while the heart of

[111] PG 65:77; Ward, *Sayings*, 3.

[112] On this story, see Haim Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities of Some Aesopic Fables," in *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (ed. Henry A. Fischel; New York: Ktav, 1977) 443–72, at 475–76; Aharon M. Singer, "The Rabbinic Fable," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 4 (1983) 79–91 [Hebrew]; see also Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999) 103–5. For this story as it relates to other rabbinic traditions involving Roman persecutions, see Richard Kalmin, "Rabbinic Traditions about Roman Persecutions of the Jews: A Reconsideration," *JJS* 54 (2003) 21–50, esp. 30–33. I am thankful to Tzvi Novick and Josh Burns for their help with these references.

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man is "hard," the word of God can still affect it in the same way that water can erode stone. We read in Poemen 183:

> Abba John, who had been exiled by the emperor Marcian, said, "We went to Syria one day to see Abba Poemen and desired to question him concerning purity of the heart. But the old man did not know Greek, and no interpreter was to be found. And then, seeing how embarrassed we were, the old man began to speak Greek, saying, 'The nature of water is soft, and the nature of stone is hard; but if a bottle is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall down drop by drop, it wears away the stone. So it is with the word of God: it is soft and our heart is hard, but the man who hears the word of God often opens his heart to the fear of God."[113]

In the rabbinic text *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 6a (MS JTS Rab. 25), we find:

> How did Rabbi Akiva begin? It is said: When he was forty years of age he had not yet studied a thing. One time he stood by the mouth of a well and saw the stone by the mouth of the well hollowed. He said: "Who hollowed out this stone?" They said to him: "It is [the water][114] which falls upon it every day, continually." And they said to him: "Do you not know and read that, '[A]s water wears away stones and torrents wash away the soil, so you destroy man's hope' (Job 14:19)?" Thereupon Rabbi Akiva drew the inference with regard to himself and said: "If what is soft wears down the hard, all the more shall the words of Torah, which are hard as iron, hollow out my heart, which is flesh and blood!" Forthwith he turned to the study of Torah.[115]

In this source, remarkably similar to the monastic one, R. Akiva draws an *a fortiori* inference: If water, which is soft, wears down hard stone, all the more can the words of the Torah, which are hard, wear down the heart of man which is mere flesh and blood.[116]

Educational Imagery

Rabbinic and monastic sources employ similar imagery in connection with the training and education of the next generation. An epistemological claim, already

[113] PG 65:65–367; Ward, *Sayings*, 192–93.

[114] The manuscript here reads חבל של דלי חקקה שת?דיר? [נוטף] עליה כל היום ("the rope of the bucket which [drips] upon it every day, continually"). The continuation and the quotation of the Job verse makes clear that "water" fits better. But, the rope here might signal an "editorial stitch" of originally two different parables- one about the rope eroding the stone and the other about the water. I intend to go back to this example in a future article.

[115] *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (trans. Judah Goldin; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1955) 41.

[116] The connection between these sources might be suggestive of a more genealogical connection between *Avot de Rabbi Natan* and the *Sayings*. I have suggested as much, along with further discussion on the specific relationship between these two passages, in a talk "Avot de-Rabbi Natan and the Monastic Literature: A Comparative Study." I intend to explore this relationship further in future articles.

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present in Aristotle's concept of *tabula rasa*, expresses the notion that the mind is born clean, a "blank slate," that is later written upon:

> Have not we already disposed of the difficulty about interaction involving a common element, when we said that mind is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable, though actually it is nothing until it has thought? What it thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing tablet on which as yet nothing actually stands written: this is exactly what happens with mind.[117]

In both rabbinic and monastic literature we find the idea that education is like writing on paper and that the young brain is like a clean sheet. The Aristotelian idea is part of a dichotomy, however, between Aristotle's "empty mind" view and the opposing view of innatism, according to which the mind is born with certain innate knowledge. By contrast, the rabbinic and monastic texts assume a dichotomy between the young mind and the aged mind in which the young mind has distinct advantages over the old mind. In *m*. *Avot* 4:20 one reads:

> Elisha b. Abuyah said: "He who learns [when] a child, to what may he compared? To ink written upon a new writing sheet; and he who learns [when] an old man, to what may he be compared? To ink written on a rubbed writing sheet."

The learning process is likened to writing with ink. The quality of the writing depends on the interaction between the ink and the page. The beginning of the education process is superior and produces a more significant and lasting impression, just as using ink on a fresh sheet of parchment yields a clear and lasting text. This notion appears as well in the *Sayings*, for example, in Isaiah 2:

> [Abba Isaiah] also said to those who were making a good beginning by putting themselves under the direction of the Holy Fathers, "As with purple dye, the first coloring is never lost."[118]

Here, too, the education of young students is described using the imagery of writing with a type of dye. The beginning of the education process is superior to later stages. In the monastic passage the type of ink—the purple specifically—is stressed: it does not fade or flake as some others.[119]

Narrative Elements

In addition to these literary motifs, one can point to a few more developed narrative elements shared by both corpora of texts.

[117] Aristotle, *Soul* 3.4. The translation is from Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1988) 124

[118] PG 65:181; Ward, *Sayings*, 69.

[119] I thank the anonymous *HTR* copy editor for his useful comment here.

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Rain

The holy man's ability to bring rain through prayer is another trait that appears in both rabbinic and monastic literature. This motif is probably the result of a similar desert climate in the land of Israel and in the region of Egypt inhabited by the desert fathers—an area far from the Nile and dependent almost exclusively on rain as a source of water.

The greatness of rabbinic sages is often measured in terms of their ability to bring rain through prayer. The text in *b. Mo'ed Qatan* 28a (MS Munich 140) reads: "[Rabbah and R. Hisda] were saintly rabbis; one master prayed for rain and it came, the other master prayed for rain and it came." Likewise, *b. Ta'anit* 24b (MS Yad haRav Herzog) reads:

> Whereupon Ifra Hormiz, the mother [of King Shapur] said [to her son], "Do not interfere with the Jews because whatever they ask of their God He grants them." [The king] said to her, "For example?" "They pray and rain falls," [she replied]. . . . She sent a message to Rabba: "Concentrate now your mind [and pray for rain] . . ." Whereupon there followed such a heavy rain that the gutters of Mahuza emptied their waters into Tigris.

The ability to bring rain appears already in earlier tannaitic sources, most famously in the figure of Honi Hame'agel.[120] At the end of the story in which Honi brings rain, Shimon b. Shetah is said to have sent a message to Honi. The message reads (*m. Ta'anit* 3:8):

> You deserve to be placed under a ban, but what can I do to [you]? For you are impertinent before God just as a son is impertinent before his father and [yet] he grants his desire. Of you scripture says, "Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and let her that bore thee rejoice" (Prov 23:25).

This message, as Jeffrey Rubenstein notes, "exhibits both grudging recognition of Honi's talents and a sense of unease about his methods." He goes on to say that this unease represents "the tension between the sages and rabbinic piety," on the one hand, and "charismatic figures and their religious practices," on the other. The fact that Honi does not hesitate to "force" God into bringing rain is put under scrutiny but all the same is legitimized by the special relationship Honi has with God.[121]

The Babylonian Talmud's reworked version of this tannaitic story portrays Honi more favorably, and the tension between the rabbis and miracle workers is less apparent.[122] Other stories in the Babylonian Talmud (e.g., *b. Ta'anit* 23a–b) about the family of Honi—his grandchildren—challenge the holy man's status

[120] The name can be translated in many ways, the most common of which is Honi the circle maker. A few other suggestions have been offered such as "roof fixer," named after the roller used to fix roofs (מעגילה). Or it may refer to the name of a place.

[121] *Rabbinic Stories* (trans. and intro. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein; New York: Paulist, 2002) 128.

[122] Ibid., 131.

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as rain-maker.[123] The first story there, about Abba Hilkiah, states that the rain came in response to the prayer of his wife, and when they both prayed for rain a cloud came from his wife's side and was merited by her charitable acts. The second story, about Hanan ha-Nehba, clearly states that the rabbis were wrong to ask Honi's grandson to pray for rain. His prayer, found in *b. Ta'anit* 23b (MS Yad haRav Herzog), has the following: "Master of the Universe, do it for the sake of these who are unable to distinguish between you and me." The Babylonian Talmud traditions refine and undermine traditions relating the powers of holy men in bringing rain. The stories are included in the Babylonian Talmud with the result that the "Jews" as a whole are credited with a special closeness to God due to the ability of their holy men to bring rain. But, alongside these traditions, there are stories that express the danger of this phenomenon.

Christian holy men were also sometimes known for their ability to bring rain.[124] For example, after failed attempts of the monks at Mount Sinai, Abba Xoius stretched out his hands in prayer and "immediately it rained."[125] The following story concerning Abba Moses is especially interesting when compared to the rabbinic sources mentioned above:

> It was said of Abba Moses at Scetis that when he had arranged to go to Petra, he grew tired in the course of the journey and said to himself, "How can I find the water I need there?" Then a voice said to him, "Go, and do not be anxious about anything." So he went. Some fathers came to see him and he had only a small bottle of water. He used it all up in cooking lentils for them. The old man was worried, so he went in and came out of his cell, and he prayed to God, and a cloud of rain came to Petra and filled all the cisterns. After this, the visitors said to the old man, "Tell us why you went in and out." The old man said to them, "I was arguing with God, saying, 'You brought me here and now I have no water for your servants.' This is why I was going in and out; I was going on at God till he sent us some water."[126]

The story relates the ability of Abba Moses to bring rain by praying to God, but the nature of the conversation is unexpected. Abba Moses "argues" or "enters into judgment" with God over his need for water. In fact, Abba Moses tells God that he owes him the rain; he is obligated to supply rain to the Abba. And God complies.

In *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* a few stories are preserved about Simeon's abilities to bring rain, modeled on Elijah's biblical stories (including the physical

[123] See Menachem Hirshman, "Moqde qdusha mishtanim: Honi ve-nechadav," *Tura: Studies in Jewish Thought* 1, *Simon Greenberg Volume* (Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uḥad, 1989) 109–18 [Hebrew].

[124] On Honi's traditions and their resemblance to a few of Jesus's traditions, see, e.g., Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973); idem, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (New York: Viking Compass, 2001) 254–57, at 254, where he discusses "traits common to charismatics and the distinguishing marks which give Jesus his characteristic individuality." See also David Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001) 114–15; and Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995) 37–39.

[125] Abba Xoius 2 (PG 65:312; Ward, *Sayings*, 158).

[126] Moses 13 (PG 65:285; Ward, *Sayings*, 141).

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posture of putting the head on the knees).[127] In one of these stories, Simeon, like Honi, is so sure of his ability to bring rain during a long drought that he summons all, ahead of time, to view his success.[128]

We see the same holy man motif in connection with Abba Moses, Simeon and Honi. Not only can a holy man bring rain, but he does so by strong-arming God to do his bidding. The comparison reveals also the differences between the three accounts. While the monastic tales do not convey a sense of reproach towards the act of such an impertinent prayer, the rabbinic tale harbors a certain ambivalence, as manifested in Shimon b. Shetah's message.

This last point relates to Peter Brown's description of the Holy Man and the concept of *parrhesia* (free speech).[129] Brown has shown that the holy man, just like the philosopher model of late antiquity, used *parrhesia*, as part of his charismatic authority.[130] The holy man, deriving his spiritual authority from his personal connection to God, is empowered "to ignore normal rules of hierarchy and deference, to speak boldly and bluntly [*parrhesia*] before the wealthy and powerful, magistrates, and even emperors, in defending the interests of the ordinary people who looked to him for leadership."[131] Arnaldo Momigliano goes on to stress that holy men even have *parrhesia* when speaking to God: "These have purchased liberty by martyrdom and sanctification, and have a special right to speak to God. They can therefore help other people by speaking to God on their behalf."[132]

[127] E.g., *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (trans. Robert Doran; Cistercian Studies 112; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1992) 155–58. I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for this reference.

[128] In comparison, the story told by Cyril of Scythopolis about the holy man Euthymius during a drought in Jeruslaem emphasizes that no promises were made for rain: "[Euthymius then] went into his oratory without making any promises. Casting himself on his face, he begged God with tears to have mercy on His creation. . . . As he was praying, there suddenly blew up a south wind, the sky was filled with douds, heavy rain descended and there was a great storm" (Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* [trans. R. M. Price; Cistercian Studies 114; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1991] 34–35).

[129] I am thankful to Dov Weiss for sharing an unpublished paper with me, which uses the concept of *parrhesia* to explain the "confrontational theme" emerging in later rabbinic literature—mostly in the *Tanhuma* literature ("Confronting God in the *Tanhuma Midrashim*" [as part of the Starr seminar at Harvard University, Spring of 2012]).

[130] Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

[131] Michael Gaddis, *There is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005) 152, summarizing Peter Brown, "Arbiters of the Holy: The Christian Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 57–78. See also James Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life," in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (ed. James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette; Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004) 86 on Michel Foucault's analysis of the term *parrhesia* as serving a dual purpose in early Christian texts.

[132] Arnaldo Momigliano, "Freedom of Speech in Antiquity," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (ed. Philip P. Wiener; New York: Scribner, 1973) 252–63.

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Thus the rabbinic traditions concerning Honi, are better understood in light of the monastic traditions about the Christian holy men, such as Abba Moses and Simeon, and the concept of *parrhesia*, depicting them all as speaking out to God, for the needs of their people.[133]

Talking to the Dead

Another example in rabbinic literature for a shared attribute between rabbis and those of the monastic holy man is the ability to talk to the dead. In *b. Berakhot* 18b (MS Oxford 366) there are several stories in which rabbis ask for and obtain information from the dead:

> Come and hear; for Ze'iri deposited some money with his landlady, and while he was away visiting Rab she died. So he went after her to the cemetery and said to her, "Where is my money?" She replied to him, "In the hole of the doorpost, in such and such a place, and tell my mother to send me my comb and my tube of eye-paint by the hand of So-and-so who is coming here tomorrow." . . . Come and hear: The father of Samuel had some money belonging to orphans deposited with him. When he died, Samuel was not with him, and they called him, "the son who consumes the money of orphans." So he went after his father to the cemetery. . . . He then said to him, "Where is the money of the orphans?" [He replied]: "In the case of the millstones. The money at the top and the bottom is mine, that in the middle is the orphans.' So that if thieves took, they should take mine, and if the earth destroyed any, it should destroy mine."

In these stories the reason for consulting the dead is the need to learn the location of lost money known to the deceased but to no one else. The money in both stories is a deposit. In the second story, the loss of the deposit has ramifications for the financial condition of orphans.

The following story about the famous desert father Macarius the Great highlights his special abilities and tells of a conversation he had with the dead:

> Abba Sisoes said, "When I was at Scetis with Macarius, we went up, seven of us, to bring in the harvest. Now a widow cried out behind us and would not stop weeping. So the old man called the owner of the field and said to him, 'What is the matter with the woman that she goes on weeping?' 'It is because her husband received a deposit in trust from someone and he died suddenly without saying where he had hidden it, and the owner of the deposit wants to take her and her children and make slaves of them.' The old man said to him, 'Tell her to come to us when we take our mid-day rest.' The woman came, and the old man said to her, 'Why are you weeping all the time like this?' She replied, 'My husband, who had received a deposit on trust from

[133] We may note that in addition to the power of holy men to bring rain, another shared motif is the ability to control the powers of nature. The holy man exerts mastery over animals in general and dangerous animals in particular. See Eliezer Diamond, "Lions, Snakes and Asses: Palestinian Jewish Holy Men as Masters of the Animal Kingdom," in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (ed. Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz; Louvain: Peeters, 2003) 251–83.

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> someone, has died and he did not say when he died where he had put it.' The old man said to her, 'Come, show me where you have buried him.' Taking the brethren with him, he went with her. When they had come to the place, the old man said to her, 'Go away to your house.' While the brethren prayed, the old man asked the dead man, 'So-and-so, where have you put the deposit?' The corpse replied, 'It is hidden in the house, at the foot of the bed.' The old man said, 'Rest again, until the day of resurrection.' When they saw this, the brethren were filled with fear and threw themselves at his feet. But the old man said to them, 'It is not for my sake that this has happened, for I am nothing, but it is because of the widow and the orphans that God has performed this miracle. This is what is remarkable, that God wants the soul to be without sin and grants it all it asks.' He went to tell the widow where the deposit was. Taking it, she returned it to its owner and thus freed her children. All who heard this story gave glory to God."[134]

The rabbinic stories and this monastic tale are similar in several ways. First, in both stories the protagonists, the rabbis and Abba Macarius, are able to solve a seemingly unsolvable problem by communicating with the dead. Second, the reason that Macarius, as well as the rabbis, go into the burial ground to talk to the dead man is specifically to locate a lost deposit. Third, in the Samuel story, as well as in the monastic source, the fact that the deposit has been lost has dire ramifications. In both texts, the lost deposit affects the livelihood of society's most vulnerable—orphans and widows. In fact, in both stories the excuse for talking to the dead is the severity of the situation at hand. The significance of the money and its effect on the orphans is mentioned explicitly in Samuel's father's efforts to protect the deposit from both thieves and natural causes, as well as in the Abba's statement that communicating with the dead is possible only because of the orphans.

To name one difference, only in the Christian text do we sense some kind of discomfort over the act of communicating with the dead. On the one hand, the tale highlights Macarius's special talents and high spiritual level, allowing him to perform such tasks as talking to the dead. On the other hand, the uniqueness of his actions is manifested by the reaction of the other monks ("the brethren were filled with fear and threw themselves at his feet") and by his own statement: "It is not for my sake that this has happened, for I am nothing, but it is because of the widow and the orphans that God has performed this miracle." This special circumstance involving the fate of orphans and widows is what enabled the extraordinary act of communication with the dead. Macarius's words to the dead man are also testimony to the exceptional nature of this communication: "Rest again, until the day of resurrection." In other words, communication with the dead should occur only at the time of resurrection, but the need of orphans and widows can generate an exception.

[134] Macarius the Great 7 (PG 65:265; Ward, *Sayings*, 128).

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In the rabbinic stories, we see no such discomfort over the act of communicating with the dead. The first tale conveys no qualms about the act but simply relates that the rabbi's deposit was missing, prompting him to speak to his dead landlady. The storytellers depict the rabbis' actions in both stories as natural and portray no misgivings about their interference with the natural order of things (i.e., they give no statement to the effect that the dead are not to be disturbed until the resurrection). Even though the second story involves orphans who will suffer needlessly if the money is not recovered, the story does not dwell on their need and almost gives the impression that even on other occasions Samuel would talk to his dead father. Certainly, it was this specific circumstance that prompted him to do so, but it did not uniquely *enable* him to do so.

Conclusion

The closeness of the rabbinic and the monastic worlds, as manifested in their respective literatures, is evident in the examples given above as well as in others. Similarities arise from human reactions to issues, such as the appropriateness of anger or laughter as qualities of the holy man. Sometimes, however, one can posit a more or less genealogical relationship between the sources. The image of the stony heart eroded by water that is the word of God and the stories about sages communicating with the dead to locate a lost deposit—these appear to be more than simple analogues. In these cases, though this is not the main argument of this article, I suggest we may, with further study of the sources, find a more genealogical literary relationship.

The goal of the survey presented here is to prompt a reconsideration of the relationship between the rabbinic and monastic texts. First and foremost, the time has come to put these two corpora of texts side by side and examine the relationship between them.

The ramifications of such a comparison are crucial for the study of both Judaism and Christianity in the ancient world as well as the study of specific topics in the history of their development, such as the formation of spiritual aspects in the Jewish and Christian milieus. Furthermore, as this paper demonstrates, general statements as to the nature of the two corpora should be nuanced. Each case merits careful assessment, based on a full account of all textual versions as well as the range of views within these texts.

Finally, this survey gives us the necessary background for future investigations. Having established the common ground of rabbinic and monastic culture, it is now worthwhile to proceed carefully to an examination of examples that appear especially close. Only then can we take up the historical question of literary contacts between rabbinic authors and their monastic contemporaries.

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