Historical, Mythical and Religious Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud in their Middle Persian Context

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ABSTRACT

Historical, Mythical and Religious Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud in their Middle Persian Context

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This dissertation offers a comparative study between a number of Talmudic and Middle Persian narratives. The present work seeks first and foremost to examine Talmudic narratives in their Iranian context, and secondly to examine the Talmudic background of Iranian narratives where applicable.

The first and second chapters will offer an analysis of the alteration of historical and Biblical figures in the Bavli (the Babylonian Talmud) based on the influence of Iranian mythical and historical figures, while the third chapter will provide an account of how Iranists can learn from Talmudic Studies. Here we suggest that a Talmudic narrative may have encouraged Zoroastrian priests to compose an extensive work of religious literature, namely the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, an idea which will be further explored in the appendix.

The relationship between Iranian and Jewish materials in the Talmudic era is merely a piece of a larger puzzle, a piece that a number of scholars—such as Elman, Secunda, Mokhtarian, Herman, Kiel, Kalmin etc.—have recently begun to focus on. By focusing on Talmudic narratives that have not yet been sufficiently examined for Iranian themes and ideas, this dissertation represents a contribution towards piecing this puzzle together.

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Abbreviations, Citations and Terminology

The transcription of Hebrew and Aramaic follows the basic conventions of Jewish studies, while the transcription of Middle Persian principally accords with D.N. MacKenzie's system, which is predominant in Iranian studies. For example, "long" vowels are marked only in the transcription of Iranian (ā, ē, ī, ō, ū), and the letter shin, for instance, appears as "š" in Iranian and "sh" in the transcription of Hebrew/Aramaic.

All translations of Pahlavi texts are my own, unless otherwise stated in the footnotes. All translations of the Babylonian Talmud are from the Soncino translation of the Talmud, unless otherwise stated in the footnotes. I only note variants that are significant for the immediate discussion or which reflect profound differences in meaning.

The names of the tractates are spelled out based on the SBL style guide, and the tractates are from the Babylonian Talmud unless otherwise stated. Finally, Persian words and expressions are transcribed based on Encyclopedia Iranica's method (all classical Persian translations, such as Šāh-nāma, are my own as well).

Introduction

This dissertation is an investigation and analysis of Talmudic narratives that had not previously been sufficiently examined for Iranian themes and ideas. My first step will be to compare a number of narratives between the two traditions. In the emerging field known as Irano-Talmudica Studies, any study must begin by identifying similar thoughts, ideas and motifs within the Iranian and Talmudic traditions. This initial step of discovery can be quite time-consuming, since the Talmud is a voluminous composition containing many individual narratives and the similarities with those found in the Iranian tradition are not always obvious.

Irano-Talmudica scholars must deal with the fact that the narratives, myths, and literary motifs they seek are sporadically scattered throughout the Talmud. Furthermore, the various Middle Persian (Pahlavi) texts exist in a range of genres and were composed in different times and places. Irano-Talmudica scholars must navigate these challenges in order to find common motifs and thoughts between the two traditions and draw connections as to the significance of the similarities they find—in other words, their job is to try to explain how and to what extent each narrative, myth or idea was influential, and also to articulate the process and outcome of the borrowing and lending of ideas between Jews and Zoroastrians.

The present work seeks first and foremost to examine Talmudic narratives in their Iranian context, then secondly to examine the Talmudic background of Iranian narratives where applicable. Our principal aim is to demonstrate how Biblical figures that appear in the Talmud—such as Solomon or Moses—have been transformed based on Iranian ideas and myths. Through such an approach we learn, for example, that the differences between the Biblical and the Talmudic Solomon figures can be explained through the influence of Iranian literature. It also

reveals the presence of historical (non-Biblical) figures such as Herod in the Talmud. With regard to Herod specifically, our research will demonstrate that the Talmudic sages seem to have transformed his character based on Iranian narratives. The second focus of our thesis—examining Iranian materials in their Talmudic context—demonstrates how Iranists can benefit from familiarizing themselves with the Talmud.

The first and second chapters will offer an analysis of the alteration of historical and Biblical figures in the Bavli (the Babylonian Talmud) based on the influence of Iranian mythical and historical figures, while the third chapter will provide an account of how Iranists can learn from Talmudic Studies. Here we suggest that a Talmudic narrative may have encouraged Zoroastrian priests to compose an extensive work of religious literature, namely the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, an idea which will be further explored in the Appendix.

The Bavli was compiled during a vast period of around 400 years (220-500 CE), by rabbis who resided in Sasanian Mesopotamia. According to the 10th-century Iranian Muslim geographer Ebn Ḵordādbeh, Mesopotamia was understood as the "heart of Iran" throughout most of Iranian history—as he states in his *Ketāb al-masālek wa'l-mamālek*, "I begin [my book] from Savad [Iraq], that was called by Persian kings the heart of Ērānšahr…"[1] Although by the Sasanian era there were Jewish communities living throughout Iran—in Bukhara, Isfahan, Hamadān, etc.—only the Jewish community that resided in Mesopotamia was engaged with composing the Bavli. Irano-Talmudica scholars have thus primarily concentrated on this community, and the present work will follow suit.

[1] M. Mohammadi Malayeri, "Tārīḵ va Farhang-e Iran Dar Dorān-e Enteqāl az Asr-e Sasani be Asr-e Eslāmī: Del-e Ērānšahr," in *History and Culture of Iran Transforming from Sasanian to Islamic era: The Heartland of Iran*, vol. II, (Tehran, Tus Publicatios, Ltd.1375, 1996), 148.

Trying to understand the social, political and cultural status of this community—both independently and in relation to other people and communities living in Sasanian Mesopotamia—is an ongoing concern in this field. Yaakov Elman, who initiated a new wave and a new approach to Irano-Talmudica Studies, believes that Jews were politically and culturally at ease in the Sasanian Empire. Explaining this position he states, "…they felt at ease in a more personal way, in language and social relations, so much so that some Babylonian rabbis of the late third and fourth centuries felt compelled to discourage social relations between Jews and non-Jews. The ongoing nature of such legislation and anecdotes preserved in the Talmud itself indicate that this effort was far from totally successful."[2] While he acknowledges that certain political conditions, such as the conversion of the Roman Empire—the Persian Empire's traditional enemy and competitor—to Christianity, and the differing attitudes of various Sasanian kings and Zoroastrian high priests towards religious minorities[3] did impact Jewish life in Sasanian Mesopotamia in various ways, Elman nevertheless maintains that, in general, Babylonian Jews were at ease in this cosmopolitan socio-political context.[4]

This dissertation has not concerned itself with the basic questions of whether or not Middle Persian literature and culture impacted the compositions of the Babylonian sages, or whether Jewish sages and Zoroastrian priests exchanged knowledge and ideas. There is already a significant body of scholarship that has answered these questions in the affirmative,[5] so the present work will take it as established that Middle Persian literature and culture did in fact

[2] Yaakov Elman, "Talmud ii. Rabbinic Literature and Middle Persian Texts," *Encyclopedia Iranica,* online edition, 2010, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/talmud-ii (accessed on 1 August 2016). See also Charlotte Fonrobert, Martin Jaffee, the Cambridge Companion to the Talmud, 2007.
[3] The Talmudic narratives that illustrate how Babylonian/Palestinian Jews understood their situation under the Persian/Roman Empires will be addressed in Chapter One.
[4] Especially in comparison with the situation of Jews in Roman Palestine.
[5] See footnote six for a sampling of this literature.

impact the Bavli and that there was some level of interaction between Talmudic sages and Zoroastrian priests during the Sasanian/Talmudic period. One of my main concerns, then, is with demonstrating how an examination of Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, as well as post-Islamic Iranian materials, shows that the relationship between Iranian and Jewish materials in the Talmudic era evidences a substantive historical and cultural dynamic between these two communities, a dynamic that began approximately 3000 years ago and continues to this day. In other words, the relationship between Iranian and Jewish materials in the Talmudic era is merely a piece of a larger puzzle, a piece that a number of scholars—such as Elman, Secunda, Mokhtarian, Herman, Kiel, Kalmin etc.[6]—have recently begun to focus on. So, by focusing on Talmudic narratives that have not yet been sufficiently examined for Iranian themes and ideas, this dissertation represents a contribution towards piecing this puzzle together.

Building on the scholarly consensus that there is enough archeological and Talmudic evidence to confirm at least *some* amount of contact between Jews and non-Jews in Sasanian Mesopotamia, my work will thus be interested in fleshing out what the aforementioned sources can tell us about the manner and impact of these exchanges. This, in turn, will add to the body of scholarship which maintains that the cultural and historical dynamic between these two communities is more substantive than has been traditionally understood.

[6] See: Elman, "Talmud ii. Rabbinic Literature and Middle Persian Texts"; Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Jason Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Geoffrey Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Yishai Kiel, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud: Christian and Sasanian Contexts in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Richard Lee Kalmin, *Migrating Tales: The Talmud's Narratives and Their Historical Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

0.1 Persian Culture and the Sages

Jewish and Zoroastrian religious leaders were—according to the Talmud and Middle Persian texts—quite hostile towards one another, and understanding their exchanges has proven to be a challenging issue in Irano-Talmudica studies.[7] Nevertheless, there are numerous Talmudic narratives which, directly or circuitously, can help us perceive the relationship between Jews and Zoroastrians. In Qidd. 70a, for instance, the encounter between R. Nahman and R. Yehuda gives an account of a culturally Persianized rabbi. The narrative begins with R. Nahman summoning R. Yehuda. R. Yehuda, who lives in Pumbedita, travels to see R. Nahman, and, as the story goes:

> On his [R. Yehuda] arrival there he found him [R. Nahman] making a railing. Said he to him, Do you not accept R. Huna b. Idi's dictum in Samuel's name, Once a man is appointed head of a community, he may not do [manual] labour in the presence of three? — 'I am [merely] making a small portion of a gundritha,' he replied. 'Is not ma'akeh, as written in the Torah, or mehizah, as used by the Rabbis, good enough?' he retorted. Said he to him, 'Sit you down on a karpita [seat].' 'Is not safsal, as used by the Rabbis, or iztaba, as commonly used, good enough?' he asked. 'Will you partake of ethronga [citron],' he proceeded, 'Thus did Samuel say,' was his reply: 'he who says 'ethronga', is a third [puffed up] with arrogance: either ethrog, as it is called by the Rabbis, or ethroga, as it is popularly called.' 'Will you drink anbaga [cup of wine]?' he asked him. 'Are you then dissatisfied with isharagus, as it is called by the Rabbis, or anpak, as it is popularly pronounced?' he reproved him. 'Let [my daughter] Donag come and serve drink,' he proposed. 'Thus said Samuel,' he replied: 'One must not make use of a woman.' '[But] she is only a child!' — 'Samuel distinctly said: One must make no use at all of a woman, whether adult or child.' 'Will you send a greeting to [my wife] Yaltha,' he suggested. 'Thus said Samuel,' he replied, [To listen to] a woman's voice is indecent.' 'It is possible through a messenger?' 'Thus said Samuel,' he retorted.[8]

As this passage indicates, R. Yahuda is not used to the Persianized R. Nahman's choice of words, some of which are versions of Persian words that were not common among rabbis, or

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[7] The Pahlavi book *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* has a whole chapter dedicated to this—see Carlo G. Cereti, "Škand Gumānīg Wizār," *Encyclopedia Iranica,* online edition, 2014, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shkand-gumanig-wizar. Also see: Peshotan Dastur Behramjee Sajana, *The Dinkard: The Original Pahlavi Text*, vol. VI, (Bombay: Duftur Ashlar Press, 1891), 372; Shaul Shaked, "Zoroastrian Polemics against Jews in the Sassanian and Early Islamic Period," in *Irano-Judaica II* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1990), 85-104; the Babylonian tractates Šabb. 11a and Giṭ. 17a.

[8] Isidore Epstein (ed.) *The Babylonian Talmud: Translated, into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices* (London: The Soncino Press, 1935-1948). Online version: Reuven Brauner (ed.), *Reformatted Soncino Talmud,* available at http://halakhah.com/indexrst.html.

even ordinary people—for example, R. Nahman's daughter is named Donag (the Talmudic version of the Persian name Dēnag) which is a royal Persian name. Also of note is the fact that the women in R. Nahman's house are apparently being treated according to Persian customs.

Another issue that is significant for Iranists comes up in this narrative. In four instances R. Yehuda is critical of R. Nahman's word choice, but, rather than suggesting Aramaic or Hebrew words as replacements, he suggests Persian words with different pronunciations. For instance, R. Yehuda suggests *ethrog* or *ethroga*—without the *nun*—instead of R. Nahman's *ethronga,* and he also suggests *anpak* instead of *anbaga*. R. Yehuda's suggestions bring to mind some questions: Why does he find it acceptable to use Persian words that are common among lay people? Did Iranian higher classes use the more ancient pronunciations of the words? What is the difference between the language of the Sasanian higher classes and lay people? Also, if we infer that R. Yehuda means everybody living in the region (not just Jews), when he refers to "common" or "popular" words, it can be further inferred that non-Persian words like *iztaba* were also used by Persian-speaking people in the region. [9]

In R. Yosef's narrative in Soṭah 49a, another interesting intercultural issue arises. As the narrative states, "And R. Joseph said: 'Why use the Syrian language in Babylon? Either use the holy tongue or Persian!'"[10] Here R. Yosef suggests that Jews should either speak Persian or Hebrew, the holy tongue.[11] It appears that he does not see any reason for Jews to speak Aramaic, and his suggestion indicates that Jews could speak some Persian—which helps us make sense of

[9] In modern Persian there are words that are considered to be Arabic, and it is commonly believed that these words entered the Persian language after the Arab conquest of Iran. However, some of these words can be traced back to Aramaic, and the presence of Semitic words in spoken Persian probably has a long history and is not restricted to the post-Arab conquest of Iran.

[10] Brauner (ed.), *Reformatted Soncino Talmud*.

[11] This issue is what actually happened among Iranian Jews ultimately. Iranian Jews today speak a dialect of Persian language, and learn Hebrew for religious purposes.

why R. Yehuda only finds it acceptable to use the words of the rabbis or the words used by common people. In yet another narrative, Giṭ. 19b, we learn that R. Papa also knew Persian. The passage states:

> When R. Papa was called upon to deal with a Persian document drawn up in a heathen registry, he used to give it to two heathens to read, one without the other, without telling them what it was for, and [if they agreed] he would recover on [the strength of] it even from mortgaged property.[12]

So, even though R. Papa does not understand Persian script, it is clear that he knows how to speak Persian, as he asks Persians to read the letters out to him.

While these narratives only offer a small glimpse into the relationship between the two religious groups' leaders, there are other Talmudic expressions that lend themselves more to understanding this relationship, probably among lay people as well. Think, for instance, of the passage in tractate Šabb. (67a) regarding the healing of boils, which contains an incantation using words traditionally understood to be meaningless:

> For boils let him recite as follows: Baz, Bazya [baeshaziyah-], Mas, Masya [masyah-], Kas, Kasya [kasyah-], Sharlai, and Amarlai, these are the angels who were sent from the land of Sodom to heal painful boils. Bazakh, Bazikh, Bazbazikh, Masmasikh, Kamon [kemna Mazda][13], Kamikh, may your appearance remain with you, may your appearance remain with you, May your place remain with you may your seed be like one who is barren and like a mule that is not fruitful and does not multiply, so too, do not increase and do not multiply in the body of so and- so, son of so-and-so.[14]

As the bracketed words above suggest, a few of the "meaningless" words included in this passage actually seem to correspond to some Avestan and Middle Persian adjectives and superlative adjectives. For instance, *bazya* implies the Avestan word *baešaziyah* (doctor), *mas* is an adjective meaning big, *masya* (Av. *masyah-*) is the superlative form of *mas-,* and, finally, *kasya* (Av. *kasyah*), is, again, the superlative form of *kas* which means small or little. Repeating

[12] Ibid. As Yaakov Elman also states: "… Most Mahozans, who shopped in Ctesiphon, must have used it [Persian] to communicate there." In Elman, "Talmud ii. Rabbinic Literature and Middle Persian texts."
[13] *Kemna Mazdah* means "who is it Mazdah…". These are the initial two words of a Nērang prayer from Khordeh Avesta which was being used as exorcism.
[14] Brauner (ed.), *Reformatted Soncino Talmud*. It is interesting to note that the Koren Talmud Bavli provides the exact same pronunciation of this folio.

manthra (spells) from the Avesta was a common Zoroastrian way of healing,[15] and so the presence of these Avestan words in Šabb. 67a seems to support Shai Secunda's assertion that "there is some evidence that Jews studied orally with Zoroastrian priests."[16]

While it is not fully clear which class of Jews learned Zoroastrian spells (Rabbis, lay people, or both), Šabb. 67a seems to be the teaching of a sage, which supports the hypothesis that at least some Rabbis learned these spells. However, in exploring this issue Secunda quotes an ambiguously-worded Talmudic anecdote—"Zutra b. Tuviya said that Rav said…And he who learns something (*davar*) from a magus is worthy of death"[17]—which could suggest that perhaps lay people also learned spells from Zoroastrian priests. In this short passage Rav Zutra b. Tuviya is presumably warning against a crime that is already being committed by some Jews, but there is no clear indication whether the "he" referred to is a Rabbi or lay person. Because of the strongly worded warning contained in the passage, Secunda concludes that it "may serve as evidence that the Jews were learning Avestan texts from Zoroastrian priests which they thought were magically efficacious."[18]

As Gideon Bohak notes in *Ancient Jewish Magic*, Jewish sages were fond of using *voces magicae*, which further supports the prevalence of this type of cultural exchange. As he states,

> …from late antiquity onwards the Jewish magicians too were very much infatuated with such abracadabra words. Their fondness for *voces magicae* may itself be the result of non-Jewish influence – it has no precedents in the Hebrew Bible or those Jewish texts of the Second Temple period to which we have any access – but such claims are a priori impossible to substantiate. The use of such *voces* is well attested in many magical traditions all over the world, including some which certainly were not influenced by the Greco-Egyptian magic of late antiquity. And in antiquity itself, the use of meaningless "words" seems to have been common in many different cultures…[19]

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[15] *Vīdēvdāt*, fragard 7, 20-22 and 44 all state that the best healers use *manthras* (spells). See Antonio Panaino, "Magic i. Magical Elements in the Avesta and Nērang literature", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Online edition (accessed on 17 December 2017).
[16] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud,* 43.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, 46.
[19] Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259.

Another window into Jewish-Zoroastrian exchanges during this time, as Secunda notes, is the phenomenon of the *bei abeidan* (house/place of abeidan), which is an abode vaguely described in the Bavli.[20] Secunda argues that there is textual evidence to support the idea that the *bei abeidan* was a hall where the sages of different religious beliefs could gather and engage in apologetics. To support this he notes that Šabb. 116a indicates that the *bei abeidan* housed Torah scrolls as well as scrolls from other religious faiths, and that there was some disagreement between Rabbis on whether or not to go there—while Rab and Raba preferred not to enter, Shmuel and Mar the son of Rav Yosef did.[21] As is stated in Šabb. 116a, "Mar b. Joseph said: I am one of them and do not fear them. On one occasion he went there [to the *bei abeidan* and] they wanted to harm him."[22]

Further supporting the idea of the *bei abeidan* as a house of religious exchange and apologetics, Secunda argues, is the fact that Talmudic sages apparently preferred the *bei abeidan* to an exclusively Christian house of worship called *bei nizrafei* in the Bavli. As he states, "the *bei abeidan* and apparently Christian house of worship known as the *bei nizrafei* were compared with one another, and the *bei abeidan* fared better in some rabbinic eyes, apparently since it was not deemed heterodox."[23] Finally, to add to Secunda's hypothesis, considering that traces of

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[20] The term *abeidan* is probably derived from Old Persian *Apadāna* (Parthian *ʾpdn(y), ʾpdnk(y)*), meaning a hypostyle audience hall. Secunda, in agreement with Shaul Shaked, suggests: "…[the] Middle Aramaic "*abeidan*" developed from the Iranian compound **baγ-dān*. Not unlike the Old Persian word *daiva-dāna*, used in Xerxes' inscription at Persepolis to denote "temple of the *daivas*," "*abeidan*" could mean a temple of the baγ, or god" (Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 51). However, I suggest that the word developed in two different ways and entered Aramaic with two different pronunciations and connotations. It means both palace (Aramaic '*pdn'*) and an audience hall (*Aramaic bei Abeidan*). The role of initial *aleph* in *Abeidan* in Shaked's analysis, however, remains unclear to me.

[21] For more information regarding the *bei abeidan* see: Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 50-63, and "The Talmudic *Bei Abedan* and the Sasanian Attempt to 'Recover' the Lost Avesta," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2011): 343-366.

[22] Brauner (ed.), *Reformatted Soncino Talmud*.

[23] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud,* 58.

apologetic texts can be found in later Middle Persian works, such as *Škand Gumānīg Wizār, Mādayān ī Gujastag Abāliš* and the *Dēnkard,*[24] the existence of some sort of audience hall for religious disputations in a context as diverse as Late Antique Mesopotamia (Sasanian Asōristān) does seem plausible.[25]

Speaking about a passage from the *Dēnkard* which discusses the proper storage of various religious texts under King Šapur I, Secunda further theorizes the existence of an interreligious library, but qualifies this by emphasizing the fact that the *Dēnkard* passage cannot be treated as a definite historical account; as he asserts:

> In light of my analysis of the *bei abeidan* traditions, the *Dēnkard* account is fascinating in the way it combines official Sasanian disputations, a distinct kind of interreligious exploration, Zoroastrian priests, "countrymen," various heretics, and the storage of scriptural books. In particular, the description of King Shapur I discussing whether to place writings kept outside the "canon" together with the Avesta conjures up images of an interreligious library such as may be assumed in Yosef b. Ḥavushma's question [his query in the Bavli suggests that there were Torah and other religious scrolls collected in *Bei abeidan*]. While it is important to stress that the *Dēnkard* passage cannot be treated as a transparent historical account, like the *bei abeidan* sources it too may be seen as reflecting traditions that circulated among a Sasanian community— in this case at King Khusrau I's court and more generally in Zoroastrian culture.[26]

Furthermore, the *Mādayān ī Gujastag Abāliš* —a Pahlavi text believed to be written by Adur Farrōbay Farroxzādān—depicts the presence of Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Muslim sages

[24] It should be noted that in the *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* and *Dēnkard*, which were written by prominent Zoroastrian priests around 9th Century CE, Judaism is heavily criticized. In *SGW* the author seems to be engaged with the Bible, and consults a number of Biblical verses in his book. See: Samuel Thrope, "The Genealogy of Abraham: The Zoroastrian critique of Judaism Beyond Jewish Literature," *History of Religions* 54, no. 3 (February 2015): 318-345; Samuel Thorpe, "Contradictions and Vile Utterances: The Zoroastrian Critique of Judaism in the Škand Gumānīg Wizār" (PhD dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2012).

[25] Regarding apologetics in Pahlavi literature, Carlo Cereti asserts: "The first three books of the Dēnkard (books III, IV, and V) all share a common apologetic nature, expounding the precepts of the Good Religion and polemicizing with other religions of the time, mainly Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, though a few chapters are directed also against the dualistic religion founded by Mani. The material found in these books seems to be a re-writing of the precepts found in the Pahlavi commentary to the Avesta, inspired by it, but not directly deriving from it." (Carlo Cereti, "Middle Persian Literature," in *Encyclopedia Iranica,* online edition, 2009, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/middle-persian-literature-1-pahlavi edition (accessed on 17 December 2017).)

[26] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 61.

debating in Caliph Ma'mūn's court, which supports the idea that this tradition continued during the reign of Abbasid Caliph Ma'mūn as well.[27]

If we understand the function and quality of the *Bei Abeidan* correctly, this demonstrates that Jewish sages and Zoroastrian priests exchanged ideas through direct contact. If we further accept as historical fact what the *Mādayān ī Gujastag Abāliš* states about debates between religious leaders, we can be confident in assuming that a significant amount of contact between the sages and priests took place. There are also narratives in the Bavli that suggest this kind of contact, one of which is a religious debate between a Magi and Amemar:

> A magi once said to Amemar: From the middle of thy [body] upwards thou belongest to Ormuzd; from the middle downwards, to Ahriman. The latter asked: Why then does Ahriman permit Ormuzd to send water through his territory? (Sanh. 39a)

This narrative clearly states that a Zoroastrian priest and Amemar were discussing religious issues, and, more specifically, shows Amemar challenging a well-known Zoroastrian belief, the issue of separation between upper and lower parts of the body.[28] As the *Mādayān ī Gujastag Abāliš* reads: "Every element of the upper part of the body such as hearing, smelling, brain and mind etc. is a place of sacred beings and the upper part of the body is similar to heaven. And the lower part of body produces filth and dirt, and contains urinary bladder etc. and is the place for Ahriman etc." These examples thus provide us with a basic picture of what is pursued by Irano-Talmudica scholars: issues related to understanding how Iranian culture impacted the Bavli, the extent to which it impacted it, and the specific areas that were impacted.

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[27] As the *Mādayān ī Gujastag Abāliš* states, "… in order to debate with all the sages of Zoroastrians and Arabs, Jews and Christians of Pārs, he [Abāliš] moved toward Bagdād to the court of Ma'mūn Amir Momenin, and Ma'mūn Amir Momenin commanded that all his sages and also Jewish and Christian sages come to his [court] and debate with Abāliš," My translation, from: *Mādayān ī Gujastag Abāliš* (1375). Persian translation by Ebrahim Mirza-ye Nazer, (Tehran: Hirman, 1996).

[28] It is worth mentioning here that a new Jewish sect called Hasidim actually believes in a belt called *gartel* (Yiddish for 'belt') that separates the upper and lower parts of the body during prayer for the same reason that Zoroastrians mentioned. See Shulchan Aruch/Orach Chaim 91:2.

As noted above, the focus of my own investigation is twofold: while my first two chapters will offer an analysis of the Iranian influence on specific Jewish historical and mythical figures—such as Herod, Solomon, Moses, and King Og—the third chapter will aim to demonstrate that the Bavli is also a beneficial resource for Iranian Studies scholars.

0.2 Outline of the Dissertation

The first chapter is historical, and examines how historical facts are dealt with in tractate B. Bat. 3b-4a, and the Middle Persian text *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān*. I will primarily be interested in demonstrating that the story about Herod in tractate B. Bat. was inspired by narratives that surround the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān, and will accomplish this by examining the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* in relationship to the argument put forward by Geoffrey Rubenstein in "King Herod in Ardaxšēr's Court: The Rabbinic Story of Herod (B. Bat.3b–4a) in Light of Persian Sources."[29] While this will form the primary focus of the chapter, I will also consider some other Iranian sources and Sasanian kings mentioned in the Talmud.

In the second chapter, which concerns Talmudic and Middle Persian mythology, I explore the course of mythological transmissions from the Avestan and Middle Persian to the Talmudic and post-Islamic literature of Iran. Specifically, I will be interested in comparing some prominent mythical figures in the Jewish tradition with specific Iranian mythical Personages—the Talmudic King Solomon will be compared with Jamšīd, and the Talmudic King Og with Gandarawa Dēw (as these figures appear in both the Avesta and Middle and Classical Persian literature).

[29] *AJS Review* 38, no. 2 (November 2014): 249-274.

The third chapter seeks to demonstrate the value of the Bavli for Iranists by exploring a hypothesis which states that certain ideas in the Bavli may have provided a framework for Zoroastrian priests to compose some significant compositions, such as *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*. Accomplishing this requires an examination of some religious issues and ideas circulating at this time regarding the Hereafter. I have intentionally chosen subjects and motifs with debatable paths of entrance into the Jewish tradition—for example: heaven and hell, resurrection, last judgment etc., notions which are likely Zoroastrian imports.[30] However, I will not be arguing that the exchange of ideas only flowed one way, from Zoroastrians to Jews. While traces of Zoroastrian motifs are indeed present in different Talmudic narratives, I will also argue that Giṭ. 56b-57a is likely the inspiration behind the creation of the Pahlavi text *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, which demonstrates that some motifs concerning the Hereafter also flowed from Jews to Zoroastrians.

The appendix continues exploring this wider hypothesis by examining a Talmudic narrative that appears in the Classical Persian work *Asrār Nāma* by Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī. No similar narrative exists in surviving Middle Persian compositions, and while this narrative could have been inspired by Middle Persian materials that have been lost to history, I will suggest that it is more plausible that it entered Persian literature through the poet's engagement with Quranic commentary (*tafsīr*), which is itself impacted by Talmudic narratives.

Throughout these explorations I aim to demonstrate that the study of the impact of Pahlavi literature and culture on the Babylonian Talmud will be more comprehensive if we study the impact of Talmudic and Middle Persian narratives on post-Islamic sources. For instance, in

[30] For instance R. C. Zaehner argues in *Comparison of Religions* that Zoroastrianism had a direct influence on Jewish eschatological myths, especially the resurrection of the dead with rewards and punishments (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 134-53.

Chapter One, which deals with Herod and Ardashir's narratives, it will be demonstrated that the consideration of post-Islamic sources complicates the idea of a straightforward transmission from Pahlavi to Jewish sources.[31] Widening the scope in this way further demonstrates that certain themes that seem common to both Iranian and Babylonian sources were not simply copied from one side, but rather creatively grafted onto, and adapted to fit, the framework of preexisting rabbinic legends as reported in earlier Palestinian traditions.[32] Finally, while the preceding discussion has primarily focused on how Iranian ideas and culture affected Jewish/Talmudic ideas and culture, there are also traces of Talmudic thoughts and motifs in Iranian materials which need more examination, and my thesis will also touch on the influence of Jewish ideas/culture on Iranian ideas/culture.

0.3 Recent Studies in Irano-Talmudica

While there is a longstanding tradition of studying Jewish and Zoroastrian thoughts and beliefs alongside one another[33]—for example, the ninth-century CE *Škand gumānīg wizār*[34] is widely considered to be a critical comparative work in this regard—the field of Irano-Talmudica studies (or, Talmudo-Iranica studies) is a rather new field of study that originated out of the work of Yaakov Elman, who focused on studying the Talmud in its Iranian context. Although the relatively late development of this specific field is perhaps curious, as studying the Greco-Roman

[31] This will be accomplished by examining a letter found in Tabari's *History*, the content of which corresponds to the Talmudic narrative concerning Herod, but is dissimilar to the letters we find in *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān*. I will argue that this discrepancy could mean that the Talmudic and Tabari narratives were not using the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* as source material. See Rubenstein, "King Herod in Ardashir's Court," 249-274.

[32] For instance, specific features attributed to the Talmudic figure of King Og of Bashan are also present in the Hebrew Bible, and it can also be argued that his Talmudic characterization seems to take on some features of an Avestan dragon.

[33] See Yaakov Elman, ''Acculturation to Elite Persian Norms and Modes of Thought in the Babylonian Jewish Community of Late Antiquity,'' in *Neti'ot Le-David*, ed. Y. Elman et al. (Jerusalem: Orhot, 2004), 31–56.

[34] Authored by Mardan Farrokh.

context of the Talmud had already proven fruitful,[35] there were some scholars before Elman who did foreshadow its development, namely Ludwig Steinheim, Jacob Neusner and E.S. Rosenthal.

While Steinheim makes a remark in 1840 noting the importance of studying Middle Persian for understanding the Talmud,[36] a generation later Neusner would wonder "why the study of comparative law that involves the Babylonian Talmud had not included within its purview 'the Pahlavi book *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* [The Book of a Thousand Decisions],'"[37] and by 1982 E.S. Rosenthal was advising Talmudists to master Middle Persian (Pahlavi) as a prerequisite to Talmudic study—"not as an occasional ancillary, but as a necessary preparation for their studies; at the same time he provided a model for such work."[38] While these figures can thus be understood as paving the way for Irano-Talmudica studies, the current discipline should mostly be accredited to the efforts of Yaakov Elman, who has produced a substantive body work inspecting the influence of Sasanian culture on the Babylonian rabbis.[39]

In a presentation given at the Chautauqua Institution in 2008, Elman explicitly affirmed the value of Iranian studies for Talmudists by noting a specific incident that took place in one of his Talmud classes. One of his students had drawn attention to a particularly complicated issue in the Talmud, and Elman was able to demonstrate that how this issue could be solved simply by considering the Talmud's Iranian context. Elman states that his research motivated a number of his students to study Middle Persian and other Iranian languages, and thus furthered the project

[35] For more on this see Peter Schafer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).
[36] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 11.
[37] Yaakov Elman, "'Up to the Ears' in Horses' Necks (B.M. 108a): On Sasanian Agricultural Policy and Private Domain," *JSIJ* 3 (2004): 97.
[38] Elman, "'Up to the Ears,'" 96. Also see: Yaakov Elman, "La-Milon ha-Talmudi: Talmudica Iranica," in Shaul Shaked, ed., Irano- Judaica, Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-Zvi, 1982, pp. 38-131, p. 38.)
[39] This stance is one that Shai Secunda also shares (see: *The Iranian Talmud*).

of distinguishing Irano-Talmudica studies as a discrete discipline [40] While other scholars such as Isaiah Gafni, Maria Macuch, Shaul Shaked and Daniel Sperber were doing work in this area in the 1990s[41] prior to this, it is important to note that these scholars were not especially or exclusively focused on the Talmud in its Iranian/Sasanian context—it is perhaps more apt to say their works occasionally touched on the subject.

By distinguishing Irano-Talmudica studies as an independent field of study, then, Elman's works encouraged a number of scholars to dedicate themselves exclusively to understanding the Talmud in its Iranian/Sasanian context. Among the most important scholars who are specifically trained as Irano-Talmudist/Talmudo-Iranists are Shai Secunda (Elman's student), Jason Mokhtarian, Geoffrey Herman, Yishai Kiel, and Reuven Kipperwasser.[42] Further highlighting the newness of the field is the fact that the first conference dedicated to Irano-Talmudica/Talmudo-Iranica studies was held at UCLA only as recently as 2007, and it was here that the aforementioned Irano-Talmudists/Talmudo-Iranists gathered together for the first time. The revised proceedings were published in 2010, in an edited volume entitled *The Talmud in its*

[40] Yaakov Elman, "Iran, the Magi, and the Jews," (Lecture, Chautauqua Institution, NY, 2008). http://library.fora.tv/2011/08/02/Yaakov_Elman_Iran_the_Magi_and_the_Jews

[41] See Isaiah Gafni, "Converts and Conversion in Sasanian Babylonia," in *Nation and History: Studies in the History of the Jewish people*, ed. Menahem Stern (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1983), 192-206; Gafni, "The Political, Social, and Economic History of Babylonian Jewry, 224-638 C.E.," in *The Cambridge History of Jerusalem, Vol. 4, The Late Roman–Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 840-76; Maria Macuch, "Jewish Jurisdiction within the Framework of the Sasanian Legal System," in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations Between Jews, Iranians, and Babylonians in Antiquity*, eds. Uri Gabbay and Shai Secunda (Tubingen: Mohe Siebeck, 2014), 147-163; Shaul Shaked, "Bagdāna King of Demons and other Iranian terms in Babylonian Aramaic Magic," *Acta Iranica* 25, no. 2 (1985): 511-525; Shaul Shaked, "A Persian House of Study, A King's Secretary: Irano-Aramaica Notes," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Sxientiarum Hungaricae* 48 (1995):171-86; Shaul Shaked, "Popular Religions in Sasanian Babylonia," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21, (1997): 103-117; Daniel Sperber, "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A passage of Saboraic polemic from Sasanian Persia," in *Irano-Judaica I: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1982), 83-100.

[42] While not specifically Irano-Talmudists, Jeffrey Rubenstein and Richard Kalmin have also produced significant works on the subject.

Iranian Context, and this work represents the first edited volume dedicated exclusively to the field.[43]

So far, there are only a few monographs specifically dedicated to the field. In 2006 Kalmin published *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine,*[44] and in 2012 came Herman's *A Prince without a Kingdom*,[45] both of which explore the situation of the Babylonian Jews in Sasanian Babylonia and their interactions with Iranians, but neither of which specifically focus on the Talmud. The first monograph explicitly dedicated to the field is thus Shai Secunda's 2013 work, *The Iranian Talmud*.[46] Next came Jason Mokhtarin's *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings and Priests*,[47] published in 2015, and the latest work is Yishai Kiel's *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud* (2016).[48]

In his seminal work Secunda makes the assertion that the relative newness of the field means the comparative study of the Bavli and non-rabbinic Sasanian texts has not seen adequate methodological or theoretical reflection,[49] and thus sets this as his task: to establish, from the ground up, the initial stages of a theoretical and methodological program for studying the Talmud in its Sasanian context.[50] A central concern for Secunda is the seemingly insular and self-sufficient character of the Bavli and Middle Persian texts, which he explains might mislead us with regards to the relationship between their authors. As Secunda states, the "relatively

[43] Carol Bakhos and Rahim Shayegan*, The Talmud in its Iranian context,* (Mohr Siebeck) 2010.
[44] Richard Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006).
[45] Geoffrey Herman, *A Prince Without a Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).
[46] Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
[47] Jason Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran,* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).
[48] Yishai Kiel, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud: Christian and Sasanian Contexts in Late Antiquity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[49] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 6.
[50] Ibid., 7.

closed nature of the Talmud and indeed of many Sasanian religious texts makes it possible to incorrectly conclude that the different communities that produced these works were distant from one another."[51] Secunda's main goal is thus to attempt to find evidence which demonstrates that the composers of Jewish and Persian texts of Sasanian era did interact with one another,[52] and he asserts that proving such historical interactions will set the stage for his central claim: "one can perceive the Bavli's interaction with its Iranian cultural and literary context not only in Talmudic anecdotes concerning Sasanian people, materials, and institutions, but also—especially—in the textual shifts in and resonances of seemingly insular rabbinic texts that transmit and reconfigure earlier, frequently Palestinian traditions."[53]

Secunda's methodological approach is multifaceted. He suggests reading strategies that do not overlook the "style and genre of the Bavli, Middle Persian literature, and other Sasanian texts, yet still allow for a mutually informed and informing reading of the different corpora."[54] Such reading strategies, he suggests, reflect "… a methodology for drawing comparisons and parallels [that] thereby consider the different kinds of models that can be used to explain convergences and divergences between the Bavli and Middle Persian texts." [55] Other methodological issues, like the orality of the Bavli and Middle Persian literature, are also treated in some detail.[56] Like many other Talmudists, Secunda believes that the Bavli cannot be accurately understood without considering the rich Iranian world in which it was created;[57] as he states, the text of the Bavli should be understood as being "… constantly engaged with its

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 33.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 7.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 6.

context, even when it does not directly quote it."[58] However, he states that reading the Bavli contextually is not sufficient on its own—the ways Sasanian Jews and their neighbors (especially their Persian Zoroastrian neighbors) perceived each other needs consideration as well.

Unlike Secunda, Jason Mokhtarian's *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings and Priests* is not overly interested with establishing theoretical or methodological paradigms. What he is interested in is meticulously close readings that focus on the rabbinical practice of othering Persians. Specifically, he "analyzes the Babylonian Talmud's portrayals of three categories of Persian others—namely, the Persians, the Sasanian kings, and the Zoroastrian priests."[59] While he acknowledges that some of the texts he analyses are short and anecdotal, he asserts that many of them are "… sustained legal commentaries or narratives on a wide scope of topics, offering insight into rabbinic attitudes toward Persians and how the Jewish sages defined their group identity vis-à-vis the Persian world."[60] Although Mokhtarian's general focus is on the social setting of courts of law and popular magic, the latter, more sustained commentaries he examines do give a fairly clear portrayal of how Persians were interpreted generally, and also provide information on how Sasanian cultural, historical, and social backgrounds influenced the Babylonian rabbis. In his final analysis, Mokhtarian adopts a mediating position with regards to how much Persian culture existed in Jewish Babylonia, standing between Jacob Neusner's historical skepticism and Yaakov Elman's current optimism.[61]

Throughout the book Mokhtarian emphasizes the importance of comparing the Talmud, not only with Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature, but also with Sasanian materials—such as

[58] Ibid., 33.
[59] Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings*, 3.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 3-4.

imperial inscriptions and seals—as well as Jewish Aramaic bowl spells.[62] Addressing his methodology specifically, he states that he is "tailoring past models of research on rabbis and others in Greco- Roman and Christian contexts to the evidentiary and historical idiosyncrasies of the Talmud's Sasanian context."[63] He acknowledges that studying the Sasanian context of the Talmud presents a unique set of obstacles, obstacles which do not seem present when studying the Talmud in its Greco-Roman and Christian context. One such obstacle, he notes, is the lack of documentation regarding Babylonian Jews—i.e., the scarcity of non-Talmudic texts originating from them—while another is the insufficient role that ancient Iranology has historically played in the field of Talmudic studies. Finally, Mokhtarian notes that despite the current interest in Irano-Talmudica studies, the field lacks the wealth of secondary literature that exists on the Greco-Roman and early Christian contexts of Palestinian rabbinism.[64]

The most recent book in the field is Yishai Kiel's *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud*, which considers mythology, culture and law, and draws from Zoroastrian, Manichean, Christian, Talmudic and extra-Talmudic sources. Kiel's basic assertion is that "Iranian attitudes to sex constitute an important comparative canvas against which the Talmudic discussions on sex can be constructively examined,"[65] and, moreover, that "Babylonian rabbinic assumptions about sex are culturally and historically connected to, and informed by, Iranian attitudes to sexuality."[66] His book has two main sections. The first section (chapters one through four), centers on rabbinic, Christian, and Iranian discussions relating to sex and sexuality, while the second

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 3.
[64] Ibid., 2.
[65] Kiel, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud*, 3.
[66] Ibid.

section (chapters five through seven), considers rabbinic, Christian, and Iranian treatments of incest.[67]

Kiel is specifically interested in highlighting "the interplay of law and narrative in Talmudic literature," [68] a concern which his methodology reflects: in each chapter he examines Talmudic narratives pertaining to the aforementioned issues, consults comparable Iranian narratives, and studies the legal, mythical, and cultural backgrounds of each. Through these explorations Kiel successfully demonstrates how the "syncretic tendencies characteristic of east late antiquity"[69] acted to weave together mythological episodes from two originally discrete traditions, and, in some instances, even equate certain figures. [70] Another important finding of the book, he notes, concerns what these comparisons tell us about "the projection of attitudes and dispositions toward sex onto the legendry stories of the inception of humanity and the mythical accounts of human sexuality."[71]

The fourth monograph that I examine is Geoffrey Herman's *A Prince without a Kingdom*. Herman's approach in this work is primarily historical—although he is also sensitive to literary aspects[72] and redactional concerns as well—and he describes it as a study of the Jewish Sasanian sources relating to the Exilarchate. Through a comprehensive examination of his source material—both Talmuds (but particularly the Babylonian), Midrashic compilations as well as a variety of Sasanian Christian sources—Herman works through the difficulties of studying the

[67] Ibid., 4.
[68] Ibid., 12.
[69] Ibid, 13.
[70] This finding, that "rabbinic traditions from Palestine were reshaped in rabbinic Babylonia, so as to resemble and emulate local Iranian myths" (Ibid., 14), is of particular interest to me, as in the first and third chapters of the present work (refer back to introduction for a summary of the figures examined) I also argue that the composers of the Bavli reshaped original Jewish/Palestinian myths to resemble Iranian ones.
[71] Ibid., 12.
[72] As he states, he feels that it is important to "examine closely the literary aspects before exploring any potential historical contributions" (Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 18). This is also my approach to examining Ardaxšēr and Herod in Chapter One.

Exilarchate in the Talmud. Two difficulties that are particularly pertinent to the present discussion are a lack of original sources and Talmudic ambiguity with regards to the Exilarchate.[73]

These difficulties represent a common dilemma encountered by many Irano-Talmudica scholars—as Herman pointedly asserts, "Scholars have, in fact, constructed an image of ancient Babylonian Jewry that cannot be easily borne by the sources."[74] As an example he cites how older scholars, such as Neusner and Jost, have provided an image of the Babylonian Jews' social identity and state that cannot be verified through existing sources,[75] and he notes that this has confusion amongst scholars in some cases. Herman's work thus highlights an important consideration with regards to consulting the field's older scholarly works. Although the difficulties just described make it difficult for Herman to answer many basic questions concerning the features of the exilarch, he also deals with an issue that is particularly exciting for Irano-Talmudica scholars: the Sasanian Kingdom's perception of the office of the exilarch.

Taking a unique approach, Herman compares the role of Exilarch with the Catholicos—the representative head of the Christians—against the Sasanian authorities.[76] He states that comparisons between the Exilarchate and the Catholicate in the Sasanian period have not been taken seriously before his work, despite the demonstrable importance and advantages of this approach. One such advantage, Herman states, is "to release ourselves from the bonds of the direct sources—the rabbinic sources—and to construct a reasonable alternative perspective on the Exilarchate,"[77] as this will allow us to "assess the credibility of existing models that have

[73] Ibid., 4.
[74] Ibid., 2.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 12.
[77] Ibid., 15.

been based entirely on the Talmudic (and Geonic) data."[78] In sum, this book is a useful resource for understanding how the use of Sasanian Christian sources can be of use to Irano-Talmudica scholars.[79]

The last monograph in this section is Richard Kalmin's *Migrating Tales: Talmudic Narratives and their Cultural Context*.[80] Kalmin's work is distinct from what we have seen so far, as he maintains that "it is not enough for scholars to find parallels between Babylonian rabbinic literature and Persian literature, for example, and to consider their work done."[81] Instead Kalmin highlights the strong connections between Babylonian Rabbinic culture and the culture of the Eastern Roman provinces, and argues that Christian and Pagan literature from the Roman East represents a vital key to the interpretation of late antique Babylonian Rabbinic literature. However, this is not to say that he denies the applicability of studying the Talmud in a number of different cultural contexts—his broader argument goes beyond arguing for the applicability of one context, and addresses "the extent and meaning of parallels between rabbinic and non-rabbinic literature and how these parallels came about."[82]

Kalmin's book is based on a close reading of a number of texts that he argues have not yet received the attention they deserve, and therefore have not yet been fully understood.[83] As Kalmin's specific interest is in studying rabbinic engagement with the texts and religious trends of Christian Mesopotamia—and other Christian communities east of Syria—his work is less topical than the other monographs discussed, but his underlying theoretical claims are useful for

[78] Ibid., 16.
[79] It should be noted that Herman also addresses the methodological challenges regarding the examination of Christian sources as well.
[80] Richard Kalmin, *Migrating Tales: Talmudic Narratives and their Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
[81] Ibid., 1.
[82] Ibid., 2.
[83] Ibid., 3.

Irano-Talmudica scholars to consider. In other words, his suggestion that the Roman East provides a common source for the shared beliefs of the Jews and Christians east of Syria[84] lends credence to the Irano-Talmudic theory that ancient Babylonian culture provided a common source of inspiration for both Jews and Iranians.

0.4 Irano-Talmudica Studies: Areas of Focus

It is now well established that interactions between Jews, Zoroastrians, Manicheans, Christians, etc., impacted the Talmud in different ways. As Secunda puts it,

> After almost half a century of productive, intense, though narrowly focused critical study of the Bavli, some Talmudists have recently begun to contemplate Sasanian religious and cultural diversity and its effect on the Babylonian rabbinic community and the Talmud itself. A spate of articles have considered the ramifications that interaction between Jews, Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Eastern Christians, and other religious groups had on the Bavli's literary conventions, cultural sensibilities, and even religious practices and beliefs.[85]

I believe it will be useful to categorize what prominent Irano-Talmudists have produced so far, and what follows is my own categorization of this body of work into a number of divisions and subdivisions. However, it will be important to note that these divisions are meant to help highlight specific and ongoing trends in the field, not to pigeonhole scholars into specific divisions. In other words, there are scholars who might primarily focus on legal dicta, for instance, but who also examine materials concerning literature or social culture as well.

0.4.1 Law and Legal Dicta

One of the first scholars to work on the comparative study of Sasanian and Babylonian Talmudic legal dicta was Herbert Finkelscherer, in his little-known article, "Zur Frage fremder

[84] Ibid.
[85] Secunda, *Reading the Bavli in Iran*, 311.

Einflüsse auf das rabbinische Recht."[86] The well-known Talmudist Isaiah Gafni has published on this subject as well. In his work *Yehudeim Bavel bi-Tqufat ha-Talmud*,[87] published in 1990, Gafni's study of comparative law and the Bavli makes use of the Pahlavi law book *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* (Book of a Thousand Decisions) which, as previously mentioned, was a suggestion put forward by Jacob Nuesner in the 1960s.[88] The use of this book represents an important development in this division of the field, as scholars—Yaakov Elman among them—now widely recognize the significance of utilizing the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* in comparisons between the Sasanian legal system and Talmudic law codes.[89] The reason for the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān's* significance, Elman notes, lies in the fact that it is the most complete Sasanian legal text available, and is, therefore, a particularly appropriate source to be used in the comparative study of the two legal systems.[90]

While Elman emphasizes that it is important to acknowledge that not every similar legal issue necessarily involves influence in one direction or the other, the comparison between Sasanian and Talmudic legal systems is demonstrably fruitful and remains a source of fascination for many Talmudists and Iranists. In other words, the failure to compare the two systems—i.e., only studying them in isolation—"prevents us from gaining a complete picture of the conditions under which each system developed, and the way that each responded to common

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[86] Herbert Finkelscherer, "Zur Frage fremder Einflüsse auf das rabbinische Recht," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 79, no. 43 ((November/Dezember, 1935): 431-442.
[87] Isaiah Gafni, *Yehudeim Bavel bi-Tqufat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1990).
[88] Elman, "'Up to the Ears,'" 98.
[89] For more on Elman's work in this area, see "'Up to the Ears'"; ''Marriage and Marital Property in Rabbinic and Sasanian Law,'' in *Rabbinic Law in its Near Eastern Context*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 227-76; "On Sasanian Agricultural Policy and Private 'Eminent Domain," *JSIJ* 3 (2004): 95-149; "Middle Persian Culture and the Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165-197; "Returnable Gifts in Rabbinic and Sasanian Law," *Irano-Judaica* 6 (2008): 129-184.
[90] Elman, "'Up to the Ears,'" 99.

problems."[91] More recent developments in this division come from Elman's former student, Shai Secunda, who has a number of publications dealing with legal comparisons between the two religions. [92] It should also be noted that a number of Iranists have contributed works pertaining to Talmudic and Sasanian legal systems as well—see, for instance, the interesting article published by the Iranist Maria Macuch entitled "Iranian Legal Terminology in the Babylonian Talmud in the Light of Sasanian Jurisprudence."[93] Furthermore, Shaul Shaked, James Russell, and Almut Hintze have also contributed to this area, with these contributions generally appearing in Irano-Judaica volumes.[94]

0.4.2 Mythology

Mythology is one of the more fruitful and stimulating areas of Irano-Talmudica studies, but is one that has not yet been given sufficient attention. Reuven Kipperwaser and Dan Shapira have co-authored a number of interesting articles on this theme—see ''Irano-Talmudica I: The Three-legged Ass and 'Ridyā," [95] "Leviathan, Behemoth and the 'Domestication' of Iranian Mythological Creatures in Eschatological Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud,"[96] or "Giant

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[91] Ibid., 102.

[92] For a sampling of his publications in this area, see: Shai Secunda, "Dashtana—'Ki derekh nashim li': A Study of the Babylonian Rabbinic Laws of Menstruation in Relation to Corresponding Zoroastrian Texts" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 2008); Shai Secunda, Domenico Agostini and Eve Kiesele "Ohrmazd's Better Judgment (*meh-dādestānīh*): A Middle Persian Legal and Theological Discourse," *Studia Iranica* 43 (2014): 177-202; Shai Secunda, "The Sasanian 'Stam': Orality and the Composition of Babylonian Rabbinic and Zoroastrian Legal Literature," in *The Talmud in its Iranian Context*, ed. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 140-160.

[93] In *Irano-Judaica IV*, eds. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-Zvi, 1999), 91-101.

[94] For more information about these contributions see Elman, "'Up to the Ears,'" 99. See also Shaul Shaked, "Irano-Aramaica: On some legal, administrative and economic terms," in *Corolla Iranica: Papers in honour of Prof. Dr. David Neil Mackenzie*, eds. Ronald E. Emmerick and Dieter Weber (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 167-175.

[95] *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 32, no. 1 (2008): 101–16.

[96] In *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman*, eds. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 203-235.

Mythological Creatures in Transition from the Avesta to the Babylonian Talmud"[97]—and these probably represent the best works published in this area to-date.[98] However, this is not to say that other scholars have not also produced useful works in this area.

Yishai Kiel is a good example. His article "Creation by Emission: Reconstructing Adam and Eve in the Babylonian Talmud in Light of Zoroastrian and Manichaean literature"[99] is a very useful examination of the mythic notions of creation shared by Talmudic sages and Zoroastrian and Manichaean priests, and his previously-mentioned book, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud*, offers an excellent treatment of mythical accounts of human sexuality as well as the projection of attitudes and dispositions regarding sexuality onto myths regarding the inception of humanity.

0.4.3 Linguistics

Another interesting branch of Irano-Talmudica studies is the linguistic approach. Within and between the Achaemenid and Sasanian eras, it is clear—as the numerous examples of Persian loanwords in surviving examples of Achaemenid-era Aramaic writing demonstrates[100]—that Persian and Aramaic languages developed side by side and influenced one another. It is traditionally believed that the lingua franca of the Achaemenid Empire was Aramaic, and that there were Aramaic-speaking scribes in the courts of Persian kings throughout the Achaemenid

[97] In *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries*, ed. Julia Rubanovich, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 65-93.
[98] See also: Reuven Kiperwasser, "Rabba bar bar Channa's Voyages," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 22 (2007-2008): 215-243. I have also presented a paper in 8th European Conference of Iranian Studies regarding a number of mythical creatures that tractate Taʿan. and Bundahishn share.
[99] *Journal of Jewish Studies* 66, no. 2 (2015): 295-316.
[100] Such as the Elephantine Papyri, Khantos inscriptions, and Biblical Aramaic books of Ezra, Daniel, and Nehemia.

period and into the Sasanian era[101]—for instance, in a Parthian-era Pahlavi text called *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* (Memorial of Zarēr), the head of King Wištāsp's scribes is called *Afrāhim/ Awrāhim Dibīrān Mahist* (Abraham the head of scribes). While a few Talmudists and Iranists have already been studying Persian loanwords in the Talmud, Yaakov Elman believes that the full grammatical impact of Middle Persian on Babylonian Talmudic Aramic should be examined as well.[102]

An important early work on Persian loanwords in the Talmud is Alexander Kohut's *Aruch Completum*, which offers an excellent examination of the Persian etymologies of Babylonian Aramaic words.[103] Another early work comes from the Indo-Iranian scholar Bernhard Geiger, whose article "Zu den Iranischen Lehnwörtern im Aramäschen," has provided important lexicographical notes about Aramaic words of supposed Persian origin.[104] Regarding the relationship of Geiger's work to Irano-Talmudica studies specifically, Rudiger Schmitt states,

> Of particular importance are Geiger's philological and linguistic contributions concerning Talmudic-Aramaic words of Iranian origin. They are more or less unknown among Iranists since they were published only in Hebrew translation in Additamenta ad librum Aruch Completum Alexandri Kohut (ed. S. Krauss, Vienna, 1937), a supplementary volume to a great medieval Talmudic encyclopedia edited in the late 19th century. In these articles, for the first time, a scholar specialized in Middle Iranian who had also studied Semitic languages, dealt with the materials borrowed from Iranian.[105]

More recent examples come from Jacob Levi[106] and Michael Sokoloff, who have both published dictionaries that include Persian words and their etymologies. Sokoloff's dictionary,[107] which is

[101] Aramaic ideograms in Pahlavi texts further evidence the long coexistence of these two languages. Apparently the Aramaic-speaking scribes who knew how to speak Persian also began to write in Persian, which lead to the emergence of Persian scribes and the development of Aramaic ideograms in Pahlavi texts.
[102] Email message from Elman to author, 19/11/2014.
[103] Alexander Kohut, *Aruch Completum* (reprint), (Jerusalem: Maqor, 1969-70). 9 vols.
[104] Bernhard Geiger, "Zu den Iranischen Lehnwörtern im Aramäschen," *WZKM* 37, (1930): 195-203.
[105] Rudiger Schmitt, "Geiger, Bernhard," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, 2012, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/geiger-bernhard (accessed on 21 December 2017).
[106] *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (2nd ed.), (Berlin: B. Harz, 1924; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963). 4 vols.

the most recent, also includes Persian loanwords from non-Talmudic sources such as magic bowls as well. Also of note is Shaul Shaked's recent and detailed work on Persian loanwords in Babylonian Aramaic.[108]

0.4.4 Literature

Literary approaches cover a variety of themes—from mythology to history to legal matters and more—but pay particular attention to what the comparison of literary elements between Talmudic and Iranian traditions can tell us. Of particular note with regards to this area is the work of Geoffrey Herman. Herman believes that Bavli scholars have not spent a sufficient amount of time examining parallel narratives in contemporaneous Persian literature, but argues that these types of comparisons will provide important insights into understanding the legendary sections of the Bavli. Two of publications that do an excellent job of demonstrating this position are his 2005 article, "Ahasuerus the Former Stable-Master of Belshazzar, and the Wicked Alexander of Macedon: Two Parallels between the Babylonian Talmud and Persian Sources,"[109] as well as his 2012 article, "One Day David went out for the Hunt of the Falconers: Persian Themes in the Babylonian Talmud."[110]

Both of these works deal with the integration of Persian elements into the Aggadah of the Bavli. In "One Day David Went out for the Hunt of the Falconers" Herman examines Persian

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[107] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Period*s (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[108] See Shaul Shaked, "Aramaic, iii Iranian Loanwords in Middle Aramaic," in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Vol. II), ed. E. Yarshater (London: Routledge, 1982), 259-61; "Between Iranian and Aramaic: Iranian words concerning food in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, with some notes on the Aramaic heterograms in Iranian," in *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages V*, eds. Shaul Shaked and Amon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2003), 120-137; "Iranian words retrieved from Aramaic", in *Languages of Iran: Past and Present*, ed. D. Weber (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 167-176.

[109] *AJS Review* 29, no. 2 (2005): 283–98.

[110] In *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman,* eds. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 111-136.

epic works dealing with kings and demonstrates that the King David story in the Bavli is likely a reimagining and reshaping of Iranian heroic themes, while "Ahasuerus, the former Stable-Master of Belshazzar, and the Wicked Alexander of Macedon" looks at sources reflecting a "distinctly Zoroastrian viewpoint." [111] Jeffrey Rubenstein's previously-mentioned article, "Herod in Ardeshir's Court" is also a fruitful work concerning the comparison of Talmudic and Iranian storytelling techniques and motifs, and will be considered in further in my own examination of Herod and Ardeshir legends.

Another rich Talmudic story that has attracted both Talmudists and Iranists is the story of Rav Kahana. Shaul Shaked's recent work on this story looks at its Armeno-Persian parallels,[112] however prior to this work—around 30 years ago before the recent growth of Irano-Talmudica studies—Daniel Sperber analyzed the Sasanian context of the Rav Kahana story in an article entitled "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia."[113] In the latter, while discussing the story of Rav Kahana's experiences in the academy of Rabbi Yohanan in Palestine, Sperber draws on evidence from both literary *and* material (artistic) sources of Persian provenance, an approach which resulted in gaining vital contextual data. These comparisons demonstrate the ways in which that the author of the Rav Kahana story absorbed and naturalized Persian literary motifs, which suggests a marked degree of acculturation by the Babylonian Jewish author *and* the prospective audience of the story. As these examples demonstrate, although this branch of study has only emerged recently (mostly due to the work of Herman), it has the potential to be a quite rewarding area of focus within Irano-Talmudica studies.

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[111] Herman, "Ahasuerus," 288.
[112] ''The Story of Rav Kahana (BT Baba Qamma 117a–b) in Light of Armeno-Persian Sources,'' in *Irano-Judaica VI*, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2008), 53–86.
[113] In *Irano-Judaica*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Ben Avi Institute, 1981), 83–100.

0.4.5 History and Culture

There are many historical records in the Talmud that can be fruitfully studied in comparison with historical accounts provided by late antique historians,[114] despite the fact that Talmudic historical records are generally not accredited as actual history. Herman, for example—in an article entitled, "Burry My Coffin Deep,"[115]—examines the Zoroastrian exhumation of the dead during specific periods in Sasanian Babylonia in relationship to examples of this practice mentioned in the Bavli, which provides important details regarding the less-than-ideal situations faced by Jews under different Sasanian kings. Whether or not Talmudic narratives are considered to be a part of the historical record depends on the methodology of the particular scholar investigating, but it is clear that the comparison of these narratives with Iranian historical records provides important social and cultural information for both Iranists and Talmudists.

Iranists and Talmudists are, however, interested in the social and cultural information contained in the Bavli for slightly different reasons. Talmudists are generally interested in examining the acculturation of Bablyonian Jews to Iranian customs.[116] For example, in *Migrating Tales: Talmudic Narratives and their Cultural Context,* the Talmudist Richard Kalmin looks at the cultural context of the Jewish Babylonian sages and proposes a different perspective

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[114] Josephus' history, for example, is one such source.

[115] Herman, "Bury My Coffin Deep! Zoroastrian Exhumation in Jewish and Christian Sources," in *Tiferet Leyisrael: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus,* eds. Joel Roth, Menahem Schmelzer and Yaacov Francus (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 31-59.

[116] See Michael S. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2001), and Eliyahou Ahdut, "Macamad ha-Ishah ha-Yehudiyah be-Bavel bi-Tqufat ha-Talmud (The Status of the Jewish Woman in Babylonia in the Talmudic Era)," (PhD dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999). It should be noted that in both of these works the authors consulted Zoroastrian materials as well. For examples of this type of literature focusing on women, see Shai Secunda's previously mentioned PhD dissertation, "Dashtana- 'Ki Derekh Nashim Li': A Study of the Babylonian Rabbinic Laws of Menstruation in Relation to Corresponding Zoroastrian Texts," and also Yaakov Elman's "He in His Cloak and She in Her Cloak': Conflicting Images of Sexuality in Sasanian Mesopotamia," in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism,* ed. Rivka Ulmer (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 129–63.

on certain narratives than scholars looking at the Eastern-Roman cultural background.[117] Yaakov Elman also has some good publications highlighting ways in which Babylonian Jews adapted to—or in some occasions resisted—Iranian acculturation; see ‘‘Acculturation to Elite Persian Norms and Modes of Thought in the Babylonian Jewish Community of Late Antiquity,’’[118] or ‘‘Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition.’’[119] Iranists, on the other hand, look for the general and common cultural aspects of Sasanian Babylonia that Jewish sages have mentioned in the Bavli and that can be examined as Iranian phenomena, but are far less active in this area of study, as many still do not consider the Talmud as an appropriate source for Sasanian Studies.

0.4.6 Religious Interactions

The religious interactions between Jews and Zoroastrians have attracted scholars of Religious Studies since the 1800s.[120] While the various common aspects between the two traditions originally led scholars to work on finding mutual influences, the current consensus is that ideas such as heaven and hell, resurrection, last judgment, Jewish angeology, etc., are

[117] Richard Kalmin, *Migrating Tales: Talmudic Narratives and their Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
[118] In *Neti'ot Le-David*, ed. Yaakov Elman et al. (Jerusalem: Orhot, 2004), 31–56.
[119] In *The Cambridge Companion to Rabbinic Literature*, ed. M. Jaffee and C. Fonrobert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164–97.
[120] Alexander Kohut had authored a series of articles that explored the relationship between Judaism and Zoroastrianism. These works deal more directly with the theologically fraught question of the Zoroastrian influence on the Bavli. See Kohut, *Ueber die Judische Angelologie und Damonologie in Ihrer Abhangigkeit vom Parsismus*, (Leipzig, 1866); Idem, W*as Hat die Talmudische Eschatologie aus dem Parsimus Auf genommen* (1867), in *Z.D.M.G. XXI,* 552-591. Solomon Rubin, Isaac Hirsch Weiss, Joshua Heschel Schorr and Yehuda Leib have also worked on religious influences. See Solomon Rubin, "Paras ve- Yehuda," *kokhavei Yizhaq* 34 (1867): 40-45; Isaac Hirsch Weuss, *Dor dor ve-doreshav* (Each generation and its scholars) 5 vols. Np: Platt & Minkus, 1924. First published 1871-1887; Ezra Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschek Schorr: Maskil and reformist," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40-41 (1969-70): 503-28. For an overview of older scholarship in the field see Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 11, or Shaul Shaked, "Iranian Influence on Judaism: First Century BCE to Second Century CE", in *The Cambridge History of Judaism Volume 1*, eds. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 308-325.

originally Iranian. However, studying religious interactions based on the Babylonian Talmud and Middle Persian religious texts is a matter that has, unfortunately, not yet attracted many Irano-Talmudica scholars specifically.

Although works looking at legal dicta in the Talmud and Zoroastrian texts—such as Shai Secunda's "Dashtana- 'Ki Derekh Nashim Li': A Study of the Babylonian Rabbinic Laws of Menstruation in Relation to Corresponding Zoroastrian Texts"—can be included in this area in certain ways, this area more specifically describes efforts to examine the collection of religious ideas that are fundamental to both Sasanian Judaism and Zoroastrianism, such as: monotheism, dualism, heaven and hell, resurrection, last judgment, angels and demons and so on.[121] For instance, Talmudic notions such as "*Minnim*"[122] (heretics, sects, gentiles), and "*shete reshuyot*" (the two powers), as well as narratives that directly engage with dualistic notions (for instance Sanh. 39a, Hullin 87a), seem to introduce a sort of dualistic thinking that should be examined more thoroughly based on Manicheian, Zoroastrian and Qumranic sources.[123]

0.4.7 Manichaeism and Rabbinic Judaism

While little work has so far been done with regards to examining the links between Manichaeism and rabbinic Judaism, in "Talmud ii. Rabbinic Literature and Middle Persian Texts," Elman does make a strong case for the importance of studying Manichaeism in relation to both the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. The leading article in this area is arguably

[121] In second chapter of the current dissertation I have worked on some common religious aspects based on the Talmud Bavli and Middle Persian sources.
[122] For a complete list of scholarly etymologies of "*Minnim*" see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Boston/Leiden: Brill 2002), 5-7.
[123] For more on this subject See Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, and also Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*.

Burton L. Visotsky's "Rabbinic Randglossen to the Cologne Mani Codex."[124] Kiel's monograph *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud*, and his article, "Creation by Emission" also touch upon the interactions between Manichaeism and Talmudic narratives, however not in a sustained way. This area thus represents an exciting opportunity for scholars, as there are plenty of original Manichaean texts that were excavated in Turfan and have yet to be deciphered and thoroughly examined.

0.4.8 Eastern Christian Texts and Rabbinic Judaism

The multicultural nature of Mesopotamia is well known, and the vital Christian community that emerged here spread, at points, throughout Sasanian Iran, and rapidly produced plenty of written materials. Examining what these Christian sources (in Middle Persian and Syriac) have to say regarding the situation of Jews under Sasanian rule, as well as what they have to say regarding Jewish-Zoroastrian relations, is a significant matter. The Talmud also has a lot to say about the Christian community of Sasanian Mesopotamia, and comparing the situation of Jews and Christians in that era is a good way to gain a better understanding of the Jewish community's condition. Kalmin's "Migrating Tales" is one notable source that deals with Jewish-Christians relations during this time, and Herman also has some works touching upon the issue—for instance, a few sections of his monograph, *A Prince without a Kingdom,* deal with Iranian Catholicate and bishops, and also compare Christian leaders with the Jewish Exilarchate.[125] Finally, Yishai Kiel also pays attention to Christian texts in a number of his works

[124] Burton L. Visotsky, "Rabbinic Randglossen to the Cologne Mani Codex," *Zeitschrift fu¨ r Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 52, (1983): 295–300.
[125] Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 123-128, 343-345. See also Herman, "Like a Slave Before his Master: A Persian Gesture of Deference in Sasanian Jewish and Christian Sources," *ARAM* 26, no. 1&2 (2014): 551-583, and

that examine the Christian background of some Talmudic narratives in relationship to the Iranian context. [126]

0.4.9 Archaeology (Magic bowls and Jewish seals)

How archaeology can contribute to studying Jewish life in Sasanian Iran is a major issue in Irano-Talmudica studies. As previously mentioned, one of the reasons for the relatively late start[127] in examining the Talmud in its Iranian context is the lack of primary source material in the form of archeological findings and original writings. Fortunately there does exist a collection of magic bowls and seals belonging to Jews from this period, and examining these in relationship to the Babylonian Talmud and other Iranian sources will help paint a broader picture of the relationship between Babylonian Jews and non-Jews, especially Zoroastrians.

Shaul Shaked is a pioneer of utilizing magic bowls and Jewish seals for this purpose, and has authored numerous books and articles on this theme. [128] Shai Secunda [129] and Jason

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Herman (ed). *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014).

[126] See Kiel, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud*; "Penitential Theology in East Late Antiquity: Talmudic, Zoroastrian, and East Christian Reflections," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 45, (2014): 551-583; Kiel and Prods Oktor Skjaervo, "'The Sabbath Was Made for Humankind:' A Rabbinic and Christian Principle in Its Iranian Context," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 25, (2015): 1-18; Kiel, "Dynamics of Sexual Desire: Babylonian Rabbinic Culture at the Crossroads of Christian and Zoroastrian Ethics," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 47, (2016): 364-410.

[127] Late in relationship to the development of the field studying the Talmud in its Greco-Roman context, where there is much more primary source material.

[128] See Shaul Shaked and Joseph Naveh, *Amulets and magic bowls: Aramaic incantations of late antiquity* (Jerusalem/Leiden: Magnes Press/Brill, 1985); Shaked and Naveh, *Magic spells and formulae: Aramaic incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993); Shaked, "Jews, Christians and Pagans in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls of the Sasanian period," in *Religions and Cultures: First International Conference of Mediterraneum*, eds. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce (Binghamton: Global Publications, 2002), 61-89; Shaked, "Spells and Incantations between Iranian and Aramaic", in *Literarische Stoffe und ihre Gestaltung in mitteliranischer Zeit. Kolloquium anlässlich des 70. Geburtstages von Werner Sundermann (Beiträge zur Iranistik, 31*), eds. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Christiane Reck, and Dieter Weber (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2009), 233-244; Shaked, J. N. Ford and S. Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls (vol. 1)* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013). Regarding seals, see: Shaked, "Jewish and Christian Seals of the Sasanian Period," in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. M. Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem, 1977), 17-31; Shaked, "Jewish Sasanian sigillography", in *Au carrefour des religions Mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux* (Res Orientales VII), ed. R.

Mokhtarian[130] have also produced works dealing with magic bowls that are of interest to this area. As Secunda notes, studying magic bowls strongly suggests that Sasanian Mesopotamia was populated with "various ethnic identities, religious affiliations, and linguistic preferences," [131] and, furthermore, that lay people in Sasanian Mesopotamia (differing religious affiliations aside) were way more in contact with each other than previously thought based on the religious texts produced by the sages and religious leaders.

Although the work of these scholars demonstrates that much has been accomplished within Irano-Talmudica studies over the last two decades, the field itself is still very young and there is much more work to be done. The focus of the present work—demonstrating the influence of Iranian materials on historical and Biblical characters in the Talmud—is one fruitful avenue of study that current scholarship has failed to adequately address.[132] This is unfortunate, because this approach is especially fruitful for scholars currently working on mythological comparisons between the Talmud and Middle Persian compositions. Biblical (and sometimes non-Biblical) characters in the Talmud—some of which are specified in the Bavli exclusively—are surrounded by narratives and myths that are absent from the Bible, and studying these narratives and myths in comparison with their Middle Persian counterparts can be quite telling. Namely with regards to discerning the process of transformation certain myths and narratives underwent, from their beginnings in the Avesta to their transmutations in the Talmud, Middle

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Gyselen (Leuven: Bures-sur-Yvette, 1995) 239-256. See also: Daniel M. Friedberg, *Sasanian Jewry and its Culture: A Lexicon of Jewish and Related Seals* (University of Illinois Press 2009).

[129] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud,* 35-46.

[130] Mokhtarian, "Excommunication in Jewish Babylonia: Comparing Bavli Moed Qatan 14b-17b and the Aramaic Bowl Spells in a Sasanian Context," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 4 (2015): 552-578.

[131] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 35.

[132] While Kiel's article "Creation by Emission" does explore this theme there is still plenty of work to be done in this regard.

Persian, and even classical Persian materials. In the current work the discussion of King Og and Gandarewa provides an excellent example of this hypothesis.

Another novel aspect of the current work is the effort to demonstrate that Iranists—who have thus far failed to engage with the Talmud in a thorough or serious manner—would benefit from more engagement with Aramaic and the Talmud, which I accomplish in my third chapter by arguing that the hell punishments motifs in *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* are originally Jewish. In my appendix I also establish that there is even evidence of Talmudic influence on themes in classical Persian literature, which, as far as I am aware, is not an issue that has been explored by either Talmudists or Iranists. However, in my view the Talmud should not be conceptualized as an exclusively Jewish composition, but rather a work composed by the Jewish citizens of Iran, citizens who had undoubtedly been influenced by Persian culture after living under Iranian rule for more than a thousand years. This interpretation seems to be clearly supported by existing source materials; for example, I note in my first chapter that the Jewish community of Sasanian Iran seems to be engaged with Iran's political issues, and, furthermore, that sometimes it seems as though we should consider their voices on Iranian matters as being the other side of the story—the side that pro-Sasanian authors may have concealed at the time.

Chapter I:

Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān and Herod

As previously noted, this chapter will analyze the Iranian influence on the presentation of historical figures in the Talmud by comparing the account of Herod the Great in B. Bat. 3b-4a with accounts of Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān in *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān.* Through this comparison it will be demonstrated that Herod's exploits—from his beginnings as an appointed governor to a usurper who is guided by a divine voice to become a great king—bear remarkable parallels to the story of Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān, founder of the Sasanian empire.

The Pahlavi text *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* is a fruitful text for shedding light on certain details found in Talmudic narratives. There are several motifs found in the former work that are analogous in a variety of ways to certain Talmudic motifs, though they are often subtle. Overall, it seems that Talmudic sages were not comfortable using Iranian religious materials directly, and even if they had consulted Iranian sources, they would not reveal this readily. This is one of the main issues that scholars of Irano-Talmudica studies deal with. Indeed, whether Jewish Babylonian sages consulted Iranian sources directly or intentionally is a point of major dispute among Talmudists. *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* (henceforth KAP) is a text that, when compared to some Talmudic narratives, shows that Talmudic sages seemingly have consulted it to create their own storylines. The fact that it is not a religious text suggests that Talmudic sages were more comfortable incorporating motifs and ideas from a popular narrative.[133]

[133] The hostility between Talmudic sages and Zoroastrian priests is attested to on several occasions in the Bavli. For instance, in Šabb. 75a it states: "Rav Zutra b. Tuvia said [that] Rav said: … He who learns something from a magus

KAP is a short work written in Middle Persian prose. In a legendary fashion, it relates the Sasanian King Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān's own life story: his rise to the throne, battle against the Parthian King Ardawān, and so on. The sole, independent manuscript of this text to have been identified so far is Codex MK, which was copied in 1322 in Gujarat. However, the text itself relies on an older and longer version. Carlo Cereti believes that the text belongs to the Sasanian era, and in my opinion provides sufficient proof for his claim.[134] In the following chapter, a number of themes and ideas shared by KAP and the Bavli's story of Herod at B. Bat. 3b-4a will be discussed. Alongside the main two sources, namely KAP and B. Bat. 3b-4a, some other narratives might be consulted infrequently when needed.

As Jeffrey Rubenstein also asserts in his article "King Herod in Ardaxšēr's Court,"[135] the Story of Herod is one of the most colorful stories of the Bavli. Customarily, it is believed that Josephus's account of Herod's life and deeds in "Antiquities" xv-xvii and "The Jewish War" were the main sources for the Talmudic narrative. Rubenstein correctly asserts that the lack of awareness of the Sasanian materials was the main reason scholars believed that Bavli's Herod story was significantly influenced by Josephus's works.[136] Moreover, he has comprehensively explained why "The Josephan Influence" worked on by Daniel Schwartz,[137] Eli Yassif[138] and other scholars, is not entirely satisfactory. And yet, regarding Josephan influence, he properly

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is worthy of death…" For more see: Shai Secunda, "Studying with a Magus/Like Giving a Tongue to a Wolf," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2005): 151-157.

[134] Carlo G. Cereti, "Kar-nāmag i Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān," *Encyclopedia Iranica,* online edition, 2012, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/karnamag-i-ardasir, accessed 29 January, 2018.

[135] Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "King Herod in Ardaxšēr's Court: The Rabbinic Story of Herod (B. Bat. 3b–4a) in Light of Persian Sources," *AJS Review* 38 (2014): 249-274.

[136] Ibid., 249.

[137] Ibid., 253.

[138] Ibid., 255.

asserts that, "Some dependence on Josephus or on popular oral traditions deriving from Josephus should not be discounted."[139]

Additional scholars demonstrate how KAP's themes are integrated into other Talmudic narratives. Geoffrey Herman in "One day David went out for the hunt of the falconers,"[140] shows the impact of Persian literary culture on Talmudic narratives. Herman examines a rabbinic exegetical narrative, and demonstrates that Talmudic sages reworked a Palestinian Aggadah by applying a Persian popular genre: namely, falcon hunting, or as the Bavli puts it, "*škar Bazaei*".[141] Herman observes that "The fact that this story begins with the hero setting off on a hunt is interesting beyond the use of a Persian term in the key opening sentence [*škar Bazaei*]. Not only do Persian stories tend to begin this way, but this is, in fact, a standard format for the introduction of adventures in Persian texts."[142] Herman presents examples from KAP and other Persian sources showing that the Persian theme "One day … went out to hunt …", as well as the noble Sasanian sport of hunting, inspired the Bavli's narrative.[143]

Herman's other article, "Ahasuerus, the Former Stable-Master of Belshazzar, and the Wicked Alexander of Macedon,"[144] again shows how Talmudic narratives share themes with KAP. In this article, Herman explores the implication of the "stable master" in both Persian and Talmudic sources, and concludes that the "stable master" had a low ranking among other court officials in the Sasanian era. Herman suggests that this is why both Persian and Talmudic narratives use the "stable master" motif as a popular calumny showing disrespect to a currently

[139] Ibid., 249.
[140] Geoffrey Herman, "One Day David Went Out for the Hunt of the Falconers: Persian themes in the Babylonian Talmud," *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honour of Yaakov Elman*, ed. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010.)
[141] *Škar Bazaei* is a Middle Persian compound which means "falcon hunting" (Herman, "One day David,"114).
[142] Ibid., 119.
[143] Ibid., 119-121.
[144] Geoffrey Herman, "Ahasuerus, the Former Stable-Master of Belshazzar, and the Wicked Alexander of Macedon: two parallels between the Babylonian Talmud and Persian sources," *AJS Review* 29, no. 2 (2005): 283–297.

high ranking personage. In KAP, after disrespecting Ardawān (the last Arsacid king) and his son, Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān was degraded to "Stable Master" of Ardawān. In the Talmudic narrative, Vashti (Achaemenid Queen) exclaims that Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was the former "Stable Master" of Belshazzar (Vashti's father), and sends a disrespectful message to the king, inciting his fury.[145]

Yet, the best work on KAP in relation with the Bavli is Rubenstein's article "King Herod in Ardaxšēr's Court: The Rabbinic Story of Herod (B. Bat. 3b–4a) in Light of Persian Sources." In the aforementioned article, Rubenstein puts the two narratives, namely KAP and B. Bat. 3b-4a, side by side and compares every mutual theme very precisely. Finally, he concludes that the Talmudic sages were aware of some Sasanian traditions and used them deliberately in their Herod story.[146] In this chapter, before analyzing and paralleling the Talmudic narrative and KAP, a brief introduction to Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān and Herod the Great will be provided based on historical facts.

1.1 Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān

Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān[147] was the founder of the Sasanian dynasty in Iran. He reigned from about 180 to 242 CE. He was the son of Pābag (who was likely a priest of the temple to the goddess Anāhīd at Istakhr in the Fars region, near modern Shiraz), and the grandson of Sāsān.[148]

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[145] Ibid., 292.

[146] I first noticed the resemblance between KAP and B. Bat. 3b during my Talmud reading course with Professor Ira Robinson at Concordia University, and later decided to work on that as a chapter of my dissertation. However, halfway through my work, I found Rubenstein's article, which served to confirm may of the thoughts I was already having.

[147] There are several works that can be consulted about life and deeds of Ardaxšēr: see *Tārīkh-e Ṭabarī*, the Ka'beye Zartošt Middle Persian inscription, *Nihayat al-'arab fī fonūn al- adab*, *Tārīkh-e Ya'qūbī*, *Tārīkh al-Kāmil, Fārs-nāma* of Ibn Balkhī, Agathias, *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, etc.

[148] As Daryaee asserts, if Pābag was anyone of rank, he was, at best, a local ruler of a southern small city called (Xir) Khīr ("Ardaxshir and the Sāsānians' Rise to Power," *Studia Classica et Orientalia* 1 (2010): 247.

He overthrew the Arsacid empire and killed the last Arsacid King, Artabanous V, in roughly 223-224 CE. In Šāpūr's [149] (Ardaxšīr's son) inscription on Kaʿba-ye Zardošt ("Kaʿba of Zoroaster)," Sāsān is mentioned simply as a "lord" or "nobility." However, Pābag is mentioned as a "king".[150] According to Daryaee, "The origins of the house of Sāsān and of Ardaxšēr himself is still a mystery."[151] Touraj Daryaee believes that Pābag was originally a priest of the Anāhīd temple who rebelled against the local ruler. He writes that, "Pābag dethroned the king of Istakhr, Gozīhr… and designated his elder son, Šābuhr [Ardaxšēr's brother], and coins were struck showing the two on either side."[152] Subsequently, Ardaxšēr (the younger brother) removed his brother, and had coins minted in the image of himself and his father, Pābag. Ardaxšēr then rebelled against the Arsacid king, killing him in a battle. However, Ṭabari puts forward another version of the story. According to Ṭabarī, Pābag obtained permission from Gozihr, the king of Eṣṭaḵr, to place his son (Ardaxšēr) in the care of Tīrī, the commandant of the castle of Dārābgerd. When Tīrī died, Ardaxšēr took over his post, but then defiantly began to extend his own sway. In the process, he killed several local princes, and even urged his father to overthrow Gozīhr. Pābag did so, and, upon the Parthian Great King's refusal to make Šāpūr the new king of Eṣṭaḵr, declared open rebellion.[153]

1.2 Herod the Great

Herod was a grandson of a famous tribal leader named Antipas, and son of a governor of

[149] I have chosen the transliteration "Šāpūr" based on modern Persian pronunciation. McKenzie's transliteration, which replaces "p" with "b", seems to reflect that of the Manichean sources.
[150] Daryaee, "Ardaxshir and the Sāsānians,'" 243.
[151] Ibid., 241.
[152] Ibid., 243.
[153] Joseph Wiesehöfer, "ARDAŠĪR I i. History," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. II/4 (London: Routledge, 1986), 371-376. Aavailable online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ardasir-i.

Idumaea named Antipater. He managed to overthrow the Hasmonean dynasty, establishing the Herodian dynasty afterwards, and finally dying in 4 B.C. Regarding Herod's family background, Norman Gelb states that, "Antipater [Herod's father] was a remarkable personality in his own right. He was an Arab from Idumaea, the land south of Judaea that had been conquered and annexed by warrior–high priest Hyrcanus I, under whom its pagan inhabitants had been converted to Judaism…" [154] When Hyrcaus I conquered Idumea and made it a province of Judea, Herod's grandfather, Antipas, was appointed the governor of Idumea.

Herod's father was a friend and helper of the Romans, and after years of struggle, made his son, Herod, the governor of the northern region of Galilee, and subsequently "It was there, at the age of twenty-five, that Herod started along the path that would lead him to the throne, great achievement, and enduring notoriety."[155]

During Herod's struggle to overthrow Hasmoneans, Iranian Parthians conquered Judea and appointed Antigonus II Mattathias the Hasmonean king of Judea. Subsequently, with the help of Romans, Herod managed to drive Parthian-backed Hasmonean King, Antigonus, from the throne of Judea. He afterwards sieged Jerusalem and the "… people of Jerusalem were cut to pieces by great multitudes as they were crowded together in narrow streets and in houses or were running away to the temple; nor was there any mercy showed... The temple was looted, as were countless homes of the people."[156] The aforementioned is what history books relate about Ardaxšēr and Herod. However, what concerns us mostly in this chapter is not history, but myths and narratives that surround these two great kings. Before comparing Herod and Ardaxšēr based

[154] Norman Gelb, *Herod the Great: Statesman, Visionary,* Tyrant (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 6.
[155] Gelb, *Herod the Great, 15*.
[156] Ibid., 44-45.

on Persian and Talmudic myths and narratives, some facts regarding their historical characters will be discussed to help us better understand the mythical narratives.

1.3 The Quest for Legitimacy

First, we should discern that there are no significant similarities between Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān and Herod the Great, historically—other than being the sons of local rulers. Who overthrew two great dynasties and established new powerful ones. However, they both had a more important issue in common: the struggle to gain legitimacy as new kings. This legitimacy problem, in my point of view, is the main reason behind the creation of their mythical narratives.[157] Both Ardaxšēr and Herod managed to put two popular dynasties, namely Arsacids and Hasmoneans, to an end. And obviously, in order to declare new kingship, they needed to gain legitimacy. One of their primary means of legitimating themselves as kings was likely through marriage with members of the previous dynasties, thus creating an appropriate lineage. As historical records illustrate, Herod married Miriamne, a Hasmonean princess, to gain close relations with popular Hasmoneans, and to declare himself a legitimate heir to the former dynasty.[158]

Even though there are not many historical records concerning Ardaxšēr's marriage(s), there are different narrations on this topic. According to KAP, Ardaxšēr and a maiden (probably

[157] Regarding KAP's struggle to prove Ardaxšēr's legitimacy, Mokhtarian states: "In general, the ideological aim of this narrative [KAP] represents a late Sasanian or post-Sasanian priestly construct that promotes a point of view supporting the legitimacy of the early Sasanian kings as rightful heirs of authority from the Parthians." (Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers*, *Kings*, 82)

[158] Regarding Miriamne, Gelb states: "Miriamne was the young granddaughter of both of Queen Alexandra's sons, Ethnarch-High Priest Hyrcanus and the now deceased Aristobulus. She was thus a Hasmonean twice over, a product of the marriage of Hyrcanus's daughter Alexandra to Aristobulus's oldest son Alexander Maccabeus..." And Herod knew that, by marring Miriamne, "he would be intimately linked to the Hasmonean aristocracy, which had long tried to bring him down. It would make any future claim by him to be ruler of Judaea closer to legitimacy than it otherwise would be" (*Herod the Great*, 30).

one of Ardawān's concubines) fell in love and ran away. However, the story does not mention their marriage,[159] and Šāh-nāma states that the maiden was called Golnar. On the other hand, KAP and Šāh-nāma both mention that Ardaxšēr married Ardawān's daughter.[160] Moreover, there is an inscription of Šāpūr I in Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, Fars province, which provides the order of precedence of the dignitaries and offices at Ardaxšēr's court. This inscription indicates that, after introducing the four kings holding governships, three queens are named: Dēnak/g, the grandmother of Ardaxšēr, Rōdak/g, the mother of Ardaxšēr, and Dēnak/g i Pābagān, who is called "The Queen of Queens"[161] and is Ardaxšēr's sister.[162] Generally, scholars believe that Ardaxšēr's sister, Dēnak/g, must have been his wife as well. Unfortunately. The inscription does not provide any extra information about The Queen of Queens. However, King Šāpūr mentions his mother, Myrod, in the inscription as well. Therefore, we know that Myrod is definitely Ardaxšēr's wife, who was (according to legends and KAP) a surviving Arsacid princess. Whether Ardaxšēr aimed to get legitimacy through marriage is subject to more investigation. However, his struggle for gaining legitimacy as the new king is obvious and substantiated. Regarding Ardaxšēr's search for legitimacy, Daryaee states that:

> If he was from a noble house he would have emphasized one version or one lineage, but stories about Ardaxšīr's origins are so varied that they suggest a search for legitimacy via every tradition that had been

[159] Regarding this maiden, Rubenstein's article "King Herod in Ardeshir's Court" translates the term *kanīzag-ēw* as "certain maiden," "servant girl" and "slave girl." The word *kanīzag* in Middle Persian texts most commonly means "a young girl"; eventually in classical Persian literature and modern Persian, it came to mean "servant" or "slave." In the same text the only noble girl from Mihrak/g's house who survived whom Šāpūr married is called *kanizag* as well. Even after she is married to the crown prince Šāpūr, the story refers to her as *kanizag*.

[160] Rubenstein states: "The authors of the Karnamag and Xwaday-namag write to glorify and legitimate the Sasanian dynasty. Hence the marriage to the former king's daughter and offspring with both Sasanian and Arsacid blood. Firdowsi, in the Šāh-nāma version, hits us over the head with this idea: 'Then Sabak came before Ardaxšēr and said, 'Wise king, demand Ardawān's daughter in marriage: she has splendor and beauty and the dignity of station. The crown will be in your hands'" ("King Herod," 262).

[161] Apparently Dēnak/g was a popular name among the Jews as well; the Bavli also contains variations such as Donag. One of R. Nahman's daughters was called Denag/ Donag.

[162] Wiesehöfer, "ARDAŠĪR I i. History."

passed down by the Persians, some constructed and perhaps those unknown. Foreign sources are mostly unanimous of regarding Ardaxšīr's unknown lineage.[163]

1.3.1 How Jewish Babylonian Sages perceived Herod in B. Bat. 3b-4a[164]

The following is the myth B. Bat. 3b-4a, narrates regarding Herod; his relations with the Hasmonean princess, his conversation with Bava b. Buta, his decision to construct the temple, his relation with Romans, and so on. All the aforementioned issues will be discussed in light of KAP as well.

[א] הורודוס עבדא דבי חשמונאי הוה נתן עיניו באותה תינוקת יומא חד שמע קלא דהוה קאמר'

כל עבדה דמריד האי שעתא מצל.

[ב 1] קם קטלינהו לכולהו מרוותי שיירא להההיא ינוקתא. סלקה לאיגרא ורמיה קלה ואמ' כל.

דאמ' מבית חשמונאי אנא עבדא הוא דלא אישתייר מיניהו אלא ההיא ינוקת והיא קא נפלה ומתה

[ה]טמ[י]נה בדובשא שבע שנין. איכ' דאמרי בא עליה ואיכ' דאמר' לא בא עליה. מאן דאמ' בא

עליה כי היכי דליתוביה יצריה. ומאן דאמ' לא בא עליה למה לי דעביד הכי. כי היכי דניפוק קלא

דניסב בת מלכא.

[ב 2] אמ' מאן דריש מקר(ם) [ב] אחיך תשים עליך מלך. רבנן. קם קטלינהו לכולהו רבנן

שיירי לבבא בן בוטא למיסב עצה מינה. אהדר ליה כלילא דילאי ונקרינהו לעיניה. יומא חד אתא

ויתיב קמיה. אמ' ל' חזא מר האי עובדא בישא מאי קא עביד. (א"ל) ומאי אעביד ליה. אמ' ל'

נלטייה מר. אמ ליה כת' גם במדעך אמלך לא תקלל. (א"ל) הני מילי מלך האי לאו מלך הוא.

(א"ל) ולא יהא אלא עשיר. כת' ובחדרי משכבך אל תקלל עשיר. ולא יהא אלא נשיא. ו[ה]כת'

ונשיא בעמך לא תאור. אמ' ל' בעושה מעשה עמך והאי לאו עו[ש]ה מעשה עמך הוא. אמ' ל'

[163] Daryaee, "Ardaxshir and the Sāsānians,'" 241.
[164] For B. Bat. 3b-4a, I used the same translation as Rubenstein in "King Herod."

מיסתפינא דיל' איכ' איניש אחרינא דשמע מ[י]לתא ואזיל ומודע ליה. (א"ל) השתא מיהת ליכא.

איניש גבן דאזיל ואמ'. אמ' ל' כי עוף השמי' יוליך את הקל ובעל כנפים יגיד דבר. אמ' ל' אנא.

הא אנא ידענא דצניעיהו כולי האי לא קטלינא לכו. השתא מאי תקנתיה דההוא גברא.

'אמ' ל' כיבה הוא אורו של עולם ילך ויעסוק באורו של עולם. הוא כיבה אורו של עולם דכת

'כי נר מצוה ותורה אור. ילך ויעסוק באורו של עולם בית המקדש דכת' ונהרו אליו כל הגוים. איכ

'דאמרי הכי קאמ' ליה הוא כיבה עינו של עולם ילך ויעסוק בעינו של עול'. כיבה עינו של עול' רבנ

דכת' והיה אם מעיני העדה נעשתה וגו'. ילך ויעסוק בעינו של עולם בית המקדש דכת' הנני מחלל את

מקדשי גאון עוזכם מחמד עיניכם. אמ' ל' מיסתפינא ממלכותא דרומי. אמ' ל' שדר שלוחא אזיל שתא

ומיעכב שתא והדר שתא א(ה)[ד]הכי והכי בני ליה.

שלחו ליה. אם לא סתרת אל תסתור ואם סתרת אל תבנה ואם סתרת ובנית עבדת בישא בתר

דעבדין מתמלכין אם זינך עלך סיפרך (ק..א) כאן. את לא רכה ולא בר רכה הורודוס <עבדא> קלניא

מיתעבד.

Herod was a slave of the Hasmonean House. He set his eyes on a certain maiden. One day he heard a voice that said, "Any slave who rebels now will succeed."

He arose and killed all of his masters. He left [only] that maiden. When that maiden saw that he wished to marry her, She went up to the roof and raised her voice and said, "Whoever says, 'I am from the Hasmonean House' is a slave. For only that maiden (=me) was left from them," and she jumped and died. He preserved her in honey for seven years. Some say he had sex with her, and some say he did not have sex with her. He who says he had sex with her— to satisfy his [sexual] urge. He who says he did not have sex with her— why did he do that? So as to send forth a rumor (=voice) that he took in marriage the daughter of a king.

One day he [Herod] came and sat before him [a significant sage called Bava b. Buta]. He [Herod] said to him [Bava b. Buta], "Do you see, Sir, this evil slave— what he does?" (He said to him), "What can I do to him?" He [Herod] said to him, "Curse him." He said to him, "It is written, 'Don't revile a king even among your intimates' [Kohelet 10:20]." (He [Herod] said to him), "This applies to a king. But that one is no king." (He said to him,) "Even if he is only a rich man, as is written, '[Don't revile] a rich man even in your bedchamber' [Kohelet 10:20]. And even if his is only a noble, as is written, 'Do not put a curse upon a chieftain among your people' [Exodus 22:27]." [Herod] said to him, "[That verse applies] to one who acts in accord with the ways of your people, but this one does not act in accord with the ways of your people."

He said to him, "I am afraid lest there be another man who would hear something and go and inform him." He [Herod] said to him, "Now, however, there is no other man with us who might go and tell." He said to him, "For a bird of the air may carry the utterance, and a winged creature may report the word" [Kohelet 10:20]. He [Herod] said to him, "It is I! Had I known that the sages were so discreet, I would not have killed you all. Now what is the remedy for that man (=me)?" He said to him, "He extinguished the light of

> the world. Let him go and busy himself with the light of the world." And sages explain that the light of the world is the temple.
> Herod did build the temple. they [the Romans] sent to him, "If you have not razed it [the temple], do not raze it. And if you have razed it, do not build it. And if you have razed it and built it, then you are an evil slave who consults after he has [already] acted. Although your weapons are with you, your book [of genealogy] is here. You are not a king [rekha], nor the son of a king [bar rekha], but Herod, (a slave) who made himself a freeman." (B. Bat. 3b-4a)

One important issue regarding the above story is its appearance in the Babylonian Talmud, exclusively. Although the story takes place in the land of Israel, it is absent from the Palestinian Talmud and merely narrated by the Babylonian sages. This fact alone is a hint for Talmudic scholars to investigate the narrative in relation with the Iranian sources.

Herod appears in some other sections of the Talmud as well, and always is considered a slave of the Hasmonean family by the Talmudic sages. For instance, in Qidd. 70b it states:

> Thus said Samuel … "He who claims, 'I am descended from the royal house of the Hasmoneans,' is a slave, because there remained of them only one maiden who ascended a roof, lifted up her voice and cried out, 'Whoever says I am descended from the house of the Hasmoneans is a slave'; then she fell from the roof and died. So he was proclaimed a slave."[165]

However, despite Herod's negative character in the Bavli, he is considered to be the one who rebuilt the Jerusalem temple gloriously:

> … He who has not seen the Temple in its full construction has never seen a glorious building in his life. Which Temple?— Abaye, or it might be said, R. Hisda, replied, the reference is to the building of Herod. Of what did he build it?— Rabbah replied, of yellow and white marble. Some there are who say, with yellow, blue and white marble…[166] (Sukkah 51b).

1.3.2 How Zoroastrian Priests perceived Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān

Since KAP is a lengthy text compared to the Talmudic narrative of Herod, I will summarize it and quote the sections which are being discussed in this chapter. KAP begins by introducing Pābag and Sāsān, who are the grandfather and father of Ardaxšēr:

> In the records of wars of Ardaxšēr, son of Pābag, it is written thus: "That after the death of Alexandar i Hromik (the Roman Alexander), in Ērānšahr, there were two hundred and forty governors.

[165] All translations of the Babylonian Talmud are from Soncino translation of the Talmud unless otherwise stated. Moreover, all of the Talmudic narratives are from the Babylonian Talmud unless otherwise stated in a footnote.
[166] For a full description cf. Josephus, Ant. xv, 11v.

> Pābag was the frontier and governor of Pārs, and was appointed by Ardawān.
> And Sāsān was Pābag's shepherd [or herded Pābag's sheep] and always was with the sheep and was from the lineage of Dārāy ī Dārāyān (Darus the third).
>
> One night Pābag saw in a dream that the sun was shining from Sāsān's head and lightened up the whole world. And then, the other night [he] dreamt that Sāsān was seated on a white saddled elephant, and all the country had gathered around Sāsān and bent the knee[167], and praised and applauded him. And the third night [he] saw as if Farrōbāy, Gušnasp and Burzēnmihr fires, were blazing from Sāsān's dwelling and giving light to the whole world.
>
> The deram interpreters said: 'The person who was seen in that dream, or one of his descendants will become the ruler of the world, because the sun and the saddled white elephant represents domination, power and victory…

Subsequently in the story, realizes that Sāsān is descended from Dārā ī Dārāyān (the last Achaemenid king) and arranges her daughter's marriage with him. His daughter gives birth to Ardaxšēr, whom Pābag raises up as his own son.[168] Ardaxšēr becomes so famous in both wisdom and strength that the great King Ardawān wants him in his court to accompany his princes.

However, in a hunting scene, Ardaxšēr blames Ardawān's son for committing a lie, and "Ardawān thereby felt offended and thereafter did not allow Ardaxšēr to ride on horseback. He sent the latter [Ardaxšēr] to his stables of horses and cattle, and ordered him as follows: 'Take care (of those animals so) that you do not go in the day or night from before those horses and cattle a hunting, to the playground or the college of learning.'" Ardaxšēr writes to his grandfather about the incident, who replies to Ardaxšēr as follows:

> You did not act wisely regarding disputing with nobles and act offensively on a matter that would not harm you. And now offer an apology and show regret, since sages say: " enemy could not harm an enemy the way a man can harm himself [by acting unwisely … And you yourself know that Ardawān is superior to you and me and many people of the world…

[167] Namāz Burdan, means to bend the knee. This expression is absent from Sanjana's 1896 translation.
[168] If a man does not father a son, the law will consider his first grandson (his daughter's son) as his own son, so according to Zoroastrianism Pābag was officially, but not biologically, Ardaxšēr's father. This ancient rule has caused some confusion regarding Ardaxšēr's father.

From this point, the story enters a second phase during which Ardaxšēr endeavors to escape Ardawān's prison, and he wages war with Ardawān and other regional rulers until he becomes the King of Kings. Everything begins with Ardawān's maiden falling in love with Ardaxšēr.

The following is how Ardawān's maiden, who is introduced as Golnar in Shanameh, appears in KAP:

> Ardawān had an admirable maiden whom he treated with greater respect compared to other [maidens] and she would minister to Ardawān in all aspects" This respectful maiden of Ardawān eventually falls in love with Ardaxšēr, and spends her time with Ardaxšēr in the stable every night after Ardawān goes to sleep.

How the maiden aids Ardaxšēr's escape is narrated as follows:

> One day, Ardawān called upon the sages and astrologers that had in his court… And asked them about the future of his kingdom and family.
>
> One of the sages replied: '…it seems that a king and a new kingdom will emerge, and [he] kills many governors, and bring the world under the rule of one king again.'
>
> A second one of their heads [astrologer's leaders] came forward and said: 'It seems that any slave- who from today up to three days- runs from his master will become a noble and king and will overcome his master and defeat him.'

When the maiden returns to Ardaxšēr at night, she recounts to Ardaxšēr the words as they were told (by the astrologers) to Ardawān. Ardaxšēr, after hearing what Ardawān's maiden expresses, decides to escape. The maiden then helps Ardaxšēr, and they both run away and begin their journey. That night, Ardawān realizes that his maiden and Ardaxšēr have escaped, so he goes after them with an army.

On his way, Ardaxšēr, sees two women who miraculously know him and guide him:

> … Do not fear O Ardaxšēr the Kai, son of Pābag, from the house of Sāsān, the grandson of King Dārā; you have escaped from any evil and no one can capture you, and you will rule over Ērānšahr for many years, hurry until you reach the sea, and do not pass until you see the sea with your own eyes, because the moment you look at the sea you will be fearless [safe] from the enemies. Ardaxšēr became glad and left that place [the village] in a rushed manner.

Many wars and extraordinary events take place until "He [Ardaxšēr] killed Ardawān, whose entire wealth and property fell into the hands of Ardaxšēr, who married Ardawān's daughter, and

went back to Pārs." On one occasion when Ardaxšēr was having his meal, the following incident occurred:

> Instantaneously a wooden arrow dispatched from the castle and plummeted up to the feathers [arrows feathers] to the lamb that was on the table, and a message on the arrow read as follows: 'This arrow was shot by the soldiers of the Worm-king (*Karm xwadāy*), it behooved us to not to kill a great man like you so we strike this lamb.'

On another occasion, when Ardaxšēr's army was defeated, he managed to escape:

> At night, he [i.e. Ardaxšēr] went to the house of two brothers called Burzag and Burz-Ādur, and said that: "I am one of Ardaxšēr's troops that was defeated by the Worm's army, today please have me over [at your house as a guest] until there are news from Ardaxšēr's troops [to see] where they are. They [the two brothers] told Ardaxšēr sorrowfully: "Accursed be the wicked gannāg mēnōg (Ahriman), that made this idol superior and strong so that [the idol] made all the people of the towns to turn away from the religion of Ohrmazd and the Amahraspands [seven archangels], and a great king and man like Ardaxšēr and his troops and every one was defeated by the hands of those wicked idolater enemies."
>
> They (i.e. those brothers) performed the *drōn* (food blessing) prayer and asked, Ardaxšēr thus: "Please recite the *wāz* (food blessing) and eat and do not be sad and worrisome, because Ohrmazd and the Amahraspands will solve this problem and will not leave this idol the way it is. …" They had no wine, so they brought bear[169] and arranged the *myazd* [offering table], and recited blessings.
> Ardaxšēr was confident about their [two brothers] good will, religiosity, sincerity and submissiveness, so he revealed his secret to Burz [here in the manuscript the name appears as Burzag] and Burz-Ādur and said: "I am Ardaxšēr myself. Now find a way to destroy this Worm and its companions.

The story focuses on the two brothers' religiosity, as they ultimately declare that they are religious pupils: "take there (with you) two men who are religious pupils." In the end, Ardaxšēr, with the help of the two brothers, defeats the Worm and:

> Ardaxšēr uprooted that castle and demolished it and ordered a village called Kulālān to be built in its place, and founded ātaxš ī Wahrām in there; and property gold and silver of that castle was loaded on the back of thousand camels and was sent to Gōwār [name of a city].

Defeating the Worm is one of Ardaxšēr's most significant deeds. However, the story does not finish here, and continues with Ardaxšēr managing the Empire. He also has a son called Šāpūr, who would later marry a surviving princess from the well-known Mihrak/g family, and fathers a child called Hormuz.

[169] In Sanjana's translation the two brothers bring pomegranate; however, I did not encounter the word *anār* (pomegranate) in Sanjana and Antia manuscripts. In both versions the word *Wašk* (bear) is attested.

1.3.4 Ardaxšēr and the Jews

Although Ardaxšēr i Pābagān's predecessor and successor—Ardawān V (ʿAbod. Zar., 10b, 11a) and Šāpūr I—are named in the Talmud, Ardaxšēr i Pābagān, the founder of the Sasanian Empire, is not mentioned in the Bavli by name. Overall, other than the Achaeminid kings whose names are mentioned in the Old Testament, and the last Parthian king (Ardawān V), only Šāpūr I and II, Yazdegird I, and Pērōz from the Sasanian house are mentioned in the Bavli.[170] Nevertheless, the fact that Ardaxšēr i Pābagān —one of the most important figures in the Sasanian era—is missing from the Talmud Bavli is striking.

However, there are a couple of anecdotes in which the consequences of Ardaxšēr's reign are described. In the Bavli, the new Persian Empire (Ardaxšēr) is responsible for depriving the Jews of the right they previously had of imposing capital punishment (exercised under the Parthians). The following narrative states that the new Persians, namely the Sasanians, "are particular regarding bloodshed":

> A certain man who was desirous of showing another man's straw [to be confiscated] appeared before Rab, who said to him: "Don't show it! Don't show it!" He retorted: "I will show it! I will show it!" R. Kahana was then sitting before Rab, and he tore [that man's] windpipe out of him. Rab thereupon quoted: "Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the heads of all the streets as a wild bull in a net; just as when a 'wild bull' falls into a 'net' no one has mercy upon it, so with the property of an Israelite, as soon as it falls into the hands of heathen oppressors no mercy is exercised towards it." Rab therefore said to him: "Kahana, until now the Greeks who did not take much notice of bloodshed were [here and had sway, but] now the Persians who are particular regarding bloodshed are here, and they will certainly say, 'Murder, murder!'; arise therefore and go up to the Land of Israel…" (B. Qam. 117a)

As Jacob Neusner relates, "The new regime [Sasanians], first of all, annulled Jewish legal autonomy, and made it clear that the government would supervise the activities of Jewish courts as the Parthians never had."[171]

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[170] The only reference to Pērōz in the Bavli is very ambiguous. In Ḥul. 62b I doubt that the Sasanian King, Pērōz, is meant, and if he is, his name is being used merely as a hint to remind the reader of the name of a certain bird: "*piruz androfata* (the name of a bird) is forbidden; and to remember this think of 'the wicked piruz.'"

[171] Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia, Part II: The Early Sasanian Period* (Eugene, OR: Wips and Stock, 2008), 31.

There is another story illustrating that Sasanian regime supervised the activities of Jewish courts. The story centers on Rav Shila, who was the head of Bet Midrash in Nehardea in first half of the third century.[172] According to the story Rav Shila, a prominent sage in the last days of Arsacids and the early Sasanian period, used to make legal judgments, and despite the new government's rules, he continued working as a judge. However, in this certain case, the party who was unsatisfied with R. Shila's sentence knew that the new government had annulled Jewish legal authority. Therefore, he made a complaint to the government, and informed them about Rav Shila's act: "R. Shila administered lashes to a man who had intercourse with an Egyptian (gentile in some versions) woman. The man went and informed against him to the Government, saying: There is a man among the Jews who passes judgment without the permission of the Government…"[173] (Ber., 58a).

There is another Talmudic anecdote that shows the Jewish community was not satisfied with the new Persian regime during Ardaxšēr's reign. When the news was brought to R. Johanan, the most esteemed amora in Palestine, that the Persians had overrun and conquered Babylonia, he was overcome with sympathy for his Babylonian brethren: "When R. Johanan was informed that the Parsees had come to Babylon, he reeled and fell. When, however, he was told that they accepted bribes he recovered and sat down again" (Yebam. 63b).

Furthermore, the Jewish Encyclopedia states that under Ardaxšēr's rule, "Difficulties were put in the way of the Jews in such matters as the slaughtering of cattle for food, and as to their bathing-places and cemeteries, which were subject to intrusion. On certain Persian holy days, the Guebers [Zoroastrian officials] would not permit any light in the houses of the

[172] See Barak S. Cohen, *The Legal Methodology of Late Nehardean Sages in the Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
[173] Two Persian words are used in the story: *hermana* (*framan*) = order, and *fristaga* = messenger.

Jews."[174] Moreover, on another occasion the Parthian and Sāsānians are clearly compared: "The patriarch Judah II. was informed that the Parthians resembled the armies of King David, but that the New Persians were like demons of hell" (Ḳiddushin. 72a). And finally, there is an anecdote in which Rav's affection for Ardawān is illustrated. In ʿAbod. Zar. 10b-11a, it states that, "Antoninus served Rabbi. Ardawān served Rav. When Antoninus died, Rabbi said: The cord is separated. When Ardawān died, Rav said: The cord is separated."[175] On the other hand, evidence of Ibn Daud shows that in Ardaxšēr's days, the Jews and Persians were on good terms, as was also the case in the days of King Šāpūr.[176] According to the Jewish Encyclopedia:

> S. Cassel believes that the Jews were favored by the Persians; and Graetz knows of no persecution under Ardaxšēr. There is, however, in the "Small Chronicle"— although not in its proper place— a statement that; the Persians obtained dominion in the year 245 after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and instituted a persecution of the Jews. The Jews were no longer appointed to the wardenship of the canals (reshe nahare), nor to offices of the court (gezirpaṭi; Persian, hazar paiti; Greek, ἀζαραπατεῖς), which, however, the Jews regarded as an advantage (Ta'anit, 20a); canal-wardens, who were also tax collectors, being held in such dread (as is graphically described in Sanh. 25b) that the Jews were glad to be relieved from the duty…[177]

1.4 The Sasanian Kings are mentioned in the Bavli

After going through the anecdotes relating to the Sasanian kings in the Bavli thoroughly, I realized that the incidents and deeds attributed to the specific Sasanian kings in the Bavli might be ascribed to other kings in Iranian materials, or vice versa. There are also incidents in the Bavli which are generally attributed to "the government", but we might be able to find the details of these incidents in the Iranian materials.

The example of Wahrām V, son of Yazdegird I, is helpful when examining the aforementioned issue. Although Yazdegird is mentioned in the Bavli, Wahrām and his Jewish

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[174] Morris Jastow et al., "Babylonia," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, online edition, 1936, available at http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2286-babylonia (accessed on 10 January 2018).
[175] According to Mokhtarian: "Both the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud contain positive portrayals of the final Parthian king, Ardawān IV…" (*Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings*, 80-81).
[176] Jastow et al., "Babylonia."
[177] Jastow et al., "Babylonia."

mother (whom, according to a Pahlavi text, was daughter of the Jewish exilarch), are absent from the Babylonian Talmud. According to a Pahlavi text called *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* (The Cities of Iran), "The city of Susa and Šūštar were built by Šīšīnduxt [Šošanduxt in other versions], the wife of Yazdgird, the son of Šābuhr, since she was the daughter of Reš Galut, the king of the Jews and also was the mother of Wahrām Gōr."[178] In the same text about the city of Gay (modern Isfahan), we read thus: "The city of Gay was built by the accursed Alexander, the son of Philip. The dwelling of the Jews was there. During the reign of Yazdgird, the son of Šābuhr, (the Jews) were led there by the request of Šīšīnduxt who was his wife."[179] Also, regarding Wahrām Gōr's brother, Narsēh i Yahudagan, the text states that, "The city of Xwārazm was built by Narsēh, the son of the Jewess." Furthermore, Daryaee explains that, "Muslim historians tell us that Wahrām Gōr had appointed his brother as the governor of Xwarāsān (Ṭabarī 1999; 99)."[180]

And interestingly, one of the two Jewish-related anecdotes in the Šāh-nāma happens in Bahrām V's (Wahrām Gōr in Pahlavi) time. According to the Šāh-nāma, Bahrām Gur used to make adventurous patrols throughout his kingdom, once he went to spend the night at a Jewish man's house. The Jewish man was very famous for his wealth and inhospitality and ungenerousness, and Wahrām wanted to make sure that complains about the Jewish man's meanness are true. The story begins with an old man's words regarding the Jewish man called "Barāhām" (Probably a version of Abraham):

> … Barāhām is a niggard barren Jew, and his ungenerousness cannot be hidden, He has money and treasure, Also carpets, silks and many other things…[181]

[178] Daryaee, Touraj, Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērānšahr*: a Middle Persian text on late antique geography, epic, and history: with English and Persian translations and commentary*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2002, 27.
[179] Daryaee, 2002, 28.
[180] Daryaee, 2002, 49.
[181] All Šāh-nāma translations are my own, based on the Khaleghi-Motlagh edition.

Bahrām Gur[182] anonymously goes to Barāhām the Jew and seeks a place to spend the night, but Barāhām's servant informs Bahrām that there is no place for him to spend the night:

> Barāhām said [to his servant] that instantly go and say: "This place is small, and the Jew is poor and starves every night. He sleeps bare and hungry on the ground.

Still, Bahrām insists, "Let me sleep by the door, I will not ask for anything else." Barāhām makes different kinds of excuses, and yet Bahrām insists on spending the night at his place. In the end Barāhām agrees that Bahrām can stay on a couple of conditions:

> Promise to not ask for anything because I don't even have a winding sheet for my death… If your horse leaves its droppings here or breaks the tiles of this house you need to clean its dropping in early morning… and pay for the tiles.

And Bahrām agrees and spends the night. The story overall emphasizes on Barāhām's tightfistedness and cruelty toward the guest.

The end of story consists of two Talmudic motifs namely excessive wealth of a Jew that exceeds Sasanian king's wealth and seizing a Jew's wealth according to Sasanian king's order:

> Barāhām was ordered to go to king's palace and an honest man was sent to Barāhām's house and brought his treasures and belongings to the court: '… Go and take beasts of burden with you and be careful about being just. Go to Barāhām's house … and take what you find in there…The honest man went to the Jew's house, the house was full of precious fabrics and money.'

The story relates that the king's raven finds a huge treasure at Jew's house, and faces difficulties transporting them:

> The priest [honest man] could not count them [the treasure], he asked for thousand camels from Jahrom fields, they loaded them all however still some [of Jew's treasure] remained… When the sound of Caravan was heard, a wise man went to the king and said: 'In thy treasure house there are not gems as much as this [the Jew's treasure], and two hundred ass-loads are left yet.'

Thus, the king realized that Barāhām the Jew was wealthier than he.

The Bavli also refers to an occasion in which property of a Jew was seized by the Sasanian government. For instance, during an interpretation of Deuteronomy 31:7 when the rabbis argue with Rava, Rava exclaims, "Do ye know then how much I send secretly to the Court

[182] In the Šāh-nāma translations I used the new Persian pronuniciation of Wahrām Gōr's name.

of King Shapur? Even so the Rabbis directed their eyes upon him. Meanwhile the Court of King Shapur sent [men], who plundered him. [Seized his properties]" (Ḥag., 5b.). In this example, a probably fictional narrative that based on the Šāh-nāma set during the time of Bahrām V, was ascribed to King Šāpūr in the Bavli. Although seizing Jews' properties could have happen during the reign of any Sasanian king, the only record in Iranian materials belongs to the days of Bahrām V.

Moreover, the very idea of a common Jewish man being wealthier than the Sasanian king can be seen in both the Talmud and the story of Bahrām V from the Šāh-nāma. In Šabb. 113b, regarding the massive wealth that the Palestinian patriarch, Judah I, was assumed to have possessed, it is anonymously asserted that the, "Rabbi's stable-master [House-steward in some manuscripts] was richer than King Šāpūr!"[183] And also in Bava Meziya 85a we read: "Rabbi's house-steward was wealthier than King Šāpūr."[184]According to the Šāh-nāma, Bahrām's official who went to seize the Jewish man's (Brāhām) property, informs the king that this man is way wealthier than the king!

I suggest that the theme of Wealthy Jew who is richer than the king and king's officers seizing Jews' wealth was a common narration among people of Sasanian Iran. Another theme that king Bahrām Gur and the Talmud share is the idea of dragon slaying. According to the Šāh-nāma, once Bahrām went to India and the King of Indians asked the Persian king to slay an annoying dragon. Despite the opposition of Iranian nobles, Bahrām fights the dragon and kills it.

[183] Judah I was, of course, no contemporary of any of the three Sasanian kings by the name of Šāpūr. One suspects that the name Šāpūr became synonymous with "Persian king" for the early creators of the BT [Bavli] much in the same way as Caesar for the Romans and Xusro for the later Persians and Arabic historiography became. (Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings*, 75.)

[184] In "Ahasuerus, the Former Stable-Master" Herman states that the title Stable Master is the correct variation (rather than "House Steward").

However, the Bavli refers to a dragon which was found during the time of King Šāpūr: "Was there not a serpent in the days of King Šāpūr before which thirteen stables of straw were laced, and it swallowed then, all?" (Ned. 25a)[185] So, again something that is attributed to Bahrām in the Iranian materials, is being shifted to King Šāpūr's time in the Bavli.[186]

Moreover, the character of the significant "mother of the king", Ifra Hormiz (the mother of King Šāpūr in the Bavli), is comparable to the character of the Jewish mother of Bahrām V in the Pahlavi materials. Ifra Hormiz is a very significant character in Iran-related narrations of the Bavli. She adores Jews, and has a very close and friendly relationship with the Jewish rabbis:

> Ifra Hormiz the mother of King Šāpūr sent a chest of gold coins to R. Joseph, with the request that it should be used for carrying out some really important religious precept. R. Joseph was trying hard to think what such a precept could be, when Abaye said to him: Since R. Samuel b. Judah has laid down that money for charity is not to be levied from orphans even for the redemption of captives, we may conclude that the redemption of captives is a religious duty of great importance. (B. Bat. 8a-8b)

She sends money to Jewish sages as an act of charity. However, in B. Bat. 10b, there is a dispute between sages regarding acceptance of the money Ifra Hormiz sends. And on another occasion (Zevachim 116b), though Ifra Hormiz sends offerings (animal sacrifice) to rabbis so that they may be offered in honor of heavens, the rabbis consider her a non-Jew.

In another occasion she seeks religious guidance from Jewish sages:

> Ifra Hormiz, the mother of King Šāpūr, once sent some blood to Raba when R. Obadiah was sitting in his presence. Having smelt it he said to him, "This is blood of lust." "Come and see," she remarked to her son, "how wise the Jews are." "It is quite possible," he replied, "that he hit upon I like a blind man on a window." Thereupon she sent to him sixty different kinds of blood and he identified them all but the last one which was lice blood with which he was not acquainted. Luckily, however, he sent her a comb that exterminates lice. "O, you Jews," she exclaimed, "you seem to live in the inner chamber of one's heart." (Nidah 20b)

[185] Another seven-headed dragon appeared in the days of Abbaye (died 339 C.E.) and was defeated through prayer.
[186] It should be mentioned here that the worm which Ardaxšēr defeats do have characteristics of a dragon and can be fit into the dragon hunting themes of the Iranian mythological materials.

Rashi (an eleventh-century Talmudic commentator) suggested that even though Ifra Hormiz was not Jewish, "she would keep the menstrual laws and she was close to converting."[187] Shai Secunda believes that, "Had these commentators (Rashi, Neusner and Albert de Jong) more fully considered the significance of menstrual impurity in Zoroastrian culture and the competition between Jews and Zoroastrian on this matter, they would have been better positioned to unravel the meaning of this Talmudic story and appreciate the intercultural dynamics that it reflects."[188] However, Ifra Hormiz's dedication to Judaism, and her appreciation for Jewish sages, might be because of her Jewish background. As Queen of the Sasanian court, she must have converted to Zoroastrianism, but she obviously could not abandon her Jewish background.

In the following story, Ifra Hormiz tries to save Rava's life, and plays the role of a Jewish spy in the Sasanian court where she secretly sends a messenger to Rava asking him to "Concentrate now your mind and pray for rain." (Ta'anith 24b) She does this to prove to his son -King Šāpūr- that God listens to Jews, and it is dangerous to irritate with them:

> Once a certain man was sentenced by the Court of Raba to receive corporal punishment because he had intercourse with a Gentile woman. Raba had the man punished and he died. The matter reached the ears of King Šāpūr and he sought to punish Raba. Whereupon Ifra Hormuz [Hormiz], the mother of King Šāpūr, said to her son, "do not interfere with the Jews because whatever they ask of their God He grants them." The king asked her, "For example?" "They pray and rain falls" [she replied]. He retorted: "This must have been because it is the season for rain; let them pray now, in the Tammuz cycle for rain." She sent a message to Raba: "Concentrate now your mind and pray for rain." He prayed but no rain fell. He then exclaimed: "Master of the Universe, 'O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us; a work Thou didst in their days, in the days of old.' But as for us we have not seen [it] with our eyes. Whereupon there followed such a heavy fall of rain that the gutters of Mahuza emptied their waters into the Tigris." Raba's father then appeared unto him in a dream and said to him: "Is there anyone who troubles Heaven so much? Change thy [sleeping] place." He changed his place and next morning he discovered that his bed had been cut with knives. (Ta'anith 24b)

[187] Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 6.
[188] Ibid.

The Bavli clearly states that Ifra Hormiz was the mother of King Šāpūr [II], and had relations with Rava. However, there is no other source other than the Bavli that records Šāpūr II's mother's name. Nonetheless, if we consider that "King Šāpūr" is a common name for all of the Sasanian kings, we can probably conclude that a character such as Ifra Hormiz (who is a Queen Mother who seems to be either Jewish or very dedicated to Judaism), is only comparable to the Jewish Sasanian Queen Šušānduxt, mother of King Bahrām V. Moreover, if we consider the name "Šāpūr Malka" as a common name, the only Sasanian king whose actual name is mentioned in the Bavli is Yazdegird, who had a Jewish wife according to the Pahlavi literature.[189]

As mentioned above, the Jewish wife of Yazdegird (who is mentioned in Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērānšahr) is absent from the Bavli. However, there is an interesting anecdote which may suggest that rabbis had a close relationship with Yazdegird's court, and even ate the food prepared for him. Considering that Jewish dietary laws are very strict, and rabbis would only eat kosher food, the story may suggests that Yazdegird's food might have been kosher. However, what is more interesting about the story is its parallel in Šāh-nāma, which appears during Anōširawān. Anōširawān had a decent Vizier called Mahbud:

> He had a righteous vizier, who was a conscious man and [king's] treasurer. The king would only eat the meal that Mahbud [the vizier] and his two sons provided. His [king's] kitchen was at Mahbud's house, and he [the king] was his guest. Two sons of that righteous and celebrated man were king's cooks.There was a member of the court (Zurwān) who was jealous of Mahbud and his sons.
> There was a well-known man called Zurwān, who was beneficent from the court, he was an old member of the court, and king's chamberlain and the executor of the court's ceremonies. And all year long he was with tears in envy of Mahbud and his two auspicious sons… dispraising them did not work because it annoyed the king …

[189] As mentioned earlier, only Šāpūr I and II (Yazdegird and Pērōz) are mentioned in the Bavli; moreover, Pērōz is mentioned not as a king, but only as a name that resembles that of a certain bird.

So Zurwān had to find another way. He had a Jewish friend who used to come to the court regularly: "There was a Jewish man to whom Zurwān paid interest, and because of that they commuted frequently, and he [the Jew] associated with his [Zurwān] gloomy soul."

One day when Zurwān and his Jewish friend were conversing, the Jewish man revealed his ability to do different kinds of magic:

> When he [the Jew] was trusted by the chamberlain, he became one of the servitors of the court. One day [the Jew] spoke about magic, and about the court, and the king of the world. [He spoke] about spells, sorcery, malfeasance and bad temper.

Zurwān was impressed by his Jewish friend's magical abilities, and asked whether he could help him put an end to Mahbud's supremacy. And the Jewish man said he could poison king's food only by a glance. And when king's food is poisonous Zurwān could inform the king about it and Mahbud and his sons were in trouble, and the king would execute them surely.

"The Jew told Zurwān that: "do not be sad, because of this matter (Mahbud and his sons position in the court); when the king of the world asks for Barsom (sacred twigs), see what kind of food they bring for him. See whether there is any milk in there. Go forth and smell the food. If I look at the milk from far away there would be no Mahbud nor his sons. Even if brass and stone eat that [milk] they will perish instantly."

The story related that king's food was always covered with a golden napkin, however Zurwān asked Mahbud's sons to uncover king's food just once so he can see it:

> "One day the two young men were taking king's meal, one servant that was trusted with the food took the tray on his head … Zurwān said to the two young men smiling: "O you who are unassailable ones! Please show me this food which nourishes the king; what it looks like? It has a very good smell. For a moment please withdraw the silk cover [from the food]. The young men instantly uncovered the food, and Zurwān glanced from a distance, at the same time the Jew gazed at the food. All was done when he saw the color of the food. [the Jew] said to the chamberlain thus: 'the tree you had planted came into fruit.'

And, finally, Zurwān informs the king about the poisonous meal which was prepared at Mahbud's house, and king asks Mahbud's sons to eat from the food. They do eat the food and perish instantly, and Mahbud will be executed as well.

What is striking about the story above is its parallel in the Bavli. The main theme in the two narratives is manipulation of king's food by Jews who are present in Sasanian king's court. Mentioning of meat which is ruined and poisonous is another shared theme in the two stories. In both stories, king's life is threatened by the ruined food. And a Jew using magic related to food is another common motif. In Ketub. 61a-b we read:

> Amemar, Mar Zutra and R. Ashi were once sitting at the gate of King Yezdegerd when the King's table-steward passed them by. R. Ashi, observing that Mar Zutra turned pale in the face, took up with his finger [some food from the dish and] put it to his mouth.[190]'You have spoilt the King's meal' [the table-steward] cried. 'Why did you do such a thing?' he was asked [by the King's officers]. 'The man who prepared that dish', he replied, 'has rendered the King's food objectionable'. 'Why?' they asked him. 'I noticed', he replied, 'a piece of leprous swine flesh in it'. They examined [the dish] but did not find [such a thing]. Thereupon he took hold of his finger and put it on it, saying, 'Did you examine this part?' They examined it and found it [to be as R. Ashi had said]. 'Why did you rely upon a miracle?' the Rabbis asked him. 'I saw', he replied, 'the demon of leprosy hovering over him.

As it can be seen, there are some different ideas in the two stories as well, first of all the king whose meal is objectionable is not the same king in both stories. Secondly according to the Bavli R. Ashi did not want to harm the king, he merely wanted to save Mar Zutra's life by putting some food in his mouth. And despite the Jewish man of Šāh-nāma who used magic to poison king's food in order to harm others, R. Ashi miraculously ruined king's food to save his and his companions' lives.

What I mean to clarify here is, firstly, that Bahrām V's name (who, according to Iranian materials, had a Jewish mother) is absent from the Talmud. However, events and characteristics attributed to him can be found in the Talmud. Secondly, we might be able to find traces of other

[190] According to the Bavli: "Any foodstuff that has a strong flavor or an acrid taste [will expose a man to danger if he is not allowed to taste of it]." Ketub. 61a.

Sasanian kings, such as Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān (whose name is absent from the Bavli), through "King Šāpūr" anecdotes. However, this is merely a theory which requires further examination.

1.4.1 Ardaxšēr and Herod's Wives

While Ardaxšēr and Herod pursued legitimacy through marriage, Herod's wife killed herself.[191] And, Ardaxšēr's wife failed in her plans to kill Ardaxšēr, resulting in Ardaxšēr ordering her execution. Indeed, Ardaxšēr and Herod's wives' episodes are among the interesting issues that Rubenstein discusses. According to Rubenstein, the story of Herod preserving the Hasmonean princess's corps in honey for 7 years shares commonalities with the story of Ardaxšēr's wife being hidden from him for 7 years instead of being executed.[192] In this regard, Rubenstein states:

> One can make a case that the account of Herod and the maiden's corpse comprises a type of inversion of the Sasanian narrative. Ardaxšēr marries and sires a son with a daughter (or other female relative) of the former king; Herod fails to marry or produce offspring with a Hasmonean maiden. Ardaxšēr commands the daughter to be killed, yet she survives; in the rabbinic story she dies, though Herod tries to create the false impression that she survives. The minister hides her "in the bowels of the earth" for seven years to create the impression that a living woman is a corpse; Herod preserves her in honey for seven years to create the impression that a corpse is a living woman. The minister castrates himself to prevent calumnies and lies that the son is not of Ardaxšēr's (and Ardawān's) line. The maiden kills herself for exactly the opposite purpose: to guarantee that claims of Hasmonean descent among Herod's progeny will be recognized as lies. In short, the rabbinic storytellers employ this narrative element of the Hasmonean.[193]

[191] According to Josephus, she was put to death by Herod after being married to him for several years.
[192] Šāpūr's wife was also hidden from Ardaxšēr for 7 years: "Ardašir faced grave danger in fighting rebels, the most tenacious of whom was the Persian magnate Mihrak/g. Finally, an Indian sage informed him that his kingdom would see peace only when two families, those of Ardaxšēr and Mihrak/g, rule it. Ardaxšēr so feared the House of Mihrak/g that he ordered its annihilation, only a single daughter of extraordinary beauty and physical strength escaped and lived in obscurity among the shepherds. Šāpūr met her on a hunting excursion and married her. Their son Hormuzd was raised secretly until Ardašir recognized him by chance. In this way, the two houses were united and, as had been prophesized, Hormuzd brought peace and unity to Ērānšahr" (Shapur Shahbazi, "ŠĀPUR I: History," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2002, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shapur-i (accessed on 24 August 2017)).
[193] Rubenstein, "King Herod in Ardashir's Court," 265.

1.4.2 Herod and Ardaxšēr as Slaves

As it was shown earlier in this chapter, sages of the Bavli emphasize Herod being a slave in the story— though in real life, he was not a slave. Both Herod and Ardaxšēr's genealogy in B. Bat. and KAP are made up. However, the difference is that Ardaxšēr's genealogy was praised by the author(s) of KAP, while Herod's was degraded by the Jewish sages.

According to the Bavli, not only the Talmudic sages emphasize Herod's background as a slave but the Romans send Herod a message reminding him he is not a king, nor the son of a king, but a slave who freed himself. Indeed, the word *bandag* (male servant, slave) was used once to describe Ardaxšēr in KAP, when a leader of astrologers declared, "It is so manifest that any one of the male servants who flies away from his king within three days [from today], will attain to greatness and kingship…" However, the priests who wrote Ardaxšēr's story depict him as a descendant of the Achaemenid house: "…and he [Sāsān] was (descended) from the line of (king) Dārāb, son of Dārāy."

Therefore, Ardaxšēr is a noble that unfairly becomes a slave of Ardawān, but Herod is a low born who unfairly becomes a king. Regarding Ardaxšēr, in a letter he receives from the troops of the Lord of the Worm, they emphasize on his greatness: "This arrow is darted by the troops of the lord of the glorious Worm; we ought not to kill a great man like you, so we have struck that (roasted) lamb."

1.4.3 Burz and Burz Azar and Bava b. Buta

Regarding the character of Bava b. Buta and its parallel in the KAP, Rubenstein states, "There is also the Indian sage consulted by Ardaxšēr, perhaps parallel to Bava B. Buta, with

whom Herod consults."[194] Although the Indian sage with whom Ardaxšēr consults can be a potential parallel to Bava b. Buta, I am suggesting that Burz and Burz-Ādur[195] is a more suitable parallel to Bava. B. Buta.

First, both Bava b. Buta and Burz and Burz-Ādur are religious figures. The Pahlavi texts highlight the brothers' religiosity very much. Secondly, Herod and Ardaxšēr at first converse with them (Bava b. Buta and Burz and Burz Azar) as anonymous figures, and after trusting them, Herod and Ardaxšēr reveal their identity. Furthermore, "As Ardaxšēr became unsuspicious regarding their piety, religiousness, unanimity and submissiveness, he divulged his own secrets to Burz and Burz Ādur, saying: 'I am Ardaxšēr myself. Now you contemplate as to how it is possible to discover the means of destroying this Worm and its troops.'" [196] In the end, b. Buta, and Burz and Burz Azar advise the two kings to build a new temple. Of course, in Ardaxšēr's story the previous temple was a temple of idol-worshipers, and Ardaxšēr took their wealth, gold, silver, and so on. Herod wanted to cover the new temple with gold, but the sages disagreed.

1.4.4 The Letter-Writing Motif

In the Bavli, Herod receives a letter from the Romans emphasizing his low-born background. On the other hand, Ardaxšēr receives a letter from his enemies saying that they could kill him, but they chose not to because of his noble status. After Ardaxšēr's conflict with Ardawān's son, and his imprisonment in the stable at the hands of Ardawān, Ardaxšēr sends a letter to Pābag, his grandfather, explaining the situation. Pābag writes back emphasizing

[194] Ibid., 268.
[195] According to the KAP, Burz and Burz Azar are the two religious brothers whom Ardaxšēr consulted to destroy the temple of idol worshippers serving a giant worm and build a fire temple in its place.
[196] Ibid.

Ardawān's high rank and power, and encourages Ardaxšēr to apologize. Furthermore, there is another letter from Ardawān to Ardaxšēr which is recorded in Ṭabari's account.

Rubenstein discusses the letter in his article, and clearly demonstrates how the letter resembles the letter that the Romans sent to Herod:

> You have presumed beyond your rank in society, and have brought down on yourself destruction, O Kurd brought up amongst the tents of the Kurds! Who gave you leave to assume the crown on your head, and permission to seize all the territories you have assembled together and whose rules and peoples you have subdued?
> Who ordered you to build the city which you have founded in the desert of [Jur]? When we allow you to go ahead and construct it, then build a city in the desert which is ten faraskhs across and call it Ram Ardaxšēr.[197]

I generally assert that the term *Isra'īliyyat*[198] comprise most of the Midrash and Talmudic narratives that were used by Quranic interpreters in the early Islamic ages, such as Ṭabarī himself. However, Rubenstein interestingly provides examples from Ṭabari that show Ṭabarī likely used the Middle Persian *Xwadāy-Nāmak* (Book of Kings, one of the main sources for the Šāh-nāma), which is in some ways different from KAP while resembling the Talmudic narrative more precisely. For instance, the letter the Romans sent to Herod very much resembles the one Ardawān sent to Ardaxšēr in Ṭabarī. However, as is shown previously, the letters Ardaxšēr receives in KAP are dissimilar. Moreover, the statement that Ardaxšēr—like Herod—killed all Ardawān's kin and spared only one maiden is different from the KAP, but similar to Ṭabarī's version.[199] In fact, in the KAP, Ardawān's four sons are all alive. The interesting issue here is the

[197] Rubenstein, "King Herod in Ardashir's Court," 267.
[198] *Isra'īliyyat* is an Arabic term that is applied to traditions from the Quran and Muslim exegesis concerning the history of the Israelites. See: Oliver Leaman ed., *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[199] As it states in the Tabari: "… And the first king from his (Sāsān's) house was Ardaxšēr son of Pābag who in accordance with Sāsān's -his grandfather- killed all of them including men. Women and children. And they see he did not left none of them." Furthermore, in the Tabari version, Ardaxšēr finds the only survivor of Ardawān's house and marries her.

fact that it is probable that the Talmudic sages knew the Xwadāy-Nāmak version (or a version that Ṭabarī used) in addition to KAP.[200]

1.5 Roman-Persian Challenges in the Bavli

The historical Herod (as opposed to the Talmudic Herod) had a role to play in the Persian-Roman challenges of the Arsacid era. According to historical records, Jews of the land of Israel during Herod's siege of Jerusalem preferred the Parthian-backed Hasmonean King Antigonus: "That he had been able to occupy that hallowed office only through Parthian backing was not held against him because he boasted the appropriate hereditary credentials."[201]

In response to the Romans, Ardaxšēr and Herod were obviously different. While Herod gained power with the aid of the Romans (and according to the story, was a Roman subject), Ṭabarī describes Ardaxšēr as having, "risen to avenge the blood of his cousin Dārā b. Dārā whom Alexander (the Roman in Pahlavi literature) had fought and two of Alexander's hirelings had murdered."[202]

The Bavli is helpful for comparing Jewish perspectives of the Romans and Persians. How Jews perceived the two empires based on Talmudic narratives is, itself, an interesting subject to explore. Overall the sages of the Bavli are fond of neither Iranians nor Romans in their stories. Discussing Roman-Persian challenges was a common motif in some of the ancient texts. Since the two empires were typically hostile to each other, obviously their wars affected common people and, it was important for the citizens to discuss this issue.

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[200] I always consider the fact that it is probable that some of the Persian narratives about Ardaxšēr (or other narratives) were affected by the Talmudic stories. Also, it makes sense that some *Isra'īliyyat* made their way into early Islamic sources through translating Middle Persian texts that were affected by Talmudic narratives.
[201] Gelb, *Herod the Great,* 38.
[202] Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 3. Cf. *The Letter of Tansar*, tr. Boyce, p. 29. See also Wiesehöfer, "ARDAŠĪR I i. History."

The following are some cases in which Romans and Persians are compared to each other, or are being examined in relation to each other in the Bavli:

> The Emperor [of Rome] said to R. Joshua b. R. Hananyah: "You [Jews] profess to be very clever. Tell me what I shall see in my dream." He said to him: "You will see the Persians making you do forced labor, and despoiling you and making you feed unclean animals with a golden crook." He thought about it all day, and in the night he saw it in his dream. King Shapor [I] once said to Samuel: "You [Jews] profess to be very clever. Tell me what I shall see in my dream." He said to him: "You will see the Romans coming and taking you captive and making you grind date-stones in a golden mill." He thought about it the whole day and in the night saw it in a dream. (Ber.h 56a)

On one occasion, when one of the sages discusses the positive deeds of the Romans, another sage immediately disagrees:

> R. Jose, and R. Simeon were sitting, and Judah, a son of proselytes, was sitting near them. R. Judah commenced [the discussion] by observing, "How fine are the works of this people! They have made streets, they have built bridges, they have erected baths." R. Jose was silent. R. Simeon b. Yohai answered and said, "All that they made they made for themselves; they built market-places, to set harlots in them; baths, to rejuvenate themselves; bridges, to levy tolls for them." (Šabb. 33b)

Predicting the future of Iran and Rome is yet another point of issue.[203] For instance, in Yoma 10a there is a long discussion about Roman and Persian wars, and their futures. R. Joshua b. Levi in the name of Rabbi said: "Rome is designed to fall into the hands of Persia…" Furthermore, "Rabbah b. Bar Hana in the name of R. Johanan, on the authority of R. Judah b. Ila'i, said: 'Rome is designed to fall into the hands of Persia…'" His reasoning is as follows:

> If in the case of the first Sanctuary, which the sons of Shem [Solomon] built and the Chaldeans destroyed, the Chaldeans fell into the hands of the Persians, then how much more should this be so with the second Sanctuary, which the Persians built and the Romans destroyed, that the Romans should fall into the hands of the Persians. (Yoma 10a)

There are other voices in this discussion as well. For instance, Rav disagrees with his colleagues, declaring that, "Persia will fall into the hands of Rome." However, two of his colleagues are stunned by his idea:

> Thereupon R. Kahana and R. Assi asked of Rab: "[Shall] the builders [Persians] fall into the hands of the destroyers [Romans]?"— He said to them: "Yes, it is the decree of the King." Others [other redactors] say: He replied to them: "They too are guilty for they destroyed the synagogues. It has also been taught in

[203] In Quran there is a Surat called "*Al-Rum*" (Rome), in which a series of Roman-Persian wars are prophesized.

> accord with the above, Persia will fall into the hands of Rome, first because they destroyed the synagogues, and then because it is the King's decree that the builders fall into the hands of the destroyers." (Yoma 10a)

Talmudic sages who suggest Persia will fall into the hands of Romans defend their idea saying, the Persians did destroy our synagogues so they will be punished for it. Other sages believe that Persians are good people, but their goodness will not help the Messiah to come: "The son of David will not come until the wicked kingdom of Rome will have spread [its sway] over the whole world for nine months etc"[204] (Yoma 10a).

On some occasions Romans are preferred over the Persians. However, immediately objections are raised:

> Rabbah b. Bar Hanah was once ill, and Rab Judah and Rabbah were discussing a legal issue and suddenly "a Gueber"[205] came in and took away their lamp; whereupon Rabbah b. Bar Hanah ejaculated: "O All Merciful One! Either in Thy shadow or in the shadow of the son of Esau!"[206] This is as much as to say, [is it not,] that the Romans are better than the Persians? (Giṭ., 17a)

Consequently, R. Hiyya states that, "The Holy One, blessed be He, knew that Israel would not be able to endure the persecution of the Romans, so he drove them to Babylon?" (Giṭ., 17a).

Sometimes, the sages simply speak about the social and cultural qualities of Romans and Iranians. For instance in Qidd. 49b, ideas regarding other nations' accounts can be found:

> …Ten kabs[207] of wisdom descended to the world: nine were taken by Palestine and one by the rest of the world. Ten kabs of beauty descended to the world: nine were taken by Jerusalem and one by the rest of the world. Ten kabs of wealth descended to the world: nine were taken by the early Romans and one by the rest of the world. Ten kabs of poverty descended to the world: nine were taken by Babylon and one by the rest of the world. … Ten kabs of strength descended to the world: nine were taken by the Persians, etc. (Qidd. 49b)

This section demonstrates that the Bavli is fond of comparing Romans and Persians with each other. Furthermore, it appears that the Talmudic sages, in general, were not satisfied with

[204] Just like the common Shi'ite belief which asserts the Messiah will not come until the whole world is filled with injustice and sin.
[205] *Gueber* (*gabr*, from Aramaic for "man") is one of the names by which Zoroastrian priests are called in the Bavli. In Islamic times Muslims used it as a pejorative.
[206] The Roman Empire is, in some occasions, called "Son of Esau."
[207] A measuring device.

these empires. Although there were many anecdotes in which a good relationship with the Persian court is demonstrated,[208] overall, Talmudists believe the sages' ideas regarding Persians depended on the period in which they had lived. In sum, whether they lived under a tolerant king or a hostile one affected their ideas about the Persians.

1.6 Bat Qol, the Heavenly Voice

One of the key issues when comparing KAP with B. Bat. 3b, is the heavenly voice which informs Herod that if he runs from his master in the next three days he will succeed.[209] Although both Ardaxšēr and Herod receive the same message regarding rebelling against their masters in three days, the source of the message is different. In the Bavli, "Bat Qol" (daughter of the voice) or "Kala" (the voice) gives the message. However, in KAP the equivalent to Bat Qol, or Kala, of the Talmudic narrative is Ardawān's court astrologer. Although Ardawān's maiden (who informs Ardaxšēr that the astrologer foresees that "every slave who rebels…") is another possible equivalent for the Bat Qol, or Kala.

In his article, Rubenstein gathers all different occurrences of the word "voice" from different manuscripts, and concludes that the word "Kala", meaning "a voice", is the original one. He asserts that, "Of the readings kala and bat kala, it seems that kala is original, as one can easily see how kala would have been changed by scribes to the more familiar bat kala, but not why bat kala would be altered to the vague and indefinite kala."[210]

Rubenstein further explains what "a voice" could mean in the story. However, overall, it can be inferred from the Talmudic story that sages did not want to have someone from the

[208] Jason S. Mokhtarian, "Empire and Authority in Sasanian Babylonia: The Rabbis and King Šāpūr in Dialogue," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 19 (2012):148-180.
[209] Rubenstein has coherently discussed the heavenly voice in his aforementioned article.
[210] Rubenstein, "King Herod in Ardashir's Court," 261.

Hasmonean house help Herod (the way Ardawān's maiden helped Ardaxšēr). They also did not want the "voice" to be a heavenly one guiding Herod. Also, obviously, the sages were not fond of astrology and foretelling. That is why this piece of the story is somewhat ambiguous, and that is the reason why later copyists tried to elucidate this part of the story by adding "bat" or changing "Kala" to other words. Still, in the end, the story implies that the "Kala" was a "heavenly voice". The issue of heavenly voices in both Talmudic and Iranian texts is, itself, an interesting issue which is going to be briefly examined here.

1.6.1 A Heavenly Voice in the Ruins

Although there are not many cases of heavenly voices like "Bat Qol" in the Pahlavi texts, there are many cases in which astrologers and dream interpreters foresee future matters—specifically, in kings' courts. There is one famous case in Šāh-nāma in which a heavenly voice reveals the identity of "Dārāb": an unidentified future king who is sleeping alone in the ruins of an old building.[211] The story goes:

> Dārāb also was discomfited from that [storm], and was looking for a way to escape from the rain. He looked and saw a ruined place in which a dome was stable. It was a ruined high old dome that was wiped out by wind and rain… He (Dārāb) decided to sleep under that ruined dome, he was alone and had no companions. The commander (Rašnawād) was patrolling around the troops, while passing the ruined dome he heard a voice from the ruin. He was scared and about to clamor. [The voice spoke thus:] "O ruined

[211] The reason that I consider the Šāh-nāma as a source to compare with a Talmudic narrative is because, according to the introduction of Šāh-nāma itself and the introduction of lost prose Abū-Mansūrī Šāh-nāma, the original Šāh-nāma was written based on a number of Middle Persian texts gathered from Zoroastrian priests by the time of Abū-Mansūr (the governer of Tūs). The first book was a prose work translated from Middle Persian by a group of scholars gathered in Abū-Mansūr's court in Khorasan, and their mission was to write the history of Iran. When Abū Manṣūr b. ʿAbd-al-Razzāq, the governor of Tūs, decided to have a Šāh-nāma composed in New Persian, he instructed his minister, Abū Manṣūr Maʿmarī, to gather in Ṭūs a number of Zoroastrian scholars and dehqāns; under Maʿmarī's direction, they translated the Pahlavi Xwadāy-nāmag (q.v.), expanding it with material from other sources. The work was completed in Moḥarram, 346/April, 957 and became the major source for Ferdowsī. The work, generally referred to as Šāh-nāma-ye Abū Manṣūrī, is lost except for the introduction written by Maʿmarī. See Dj. Khalegi-Motlagh, "Abū Mansūr Maʿmarī," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/4, p. 337; an updated version is available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-mansur-mamari-minister-dastur-of-abu-mansur-b. For the names of the Zoroastrians priests who gathered their Pahlavi manuscripts in Abū Manṣūr b. ʿAbd-al-Razzāq's court and wrote the prose Šāh-nāma, see M. Qazvīnī, *Bīst maqāla*, (Tehran, 1332 Š./1953), 5-90.

> dome! Be alert, and protect the king of Iran… Rašnawād thought it was either wind or the thunder. A second time a voice came from the ruin: "O dome! Be wise, the son of King Ardaxšēr is here; learn it and do not be afraid of rain (do not collapse). He (Rašnawād) heard the same voice for a third time and was desperate. He asked a counselor: 'What could this be?' Some one must go towards the dome …

What we read in Dārāb story in Šāh-nāma is comparable to a Talmudic narrative regarding the heavenly voice being heard three times in a ruin:

> It has been taught: R. Jose says, "I was once travelling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah of blessed memory appeared and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer, he said to me: 'Peace be with you, my master!' and I replied: 'Peace be with you, my master and teacher!' And he said to me: 'My son, why did you go into this ruin?' I replied: 'To pray.' He said to me: 'You ought to have prayed on the road.' I replied: 'I feared lest passers-by might interrupt me.' He said to me: 'You ought to have said an abbreviated prayer.' Thus I then learned from him three things: One must not go into a ruin; one may say the prayer on the road; and if one does say his prayer on the road, he recites an abbreviated prayer. He further said to me: 'My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin?' I replied: 'I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: "Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!"' And he said to me: 'By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim, but thrice each day does it exclaim thus!'" (Ber.h 3a)

And finally, one of the main reasons to not enter a ruin (as outlined by the rabbis) is similar to what Šāh-nāma mentions: namely, falling debris: "Our Rabbis taught: there are three reasons why one must not go into a ruin: because of suspicion, of falling debris and of demons. — [It states] 'Because of suspicion'. It would be sufficient to say, because of falling debris'?" (Ber. 3a).

Although content of the Talmudic story is different from the Dārāb story, there are similar motifs. For instance, a ruined place, a heavenly voice which is repeated three times, and an emphasis on the fear of falling debris.

There is another occasion in Kap where a guiding voice that forsees the future is attested. The story says two female characters foresee the future of Ardaxšēr. After Ardaxšēr runs away from Ardawān's prison, two anonymous women miraculously recognize him and foretell his future, guiding him in his endeavor against Ardawān:

> … Do not fear O Ardaxšēr the Kai, son of Pābag, from the house of Sāsān, the grandson of King Dārā; you have escaped from any evil and no one can capture you, and you will rule over Ēranšahr for many years,

> hurry until you reach the sea, and do not pass until you see the sea with your own eyes, because the moment you look at the sea you will be fearless [safe] from the enemies. Ardaxšēr became glad and left that place [the village] in a rushed manner.

To conclude, I suggest that since the Talmud in comparison with the Pahlavi texts has more instances of hearing heavenly voices (such as "Bat Qol"/ "Kala"), and of communications of rabbis with God and the other world (for instance, with the help of Elijah), it is more likely that the Iranian sources have adopted the latter idea from the Jewish texts. As we have seen in the KAP, there are three occasions of foretelling in the narrative; one is through astrology (and a female character reveals it to Ardaxšēr) which is very common among ancient Iranians, another is through two anonymous females, and the third one is by an Indian character called "Keyd" who forsees the future of the kingdom. However fixed characters such as "'Bat Qol'/ 'Kala'" or Elijah are absent from Pahlavi literature overall.

1.6.2 Dream interpretation

Hearing the "Bat Qol," or heavenly voices, and seeing Elijah miraculously, is a common theme in the Talmud. However, the aforementioned are discussed very rarely in the Middle Persian texts. On the other hand, dream interpretation and astrology are common themes in Middle Persian literature.

As Richard Kalmin states in his article "Talmudic Attitudes toward Dream Interpretation," Babylonian Talmudic sages were not fond of dream interpreting and astrology, mainly because the Magi were predominant in those two fields. In many cases, the Talmudic sages state that they do not want the Jewish community to be engaged with the Magi. For

instance, there is a famous saying in the Talmud which states: "Rav Zutra b. Ṭuviya said that Rav said: 'He who learns something from a magus is worthy of death.'"[212]

In KAP, there are several occasions in which kings ask for dream interpreters and astrologers. As is well-known, Magi were famous for the aforementioned acts, and probably the traditional animosity between the Magi and the rabbi is one of the main reasons that rabbis forbid the Jewish community to perform dream interpretation and astrology, or to communicate with those who do. Kalmin asserts that, "The rabbis who played the dominant role in editing and transmitting the Bavli want us to believe rabbis had little or nothing to do with professional dream interpretation, either as practitioner or client…"[213] On some occasions, however, lists of various dreams and their interpretations can be found in the Bavli (for instance, Ber. 56b-57a). Indeed, Kalmin correctly believes that since the rabbis desired to limit contact between lay people and the Magi, they provided a list of dreams and their interpretations so people can consult by themselves. Sages also used to provide people with formulas by which bad dreams turned into good ones. For instance:

> R. Yohanan is purported to have said that one who sees a dream that causes him to feel depressed should go before three who love him. R. Yohanan provides a formula to be said by the dreamer and his loved ones, and then the dream will turn to a good one. Kalmin believs that by providing such formulas "the Bavli equips people to handle disturbing dreams on their own and removes the need to go to the professional interpreter."[214]

In B. Bat. 3b-4a there is no trace of dream interpreters or astrologers. Therefore other tractates such as Ber. 56b, 57a, 57b were examined in this regard, and the result is interesting. Sages of the Bavli have interpreted seeing an elephant in a dream as follows: "If one sees an

[212] For more information on this, see: Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 71.
[213] Richard Kalmin, "Talmudic Attitudes Toward Dream Interpreters," in *The Talmud in its Iranian context*, eds. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 87-88.
[214] Kalmin, "Talmudic Attitudes," 89.

elephant [*pil*][215] in a dream, wonders [pela'oth] will be wrought for him; if several elephants, wonders of wonders will be wrought for him…"

And in another sentence, there is an emphasis on the "saddled" elephant: "All kinds of beasts are a good sign in a dream, except the elephant, the monkey and the long-tailed ape. But a Master has said: If one sees an elephant in a dream, a miracle will be wrought for him? — There is no contradiction; in the latter case it is saddled, in the former case it is not saddled" (Ber. 56b, 57a, 57b.).

In KAP, Pābag has a dream about Sāsān which is as follows: "…Another night he dreamt that Sāsān was seated on a richly adorned white elephant, and that all those that stood around him in the kingdom made obeisance to him, praised and blessed him…"[216] Interestingly, in Pābag's dream the elephant is *ārāstag* (ornamented, saddled).

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that rabbis in Yerushalmi interpret dreams professionally, and even get paid for their services. The fact that Babylonian Jewish sages had concerns about dream interpretations and contact with professional dream interpreters (which, as mentioned earlier, were commonly Magis) shows that there was, indeed, contact between the Jewish community and Magis, and this contact concerned Talmudic sages very much. Obviously, in the land of professional dream interpreters (Babylon), people, despite their religious affiliation, preferred to consult with Babylonian dream interpreters rather than Jewish ones, and I assume this issue was bothering the Talmudic sages.

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[215] The Talmudic and Neo-Hebrew name for elephant is *pil* or *pila*; plural, *pilim* (Ber. 55b, 56b), which is the common name also in Persian, Syriac and Arabic, and also the Assyrian "*pîru*." See H. Lewy, *Die Semitischen Fremdwörter Griech* (Berlin: 1895), 5.

[216] On the first night, Babak sees the following in a dream: "as though the sun was shining from the head of Sāsān and giving light to the whole world." This dream is comparable to Joseph's dream. See Genesis 37.

1.7 Ardaxšēr and Herod's Religious Background

One of the issues that can be discussed about Ardaxšēr and Herod is their religious background. While Ardaxšēr was a grandson of Sāsān (custodian of the Anāhīd fire temple at Eṣṭaḵr), Herod was not originally Jewish, but a convert to Judaism. According to Daryaee, the reason that Ardaxšēr claims descent from Sāsān (while his living father, Pābag, was ruler of Eṣṭaḵr) is to claim both priestly and royal lineage.[217] Eventually, he becomes a figure who is associated with religious matters, and builds many fire temples: an issue that, according to Rubenstein, can be compared to Herod's story of building the Jerusalem temple.[218]

However, they both have communicated with religious sages. Ardaxšēr encountered two religious brothers who helped him destroy the idol worshippers, and build a fire temple in their place. Furthermore, Herod communicated with Bava b. Buta, who advised him to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

1.8 Conclusion

Ultimately I find Rubenstein's conclusion in "King Herod in Ardaxšēr's Court" to be quite comprehensive:

> I suggest that the rabbis understood the transition from the Hasmonean to Herodian dynasties through the prism of the transition from the Parthian (Arsacid) to Sasanian dynasties. They identified Herod with Ardaxšēr, and constructed a story of Herod's usurpation and rise to power on the basis of Ardaxšēr's usurpation and rise to power as recounted in Sasanian sources.[219]

Rubenstein's observation here is very apt, albeit brief. It can be inferred from his article and the examples he brings from other sources (such as Ṭabari), that KAP was not the Talmudic sages'

[217] Daryaee, "Ardaxshir and the Sāsānians,'" 243.
[218] Rubenstein, "King Herod in Ardashir's Court," 266.
[219] Ibid., 258.

only Iranian source when writing about Herod's usurpation, a conclusion with whch one can only agree.

To add to Rubenstein's conclusion, I suggest that rabbis disliked both early Sasanian (Ardaxšēr's era) and Herodian dynasties, and their partiality towards Parthian and Hasmonean dynasties was instrumental in constructing the Herod story. In general, it can be deduced that the narrators of KAP used mythical themes to make Ardaxšēr more popular. However, the Talmudic sages used many of the same themes to defame Herod. This issue indicates that the rabbis did not see Ardaxšēr the way Persian narrators of KAP wanted them to. In the minds of Persian sages Ardaxšēr was a rightful king from Achaeminid dynasty whom seized the throne with the help of god. On the other hand, Jewish sages saw both Herod and Ardaxšēr as two illegitimate kings who destroyed the previously favored dynasties in both Iran and Palestine. What I am seeking to convey here is that what rabbis did in creating the Herod narrative shows their negative impression regarding Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān as well. Had they thought of Ardaxšēr as a legitimate king (the way KAP depicts him), they would not have used his story to depict Herod's illegitimacy. Moreover, I suggest that rabbis knew Iran's political issues very well and that the shift from Arsacids to Sasanians was a significant issue to them. The overall impression of Arsacids in the Bavli is very positive since they are compared to Hasmoneans, however regarding Sasanians the Bavli's narratives are not uniform and change according to the ruling king. Rubenstein asserts:

> There is, to be sure, no reason to expect that the sages would not have known Sasanian royal ideology and traditions about the rise of the Sasanian dynasty. Recent work of Yaakov Elman, Geoffrey Herman, Shai Secunda, Reuven Kipperwasser and others, points to a high degree of acculturation among the Babylonian sages. Nevertheless, it is always exciting to identify further dimensions of their knowledge of Sasanian tradition.[220]

[220] Ibis., 269.

It is possible to assume that the redactors of the Bavli (as R.N.Frye states) tend to place facts (about Herod in our case) into a pre-existing pattern, which, in this case, is the fictional story of KAP. Daryaee agrees with Frye, and suggests this pattern relates to discussions of Ardaxšēr in Sasanian sources as well. According to Daryaee, "... in the sources on Sasanian history, Ardaxsir is given an epic treatment which may not be close to "actual" history."[221] In the end, we can infer that this pre-existing pattern/motif used by both Zoroastrian priests and Talmudic sages regarding Ardaxšēr and Herod was something that probably had an older acquaintance in Iranian literature and culture.

I further suggest that the rabbis' take on Ardaxšēr reveals a side of his character that pro-Sasanian authors were likely interested in concealing, which demonstrates that it may be fruitful to view these Jewish leaders as being a part of the Iranian community during this era. Put differently, in surviving Middle Persian sources all we have is the view point of Ardaxšēr's supporters; however, the writings of Iranian Jews demonstrate the presence of divergent viewpoints and thus provides us with a more comprehensive sense of the relationship between the two communities.

[221] Daryaee, "Ardaxshir and the Sāsānians,'" 237.

Chapter II:

Solomon and Jamšīd, Moses and Garšāsp

This chapter will focus on the influence of Iranian motifs and themes on Biblical characters in the Bavli. Through a comparison of the Bavli's account of Solomon, Moses and King Og with Iranian accounts of the mythical figures of Jamšīd, Garšasp and Gandarewa, it will be demonstrated that the latter figures help us understand the differences between Biblical and Talmudic accounts of the former. This approach suggests that studying the impact of the Talmud and Midrash on Islamic *tafsīr*—and consequently Persian literature—may be a fruitful avenue for Iranists to explore.[222]

2.1 Solomon and Jamšīd

King Solomon's famous seal-ring—stolen by a demon (Ashmedai[223] in the Talmud, and Sakhr in *tafsīr*)—is one of the themes that classical Persian poets use very frequently. This story, narrated in Giṭ. 68a, appears to have first made its way into *tafsīr* before emerging in Iranian literature. There are two verses in the Quran asserting that Solomon was tested by God, probably due to committing a certain sin, and atoned. The verses are as follows: "34. And We [God] certainly tried Solomon and placed on his throne a body [corpse]; then he returned. 35. He said, 'My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me.'"[224] These verses are somewhat puzzling for interpreters, many of whom have turned to rabbinical literature for explanations. An ongoing dilemma for interpreters is the quality of Solomon's trial.

[222] This issue will be explained with an example from the Talmud and from the *Asrār-nāma* of Aṭṭār in the Appendix.
[223] Ashmedai is a famous demon in the Iranian lore that entered into the Babylonian Talmud.
[224] Quran 38:34-35.

What could the corpse on Solomon's throne mean? Why would Solomon ask for God's forgiveness after God tried him by placing a corpse on his throne? After consulting Jewish sources, however, a number of interpreters came to understand the corpse as a demon (Ashmedai) who ruled on Solomon's throne for a while as a result of Solomon's carelessness about idol worshiping in his house and also protecting his ring-seal and his kingdom.[225]

The aforementioned *tafsīr*s were probably the main source for what later appeared in Persian literature as the famous theme of the lost seal-ring:

> As naught, I take Sulaiman's [Solomon] seal-ring
> On which, sometimes, Ahriman's [Satan] hand shall be
>
> Or
>
> That hearth, that is the hidden-displayer; and that the cup of Jamshid [Jamšid] hath
> For a seal ring, that awhile became lost, what grief it hath?[226]

Interpreters have long held the opinion that Persian poets equated Solomon and Jamšīd in their works due to the kings' undeniable resemblances, but this position does not answer the present question of whether or not Sasanian Talmudic sages saw those resemblances when they were composing Giṭ. 68a, and whether or not Touraj Daryaee's Yima [Jamšīd] paradigm is applicable in this case. The first step to answering these questions is to elucidate the differences between the Talmudic Solomon and the biblical one. After this has been accomplished, the Talmudic King Solomon must then be further investigated and compared with some of the individuals named in the Pahlavi sources (mainly Jamšīd).

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[225] Many older Quranic *tafsīr*s contain the term *Isra'iliyat*. See, for instance, the *Tafsīr al-Tabarī*, the oldest Quran commentary (ninth to tenth century), and the *Tafsīr al-Kaššāf* by Al-Zamakhšārī written in the twelfth century. Also the *Kašf al-asrār wa-'uddat al-abrār* by Rašīd-al-dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al- Maybudī is full of Midrashic narratives when it comes to Solomon. In the latter book, regarding Surat Sād verse 34, where the corpse is mentioned in the Solomon story, Maybudī relates a narrative which resembles Giṭ. 68a-b; this will be discussed in next pages.

[226] *Ghazal of Hafez Shirazi in Persian with English translation*, Original translation by Henry Wilberforce Clarke, compiled and corrected by Behrouz Homayounfar, 2001.

In the Old Testament, the sources for the history of the reign of Solomon are II Sam. xi.-xx. and the corresponding portions of I Chronicles, also I Kings i.-xi. 43 and I Chron. xxviii. According to these Biblical sources Solomon was a glorious king who was famous for his wisdom, and, furthermore, that the Biblical Solomon was not some magical character who communicates with demons—he is, rather, the builder of the Temple that took seven years to complete, and the king who also built a palace for himself.[227]

Furthermore, the Biblical Solomon—according to I Kings 11—had "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" [228] from various nationalities (such as Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites etc.), who caused Solomon to lay open his heart to other gods. As the same passage further indicates, "And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel…"[229] Ultimately God decides to punish Solomon by eliminating ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, and also by tearing Solomon's kingdom out of the hands of his son.[230]

The magical character of King Solomon who had relations with demons, then, doesn't seem to have taken form until at least the first century onwards, although we cannot be completely certain about the dates. It is most likely that the Testament of Solomon—a Pseudepigraphical work of the Old Testament dated between the first and third centuries CE—is the oldest text in which King Solomon's magical character and his contact with demons is demonstrated. While the writings of Josephus demonstrate that ideas of Solomon's magical

[227] For further reading regarding Solomon's Biblical character and its difference with his character in Rabbinical literature see Emil G. Hirsch et al., "Solomon," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer, vol. 11 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901-6), 436-448.
[228] I Kings 11:3 (New Revised Standard Version).
[229] I Kings 11:4 (NRSV).
[230] See I Kings 11:30-34 (NRSV).

character and his dealings with demons were already common among the Jews of the 1st century CE, they do not appear in the Talmud until the third century.[231]

When comparing the Biblical Solomon with Jamšīd, it is clear that they do share general resemblances, for instance, both are glorious kings who reigned over very prosperous, vast, and strong kingdoms. Moreover, Solomon and Jamšīd both have a semi-prophetic character, both also ultimately sin, and, due to their sin, have their kingdoms overcome by their enemies.[232] While the Biblical Solomon might have looked like Jamšīd of the Avesta (Zamyād-Yašt) in terms of being the most glorious king who finally sinned and was punished, the Solomon of the first century CE (the Solomon described in the Testament of Solomon) and the Bavli definitely resembles Jamšīd of the Pahlavi texts in many ways.

2.1.2 Solomon and Jamšid in the Talmud, Midrash and Middle Persian Sources

The narrative concerning the building of the Temple in Giṭ. 68a-b begins with a discussion over the words *Shidah* and *shidoth*, which the sages declare are translated differently in Babylon and Palestine—in Babylon the two words referred to male and female demons, but in Palestine they meant carriages. Consequently, the main story begins by explaining why King Solomon needed demons during the building the Temple.

The story relates that Solomon needed to cut the Temple stones without iron tools, and in order to do this he needed to find a certain *Shamir*. To find this Shamir he was instructed to

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[231] Chester Charlton McCown, *The Testament of Solomon*: *Ed. from manuscripts. at mount Amos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1922), 108.

[232] In the Vīdvēdāt (fragard 2:3), God bestows a prophesy to Jamšīd before Zoroaster, but Jamšīd resisted and remained a glorious king. However, in the Šāh-nāma he claims that he is both a king and a *Mobed* (priest) منم گفت با فره ایزدی*** همم شهریاری همم موبدی, (He said it is I with the glory of god, I own both priesthood and kingdom). Solomon's communication with God in a dream and also God's assertion that he had showed himself to Solomon twice (I Kings 3:5, 9:2) gives Solomon a divine character as well. Moreover, splitting the kingdom of Solomon into two kingdoms due to his sins might remind us of Jamšīd being sawn in half after he sins.

"Bring a male and a female demon and tie them together; perhaps they know and will tell you."[233] Solomon does as instructed, but the demons say: "We do not know, but perhaps Ashmedai the prince of the demons knows."[234] They then tell Solomon where to find Ashmedai, and so Solomon sends Banaiahu—with a chain and a ring graven with the divine name—to find Ashmedai and take him to Solomon. Banaiahu accomplishes this by way of a certain trick, and when Ashmedai and Solomon finally meet Ashmedai says: "Now, however, you have subdued the whole world, yet you are not satisfied till you subdue me too."[235] To this Solomon replies: "I want nothing of you. What I want is to build the Temple and I require the shamir." Ashmedai states that he does not have Shamir—he says that it is the Prince of the Sea who has it, but that he will only give the Shamir to the woodpecker.[236] Despite this Benaiahu finally finds Shamir and takes it to Solomon, allowing him to build the Temple.

Solomon, however, did not release Ashmedai after the temple was built, and one day when they were conversing Solomon asks Ashmedai: "What is your superiority over us?" To which Ashmedai replies: "Take the chain off me and give me your ring, and I will show you."[237] Solomon does this, and the story goes:

…שקליה לשושילתא מיניה ויהיב ליה עיזקתיה בלעיה אותביה לחד גפיה ברקיעא ולחד גפיה בארעא פתקיה

ארבע מאה פרסי על ההיא שעתא אמר שלמה (קהלת א, ג) מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש.

[233] Soncino Talmud, Giṭ. 68a.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] A specific bird is, in some tales, associated with Solomon and Jamšīd. For instance, in Yašt 9 the glory of God leaves Jamšīd three times in the shape of a bird of prey. In Šāh-nāma, demons, birds and fairies are at Jamšīd's service, while in the Targum Sheni it is the hoopoe who is sent to the queen of Sheba. See Hirsch, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 443.
[237] Soncino Talmud, Giṭ. 68b.

(קהלת ב, י) וזה היה חלקי מכל עמלי מאי וזה רב ושמואל. חד אמר מקלו וחד אמר גונדו היה מחזר על הפתחים כל היכא דמטא אמר (קהלת א, יב) אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים. כי מטא גבי סנהדרין אמרו רבנן מכדי שוטה בחדא מילתא לא סריך מאי האי.

אמרו ליה לבניהו קא בעי לך מלכא לגביה אמר להו לא שלחו להו למלכוותא קאתי מלכא לגבייכו שלחו להו אין קאתי שלחו להו בידקו בכרעיה שלחו להו במוקי קאתי.

וקא תבע להו בנידותייהו וקא תבע לה נמי לבת שבע אימיה אתיוה לשלמה והבו ליה עזקתא ושושילתא דחקוק עליה שם כי עייל חזייה פרח.

ואפילו הכי הוה ליה ביעתותא מיניה והיינו דכתיב (שיר השירים ג, ז) הנה מטתו שלשלמה ששים גבורים סביב לה מגבורי ישראל .כולם אחוזי חרב מלומדי מלחמה איש חרבו על יריכו מפחד בלילות.

רב ושמואל חד אמר מלך והדיוט וחד אמר מלך והדיוט ומלך.

> [So he [Solomon] took the chain off him and gave him the ring. He then swallowed him, [or 'it' according to another manuscript] and placing one wing on the earth and one on the sky he hurled him four hundred parasangs.[238] In reference to that incident Solomon said, what profit is there to a man in all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun, and this was my portion from all my labour. What is referred to by 'this'? — Rab and Samuel gave different answers, one saying that it meant his staff and the other that it meant his apron [or platter]. He used to go round begging, saying wherever he went, I Koheleth was king over Israel in Jerusalem. When he came to the Sanhedrin., the Rabbis said: Let us see, a madman does not stick to one thing only. What is the meaning of this? They asked Benaiahu, Does the king send for you? He replied, No. They sent to the queens saying, Does the king visit you? They sent back word, Yes, he does. [demon replacing Solomon having sex with his queens and mother] They then sent to them to say, Examine his leg. They sent back to say, He comes in stockings, and he visits them in the time of their separation and he also calls for Bathsheba his mother. They then sent for Solomon and gave him the chain and the ring on which the Name was engraved. When he went in, Ashmedai on catching sight of him flew away, but he remained in fear of him, therefore is it written, Behold it is the litter of Solomon, threescore mighty met, are about it of the mighty men of Israel. They all handle the sword and are expert in war, every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night.
>
> Rab and Samuel differed [about Solomon]. One said that Solomon was first a king and then a commoner, and the other that he was first a king and then a commoner and then a king again].[239]

There is an emphasis on the demon's gender in this narrative, as in the Testament of Solomon. This emphasis is reminiscent of the male and female demons in Iranian myths generally. For

[238] The very idea of Ashmedai devouring King Solomon and hurling him 400 parasangs (which sets off the wandering of the king) itself has a counterpart in Pahlavi literature. Tahmuras, Jamšīd's brother, had imprisoned demons and tamed Ahriman, whom he turned into a horse. However according to *Rivāyat Darāb Hormazyār* vol. 1, p. 312, Ahriman eats Tahmuras and Jamšīd takes him out of Ahriman's belly.
[239] Giṭ. 68a-b.

instance in *Bundahišn*, chapter 27, Ardā-Wirāz Nāmag, and also Manichaean literature, an emphasis on female demons and coupled demons can be seen commonly—though the notion of male and female demons is a universal mythological notion that is present worldwide.

The Talmudic narrative and the Testament of Solomon both relate that Solomon needed demons in order to construct the temple. Both Solomon and Jamšid are kings who are famous for employing demons to make their famous constructions.[240] Solomon built the Temple (and also a palace), while Jamšid built his famous underground fortress that was supposed to protect humans, animals and plants from the severe winter.[241] However, according to Vendīdād, Jamšid did not appoint demons in his construction (except for in the Šāh-Nāma narrative where dēws helped Jamšid), but rather built by means of two special instruments that god sent him, namely *aštra* (whip) and golden *suwra*/*sufra*.[242]

The meaning of *suwra* is still not clear. However, in "Jamšīd's Souvra and Żaḥḥāk's Souvra," Ahmad Taffazoli provides a summary of all the suggested meanings, and, based on the Pahlavi equivalent of the Avestan word, concludes that it was a holed instrument, which, based on Dēnkard 9, had a magical power as well. In the Vendīdād (Fargard 2:6) it seems that the two instruments are symbols of Jamšīd's sovereignty. One of the first meanings suggested by scholars concerning Suwra is ring or seal/ring, which is no longer a commonly accepted theory.

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[240] In the Šāh-nāma demons make clay and bricks, and then build buildings for men during Jamšīd's period. The Šāh-nāma states: "He (Jamšīd) ordered the evil-minded dews to mix water and soil. When they discovered everything that was made of mud, they made molds for bricks. Then the *dēw*s constructed a wall using stone and plaster; initially he (the *dēw*) did it geometrically."
بفرمود دیوان ناپاک را *** به آب اندر آمیختن خاک را
هر آنچ از گل آمد چو بشناختند*** سبک خشت را کالبد ساختند
به سنگ و به گچ دیو دیوار کرد*** نخست از برش هندسی کار کرد

[241] Iranian Muslim authors compared Jamšīd to Noah as well, in terms of saving God's creation from a severe winter by building a fortress called "*War i Jamkard*". In *Bundahišn*, section 17, Persepolis is considered to be the War i Jamkard, which is Jamšīd's major construction made by help of demons. See Touraj Daryaee, "From Yima's Wara to Jamšīd's Throne: Persepolis and the Impact of the Avestan Lore," *DABIR* 1, no. 3 (2017): 1-5.

[242]Ahmad Tafazzoli, "Souvray-e Jamšīd va Souvray e Żaḥḥāk" (Jamšīd's Souvra and Żaḥḥāk's Souvra), *Journal of Tehran University's Humanities and Literature Departmen*t 90 (1975 [1354]): 48-50.

Interestingly, in Dēnkard 9, Żaḥḥāk has this instrument as well, and Taffazoli believes that Żaḥḥāk (a monster-king based on the demon Aži Dahāka) must have inherited Jamšid's instrument after Jamšīd was overthrown by him.[243]

King Solomon's magical instruments, sent by God from heaven and representative of his dominion, are famous as well. In the Testament of Solomon it states: "Take, O Solomon, king, son of David, the gift which the Lord God has sent thee, the highest Sabaoth. With it thou shalt lock up all demons of the earth, male and female; and with their help thou shalt build up Jerusalem. [But] thou [must] wear this seal of God."[244] Based on the Vendīdād, Jamšīd also used his heavenly instruments in building the underground fortress, but there is no trace of demons in Vendīdād. However in Yasna 9, Jamšid is introduced as the king of all the creatures including demons: "(The Glory,) which accompanied shining Yima of good herds for a long time, so that he ruled over the earth of seven parts, over demons, and mortals, over wizards and witches, over commanders, seers and ritualists.' 'Who brought up from the demons both prosperity and reputation, both flocks and herds, both contentment and honour.'"[245]

However, the Jamšīd of Pahlavi literature—as is found in the Dēnkard or the Jāmāsp Nāmag—has a more complicated relationship with demons.[246] The Jāmāsp Nāmag depicts

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[243] Ibid. Apparently a demon stealing a heavenly seal-ring/instrument belonging to a pious king was an ancient motif in Iranian lore.

[244] F. C. Conybeare, tr., *The Testament of Solomon* (1898) 16.

[245] Almut Hintze, *Zamyād Yašt: Introduction, Avestan Text, Translation, Glossary* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1994), 6:31-34.

[246] See Peshotanji Behramji Sanjana, ed., *Dēnkard, the Acts of Religion*, Book 3, trans. Ratanshah Kohiyar (Bombay: D. Ardeshir & Co., 1876). Also: E. W. West, trans., *Sacred Books of the East: Dēnkard 7, vol. 5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897). The Jamšīd of Dēnkard has even more communication with demons, in Dēnkard (vol.6 Sanjana) we read: "Jamshed, in order to destroy the deceitful influence from men, invited the demon-men and demoness, and put the demons the following questions: – 'Who created this world?' 'Who destroys it?' The demons clamored out their reply thus: – We who are demons created it, and we destroy it." Here Jamšīd invites demons and defeats them in a debate, and proves that demons are not sources of creation, and by proving that "creative and destructive powers do not emanate from one source" crushes the deceitfulness of demons and as a consequence the immortal existence is created. Also in Dēnkard 7 paragraph 60 Jamšīd communicates with demons: "… Jam said to the Dēws: 'here will be born pure and virtuous Zardōšt whose deeds will bring you that are dēws 'axwāhišnīh'.

Jamšīd as a king who ruled demons and benefitted from them: "[Jamšid ruled] over men and demons seven hundred and seventeen years and seven months and five days. Cloud[s], wind, [and] rain were under his instruction. He gave the devils and the Druzes [fiends] in the complete service of man. The demons made food for men."[247] The Jamšīd described here not only ruled over men and demons, but also natural phenomenon such as wind, clouds, and rain, and in his time demons were at the service of humans. According to Jewish folklore King Solomon was also able to control natural phenomenon, such as the wind. The story of King Solomon judging the winds of the East, West, North and South, for example, or King Solomon's flying carpet, carried by wind, are both well known.[248]

> … when Solomon sat upon the carpet he was caught up by the wind, and sailthrough the air so quickly that he breakfasted at Damascus and supped in Media. One day Solomon was filled with pride at his own greatness and wisdom; and as a punishment therefor the wind shook the carpet, throwing down 40,000 men. Solomon chided the wind for the mischief it had done; but the latter rejoined that the king would do well to turn toward God and cease to be proud; whereupon Solomon felt greatly ashamed.[249]

Apart from the aforementioned trivial similarities between the narratives surrounding Solomon and Jamšīd, there is a key fact that both Talmudic and Iranian narratives share: the fact that it is Solomon and Jamšīd's sin that causes their lifetime and rule to be divided into two major periods, namely before and after the sin. The essence of the sin or sins committed by the two kings is not clear and consistent across texts. While the Bible clearly states that Solomon's sin was marrying many foreign princesses who brought their gods to his kingdom and promoting idle-worshipping among Israelites, the Testament of Solomon states that his sin was falling in love with a maiden who is a worshiper of Raphan and Moloch. The love of the maiden causes

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'axwāhišnīh' is that you can neither care about yourselves nor about others. Translation based on Rashed-Mohassel's edition, 372 and 35.

[247] I have translated this from Pāzand based on Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, trans., *Jāmāsp Nāmag* (1903) Chapter 4.

[248] In Quran 34:12 wind was also made subservient to Solomon.

[249] "'Solomon' and 'Solomon's carpet,'" *Jewish Encyclopedia*, online edition, available at www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13842-solomon#anchor14 (accessed on 5 January 2018).

him to offer some type of sacrifice to Moloch, causing the spirit of God to leave him. Addressing Solomon the maiden asks, "Take these grasshoppers, and crush them together in the name of the god Moloch." King Solomon does this, exclaiming afterwards, "and the glory of God quite departed from me; and my spirit was darkened, and I became the sport of idols and demons."[250] As it will be explained later, the glory of God (*farr/xwarrah*) leaves Jamšīd as well, after he sins.

Significantly, the nature of King Solomon's sin is completely different in Talmudic narratives. In Giṭ. 68a-b, although the King's sin is not specified, it can be inferred that the sin is immodesty. When Ashmedai says: "Now, however, you have subdued the whole world, yet you are not satisfied till you subdue me too" he is referring to king's pride. This notion of immodesty is repeated when Solomon asks Ashmedai, "What is your superiority over us?" which, again, speaks to the notion of the king's pride. Furthermore, in the Bavli there is another tractate that refers to Solomon's pride clearly:

> When Solomon built the Temple, he desired to take the Ark into the Holy of Holies, whereupon the gates clave to each other. Solomon uttered twenty-four prayers, yet he was not answered. He opened [his mouth] and exclaimed, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors: And the King of glory shall come in." They rushed upon him to swallow him up, crying, "Who is the king of glory?" "The Lord, strong and mighty," answered he.[251]

According to this narrative the gates thought that Solomon, filled with pride, was addressing himself as the king of glory. Solomon repeats the verse, but the doors refuse to open until he prays: "O Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed remember the good deeds of David thy servant."[252] Following this the doors open, but for David's sake. Thus one major transformation of Solomon's narrative in the Bavli is the nature of his sin. The reason that Solomon's sin shifts from womanizing and idol-worshipping in the Bible and Testament of Solomon, to arrogance and hubris in the Talmud, could be due to the impact of the Iranian

[250] Conybeare, *The Testament of Solomon*, 129-130.
[251] Šabb. 30a.
[252] Ibid.

narratives of Jamšīd. As can be seen in the following paragraphs, Jamšīd—just like Solomon who circuitously called himself the king of glory—exclaims that he is the creator of the world.

There are several Pahlavi books that refer to Jamšīd's sin, however not every text illustrates the nature of his sin. There are a few texts that clearly specify that Jamšid was proud of his power and glorious kingdom, just like King Solomon. For instance in a Pahlavi text named Dādestān ī Dēnig, Jamšīd's sin is being "eager for supreme sovereignty instead of the service of Ohrmazd."[253] Or in one Persian Rivāyat, Jamšid's hubris is attributed to Ahremen, who managed to exit from hell after being confined for seventy years, went to Jamšīd, and somehow made him demented, causing him to proclaim himself creator of the world. Having lost his divine fortune, Jamšīd was deposed by Zaḥḥak and took to the mountains and deserts.[254] In another Pahlavi Rivāyat, Jamšīd claims that: "I created water, I created earth, I created plants, I created sun, I created the moon … I created man, I created the whole creation, and thus he lied…" however when he is asked the means by which he accomplished creation he cannot answer, so "… because of that untruth words his glory and kingship ran away from him and his body was demolished be demons …".[255] The sin of hubris is also attributed to Jamšīd in the Šāh-nāma, where again Jamšīd proclaims that he is god, the creator of the world: "Now that you know I [Jamšīd] am who has done everything [in the world], I should be called the creator of the world."[256]

On the other hand, there are several texts in which the nature of Jamšīd's sin is not clearly illustrated. According to Yašt 9, for instance, Jamšīd was a glorious and strong king "Under

[253] *Dādestān ī Dēnig*, Chapter 39:16.
[254] Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "Jamšid i. Myth of Jamšid", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. XIV, Fasc. 5, 501-522; available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jamsid-i (accessed online at 1 June 2017).
[255] Alan Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dadestan i Denig* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1990) 31a: 9-10.
[256] Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol.1, 45.

whose reign there was no frost no heat, … no death, no envy created by demons," but this glorious king sinned and lost the glory that God had given him. He had the perfect kingdom "before his not-lying, before he took up the false word, the untrue one into his endeavor," however after he lies: "When he had talked up this false word, the untrue one, into his endeavor, the Glory flew away from him visibly in the shape of a bird.' 'Not seeing the Glory shining Yima of good herds was driven off.' 'Unhappy Yima started to wander about and being laid low because of his evil-mindedness he kept himself hidden on earth."[257] Interestingly, wandering the world after losing the glory of God is itself another common theme between the Gittin story and Yašt 9. In the Gittin narrative when Solomon loses his ring and Ashmedai eats him and throws him four hundred parasangs away, he wanders around as a beggar.

The Jāmāsp Nāmag also refers to Jamšīd's sin, however here there is also a reference to a woman in the second phase of Jamšīd's life, which is reminiscent of King Solomon's relationships with women in his dark days. In Jāmāsp Nāmag we read:

> From him the world was more thriving. From the beginning [up to] 717 years and 7 months he was thankful to God. For 100 years he secretly went away with a woman [called] Jamai to the sea in despair. Then, after being both grateful and well-asked for., when he became a speaker of untruth, when his splendor and glory were displeased with him, he faced hardship. The accursed Aži-Dahāka [*kešānī*?][258], whom they call Bēvarasp, with the prince Spediver and with many demons caught him, slew him, and took up one thousand rays from him. (they took Jamšid's Glory)."[259]

Although the above narrative also mentions Jamšīd's untrue words, it states that before speaking this untruth he was wandering in the sea for one hundred years with a woman called Jamai, who, according to the same text, was his twin sister: "From Vivangha [Jamšid's father] were born a man and woman … Jama [Jamšīd] and Jamai."[260] Furthurmore, in Dēnkard 3, it is

[257] Zamyād-Yašt, 6:31-34.
[258] This word is unclear to me.
[259] Translation based on Pāzand Jāmāsp Nāmag, Chapter 4.
[260] Ibid.

Jamšīd who binds the demons by law (q. 286, p. 285), although in the end he is himself deceived by the demons, lies, and loses the power of communicating with the *yazata*s (divine beings).[261]

Obviously Jamšīd and Solomon both were degraded after they sinned. In the Bible, however, God decides not to punish Solomon directly for his sins, and instead rebukes his son and kingdom. Solomon as portrayed in the Bavli, however, is directly punished for his crime—and, according to one tradition, becomes a commoner who never regained his power again:

> Resh Lakish said: At first, Solomon reigned over the higher beings, as it is written, Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king; afterwards, [having sinned,] he reigned [only] over the lower, as it is written, For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tifsah even to Gaza… Did he regain his first power, or not? Rab and Samuel [differ]: One maintains that he did; the other, that he did not.[262]

Interestingly, tractate Giṭ. 68a concludes the same way. In this narrative, Rav and Shmuel again disagree over Solomon's fate after his sin, and one tradition even states that following his sin Solomon became a commoner. It is likely that the impact of Jamšīd's tale is what caused a Talmudic tradition to state that Solomon remained a commoner after he sinned. Like King Solomon of the Bavli, Jamšīd never regained his power; he wandered for a while and then was murdered (sawn into two pieces) by Aži Dahāka and Spitura.

The Gittin story has two main parts, before and after Solomon's wandering. The second part of the Gittin story depicts Solomon's court under Ashmedai's rule in absence of the real King. Ashmedai has changed his appearance to resemble Solomon and no one knows that it is he and not Solomon in the palace. Following a meeting with actual King, however, the Sanhedrin attempts to investigate. After questioning Benaiahu and King Solomon's wives the Sanhedrin realizes that the beggar who claims that he is the King is right. One significant issue in the second part of the story is the demon's sexual relationship with Solomon's wives and mother, an

[261] Dēnkard 3, 354, 322.
[262] Soncino Talmud, Sanh. 20b.

aspect of the story which was not acceptable to Palestinian rabbies, and thus in the Yerushalmi, Sanh. 2.6 the role of Solomon's double, Ashmedai, is given to an angel.[263]

However, this issue of the demon owning the King's harem can be elucidated through Iranian narratives, specifically the ones pertaining Jamšīd. It should first be kept in mind that the most important demon that Jamšīd encounters in Iranian mythology is Aži Dahāka, who is, according to Yašts: "… the three-mouthed, the three-headed, the six-eyed, who has a thousand senses, that most powerful, fiendish Drūz, that demon baleful to the world, the strongest Drūz that Angra Mainyu [Ahriman] created…"[264] This powerful demon defeated Jamšid and took ownership of his kingdom and his two sisters. Therefore, Thraetaona's [Ferēdūn's] regular request to the deities to whom he sacrificed was to overcome Aži Dahāka and to carry off the two most beautiful women in the world who were Aži Dahāka's wives.[265]

According to the *Bundahišn*, Aži Dahāka —the demon who held Jamšid's two sisters—is said to have had the habit of watching humans and demons copulate: "… Azdahāg [Aži Dahāka], during his reign, let loose a dēw on a young woman, and let loose a young man on a parīg [female demon]. They copulated under his sight ..." (Bd 9:158) The *Bundahišn* further states that Jamšīd himself wedded a parīg (female demon)[266] and also gave his sister (whom according to tradition was his wife as well) to a demon: "It [scripture] also states that, 'Jam, when [his] xwarrah [glory] had departed from him, out of the fear of demons, took a she-dēw to wife, and

[263] Joseph M. Davis, "Solomon and Ashmedai (bGiṭ. 68a–b), King Hiram, and Procopius: Exegesis and Folklore," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 4 (2016): 582.
[264] Yašt 15:24.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Jamšīd's marriage with a Parīg that resulted in creation of noxious creatures, in a way resembles Solomon's marriage to Pharo's daughter that according to the Bavli resulted in creation the hostile state of Rome as a punishment. See Babylonian Talmud, Sanh. 21b.

gave his sister Jamag to a dēw to wife.'" (Bd 9:158)[267] In addition, Ashmedai, the very demon who fornicated with Solomon's wives and mother in Giṭ. 68a-b, has a record of having relations with humans in the Pahlavi text Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram. In the latter: "the devastators of the Iranians (Ērānān) were from Koxared [a kind of female demon or sorcerer], and Koxared was born from Ēšm [Ashmedai] and Manušak, the sister of Manuš-Čihr." The aforementioned, however, is not the only way that the issue of Ashmedai in King Solomon's court has been understood.

The etymology of the name Ashmedai (Asmodeos) has been a dilemma for scholars. Today it is commonly believed that Ashmedai is Aēšma Daēva ((x)Ēšm in Middle Persian) of the Avesta. In "The Origin if the Ashmedai Legend in the Babylonian Talmud" Armand Kaminka takes up the theme of the nature and etymology of Ashmedai. In this work Kaminka suggests that Ashmedai's role in Giṭ. 68a-b clearly resembles Smerdis's narrative as related by Herodotus:[268]

> In the eighth month he was detected in the following manner: Otanes, son of Pharnaspes, was of the first rank of the Persians, both with regard to birth and affluence. This nobleman was the first who suspected that this was not Smerdis, the son of Cyrus; and was induced to suppose who he really was, from his never quitting ther citadel, and from his not inviting any of the nobles to his presence. Suspicious of the imposture, he took these measures: — He had a daughter named Phaedyma, who had been married to Cambyses, and whom, with the other wives of the late king, the usurper had taken for himself. Otanes sent a message to her, to know whether she cohabited with Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, or with any other person. She returned for answer, "that she could not tell, as she had never seen Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, nor did she know the person with whom she cohabited." Otanes sent a second time to his daughter: "If", says he, "you do not know the person of Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, inquire of Atossa who it is with whom you and she cohabit, for she must necessarily know her brother."

[267] Regarding the relationship of Jamšīd, his sister and the demons Skjærvø states: "The Pahlavi Rivāyat goes on to tell the story of how, one time Jam and the *dēw* were on a drinking spree, Jamag switched clothes with the parīg and took her drunken brother to bed, thus performing *xwēdōdah* (next-of-kin marriage), by the virtue of which the two demons fell back into Hell. The *Bundahišn* also reports that Jam and Jamag had twins, a man named Āspī(g)ān and a woman named *Zrēšom, who married and so continued the lineage (Bd 20:228-229). The story is reminiscent of the story of Lot and his daughters, who have intercourse with him when he is drunk, in order to continue the family (Genesis 19:31-38). See Skjærvø, "Jamšid i. Myth of Jamšid," *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

[268] Armand Kaminka, "The Origin of the Ashmedai Legend in the Babylonian Talmud," *The Jewish Quarterly Review 13*, no. 2 (1922) 221-224.

> To which she thus replied, "I can neither speak to Atossa, nor indeed see any of the women who live with him. Since this person, whoever he is, came to the throne, the women have all been kept separate."
>
> LXIX. This reply more and more justified the suspicions of Otanes; he sent, therefore, a third time to his daughter: "My daughter", he observed, "it becomes you, who are noble born, to engage in a dangerous enterprize, [sic] when you father commands you. If this Smerdis is not the son of Cyrus, but the man whom I suspect, he ought not, possessing your person, and the sovereignty of Persia, to escape with impunity. Do this, therefore — when next you shall be admitted to his bed, and shall observe that he is asleep, examine whether he has any ears; if he has, you may be secure you are with Smerdis, the son of Cyrus; but if he has not, it can be no other, than Smerdis, one of the magi."[269]

As Kaminka concludes, "the Ashmedai of the Talmudic legend was originally, and also in the version that came down to the amoraic period in Giṭ. 68, none else than (with the omission of r) the magician Smerdis, who, as may be seen from Herodotus, exercised the imagination of the people all over the Persian empire through the manner in which he took possession of the throne."[270] According to Kaminka, then, not only is the narrative the same, but the word Ashmedai [Asmodeos] is etymologically derived from the word Smerdis.

2.1.3 Solomon and Yima's Paradigm

As previously mentioned, Solomon and Jamšid are interchangeable figures in Persian literature, especially in Persian poetry. However, as the examination of the Talmudic narratives in light of Iranian material has demonstrated, there is reason to assume that Solomon and Jamšid were comparable even during the time of the Sasanian Zoroastrian and Talmudic sages. According to Isac Kalimi, Solomon's portrayal in the Chronicles was created by the historians who resided in Yehud province of Achaeminid Empire. Kalimi believes that the overall picture of Solomon, his mother Bathsheba and Nathan presented a negative picture in Kings because Solomon was not the legitimate heir to the throne, but a usurped of the throne. However, in the

[269] Herodotus, as translated from the Greek by the Rev. William Beloe: 42 LXVIII. See Ephraim Nissan, ″A Wily Peasant (Marcolf, Bertoldo), a Child Prodigy (Ben Sira), a Centaur (Kitovras), a Wiseman (Sidrach), or the Chaldaean Prince Saturn? Considerations about Marcolf and the Marcolfian Tradition, with Hypotheses about the Genesis of the Character Kitovras,″ *International Studies in Humour* 3, no. 1 (2014): 108-150.
[270] Kaminka, "The Origin of the Ashmedai Legend," 224.

chronological history all the features that cast a negative light on David, Nathan, Bathsheba, and Solomon are omitted.[271]

It can thus be argued that Solomon's depiction in the Jewish (post-Chronicle) materials was influenced by Iranian mythologies surrounding Jamšīd (Yima), especially Solomon's depiction in the Babylonian Talmud. Joseph Davis in this regard states that the demon story in Gittin "like so many details of so many midrashim … gave the biblical text contemporary relevance for a sixth- or seventh-century audience."[272] If, rabbis and their sixth-seventh century audience were familiar with the common myths regarding Jamšīd, according to Touraj Daryaee, R.N. Frye is therefore correct in his belief that in Iranian historiography "the reporter of events seizes upon past accepted patterns to tell us of an event."

Touraj Daryaee also introduces an expression called the "Yima [Jamšīd] Paradigm," which he provides a number of examples for, and states: "… I have come to see the primordial Iranian king, Yima (Persian Jamšīd), as the model for describing the rise and fall and the glory and majesty of kings and rulers in the Iranian world." [273] It can be proposed that the Sasanian rabbis were influenced by this paradigm, and applied Jamšīd's characteristics—such as his engagement with demons, his sin and his loss of glory—to King Solomon who already had some general similarities with Jamšīd.[274]

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[271] Issac Kalimi, "The Rise of Solomon in the Ancient Israelite Historiography," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 40.
[272] Davis, "Solomon and Ashmedai," 585.
[273] Touraj Daryaee, "Whipping the Sea and the Earth: Xerxes at the Hellespont and Yima at the Vara." *DABIR* 1, no. 2 (2016): 4-9.
[274] Regarding Jamšīd's connection with Jewish ideas in Pahlavi texts, see Dēnkard 3, 286-289. In Dēnkard the ten commandments of Judaism are being a model for the notion of "Jamšīd's ten percepts," in this regard Dēnkard states that: "Be it known that the following ten precepts were given to men by their well-wisher Jamšīd, as originating divine wisdom, doing good to men, …" and Dahāk (Aži Dahāka of the Avesta who defeated Jamšīd) is a Hebrew priest who wrote the Jewish ten commandments: "The ten precepts of the priest Dahāk of the Hebrew religion who is an injurer of God's world, a diminisher of his Creation, and who is wickedly inclined against the above the universally beneficial precepts of Jamšīd of the good faith. And as being consonant to religion and the will of

2.2 King Og, Moses and Garšāsp

One of the most important Talmudic narratives to enter into Persian classical literature is from Ber. 54b, which is the story of King Og of Bashan. King Og's case is different from the narratives just considered, as its history of transmission and transformation into the various sources that will be discussed in the following chapter is notably more complicated. King Og (Uwj bin Anaq in Persian and Arabic sources) is mentioned in the Bible, Talmud, Manichean Book of Giants, and classical Persian and Arabic literature. King Og also has analogous characters in Avestan and Middle Persian works. Similar to King Solomon's case, the Biblical King Og is different from what emerges in the Talmud, Midrash and other sources just mentioned. The aim of this section, then, is to propose that the Talmudic narrative concerning King Og of Bashan is transformed based on a number of Iranian myths and motifs.

The Biblical King Og is an Amorite king of the city of Bashan, who ruled in Ashtaroth and was seized by Moses in the battle of Edrei.[275] King Og is depicted as a remnant of the *Rephaim* (giants), and in the Midrash this Biblical giant turns into a monster with extraordinary dimensions. As Admiel Kosman states with regards to this transformation:

> We shall now summarize in short the permutations of the changing Og story: the king of Bashan, who is patently depicted in the Bible as a giant of realistic dimensions, and who was portrayed in a similar light by the sages of the midrash in the tannaitic period and by Josephus, became a figure of monstrous proportions in the amoraic exegeses (that appear in quite distinct fashion in the Babylonian Talmud), possibly under the influence of views that appear in the Apocrypha."[276]

God…. These ten universally noxious precepts of Dahāk given against Jamšīd's ten beneficial precepts were ordered by him to be well written out and preserved in Jerusalem as a religious work. The Jewish Patriarch Abraham who came after him followed his precepts. And people came to look upon these precepts of the religion of Dahāk as the work of the Prophet Abraham who was to come at the end of the world. The words received from Dahāk were ordered to become current among the people. Thus every one of the Jewish race and faith came to look upon Dahāk's religious words as meant for himself and to believe in them."

[275] Numbers 21:33 and Deuteronomy 3:11.

[276] Admiel Kosman, "The Story of a Giant Story: The Winding Way of Og King of Bashan in the Jewish Haggadic Tradition," *Hebrew Union College Annual 73* (2002): 189.

Although Kosman asserts that that the transformation of Og's character from a giant with realistic dimensions to a monster is due to the influence of apocryphal texts, it will be demonstrated in this section that the Story of Og as related by Amoraim was most likely impacted by Iranian materials.

2.2.1 King Og in the Babylonian Talmud Ber. 54b

In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Ber. 54b, there is a heroic narrative in which Moses and King Og of Bashan fight. The narrative goes as follows:

אבן שבקש עוג מלך הבשן לזרוק על ישראל גמרא גמירי לה. אמר מחנה ישראל כמה? הוי תלתא פרסי. איזיל ואיעקר טורא בר תלתא פרסי ואישדי עלייהו ואיקטלינהו. אזל עקר טורא בר תלתא פרסי ואייתי על רישיה.

ואייתי קודשא בריך הוא עליה קמצי ונקבוה ונחית בצואריה.

הוה בעי למשלפה משכי שיניה להאי גיסא ולהאי גיסא ולא מצי למשלפה. והיינו דכתיב (תהלים ג, ח) שני רשעים שברת וכדר' שמעון בן לקיש. דא"ר שמעון בן לקיש מאי דכתיב שני רשעים שברת? אל תקרי שברת אלא שרבבת.

משה כמה הוה? עשר אמות. שקיל נרגא בר עשר אמין שוור עשר אמין ומחייה בקרסוליה וקטליה.

The stone that Og, king of the (city) Bashan wanted to throw at Israel. Talmud was finished to her (This has been handed down by tradition.)

He said: How large is the camp of Israel? Three Parasangs. I will go and uproot a mountain measuring three Parasangs and throw it at them and kill them. He went and uprooted a mountain measuring three Parasangs and carried it on his head.

But the Holy One, blessed be He, sent ants which bored a hole in it, so that it went down around his neck. He tried to loosen it, but his teeth were prolonged on each side, and he could not pull it off.

It corresponds with (what is) written (the script); "Thou hast broken the teeth of the wicked" as explained by Rabbi Sham'on bin Lakish. For Rabbi Sham'on bin Lakish said: What is (the meaning of) the text, "Thou hast broken the teeth of the wicked"? Do not read," shibbarta" [Thou hast broken], but "shirbabta" [Thou hast lengthened].

> (How tall) was Moses? Ten cubits. He took a heavy axe measuring ten cubits, leapt ten cubits, and struck him on his ankle and killed him. [277]

In other short Bavli narratives we read that Og was not destroyed at the time of the Flood (Nid. 61a and Šabb. 151b), and, in addition, Erubin 48a indicates that Og was regarded as an unusually large giant. A legend also states that a grave-digger pursued a stag three miles inside of one of Og's bones without reaching the other end (Nid. 24b).[278]

In the following sections it will be proposed that the portrayal of Moses in this Talmudic narrative resembles the national monster-slaying heroes of the epic literature of ancient Iran, such as Garšāsp/Sām or Rostam. Attention will also be drawn to the fact that the giant Og also has counterparts in Avestan and Middle Persian literature, and that most of the key themes of this Talmudic narrative are also present in the Avestan and Middle Persian myths.

2.2.2 Garšāsp and Gandarewa (Gandarw in Pahlavi) in the Avesta and Middle Persian

In the Avesta a monster called "Gandarewa" is introduced.[279] There are two adjectives used to describe this monster (see: Yašts 5:38, 19:41, 15:28), namely *upapa* (aquatic) and *Zairi Pāšna* (Golden heels, or someone that has his heels in the sea).[280] Garšāsp/Keresaspa, the hero who ultimately slays Gandarewa, on one occasion prays to the goddess of the waters (Anāhita) to be able to kill him in the Vourukaša Sea.

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[277] The translation is mine, Ber. 54b.

[278] Remnants of Og's bones was apparently an interesting motif in Iranian texts as well. For instance, in *Tafsīr Abū'l-futūh* it states that one of Og's bones was used as a bridge on Nile, or his bone was a bridge during Anōširawān's time in Iran. See Mehran Afshari, "*Az Uwj ebn e Anaq ta Gandarewa Dēw* (From Uwj Bin Anaq to Ganadarava the Demon)," *Pazh* 1387, no. 4 (winter 2008): 159.

[279] He is mentioned in the Rām Yašt, the Zamyād-Yašt, the Ābān Yašt, the Vendīdād, etc.

[280] The meaning "golden heel" is accepted by most of the scholars; however, in the Middle Persian texts the word *Zreh Pāšna* is detected, which can both mean "yellow/ golden heel" or "Someone that his heel is in the sea." In the following pages it will be shown that later Iranian poets and authors preferred the second meaning.

> Offer up a sacrifice, O Spitama Zarathuštra! unto Ardvi Sūra Anāhita....To her did Keresaspa, the manly-hearted, offer up a sacrifice behind the Vairi Pisanah, with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs.
>
> He begged of her a boon, saying: "Grant me this, O good, most beneficent Ardvi Sūra Anāhita! that I may overcome the golden-heeled Gandarewa, though all the shores of the sea Vouru-Kaša are boiling over; and that I may run up to the stronghold of the fiend on the wide, round earth, whose ends lie afar."[281]

Additionally, in Yašt 15: 28, Gandarewa is described as: "The Gandarewa, who lives beneath the waters…"[282] Thus, according to Yašts 5 and 15, Garšāsp desires to slay the golden-heeled monster by/in the Vourukaša (*Faraxkard*, the cosmic ocean), and Anāhita grants him his wish. Moreover, the following is probably the most complete description that exists in the Avesta (in the Zamyād-Yašt), and pertains to Garšāsp and Gandarewa's fight:

> Who [Garšasp] slew the horned Dragon,
> The hourse-devouring, man devouring,
> Poisonous, yellow one.
> On whom the poisonous plant grew
> At the tail as high as a tree.
> … On whom Keresaspa [Garšāsp)
> Cooked his meal in an iron pot
> Around midday.
> The villain became hot
> And started sweating;
> Forwards he kicked against the pot,
> He wanted to upset the boiling water.
> Frightened manly-minded [Nairi-Manah]
> Keresaspa jumped aside.[283]
> Who slew
> Gandarewa, who had a yellow heel [Zairi-Pāšna], who
> Rushed about with wide-open mouth
> To destroy the world of Truth … [284]

Before going any further in this section it will be important to note that in the Avesta Garšāsp/Keresaspa is called *Nairi Manah* (manly-minded, brave) and is from the house of Sāma;

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[281] Yašt 5:36-38.
[282] Yašt 15: 28.
[283] There is a very interesting parallel of this Avestan scene in the Bavli in the name of Rabbah b. Bar Hana which goes thus: "Once we were travelling on board a ship and saw a fish whose back was covered with sand out of which grew grass. Thinking it was dry land we went up and baked, and cooked, upon its back. When, however, its back was heated it turned, and had not the ship been nearby we should have been drowned." (B. Bat., 73b).
[284] Hintze, *Zamyād-Yašt* VI: 40-41.

thus, it is clear that the three different characters who appear in the Pahlavi and classical Persian texts—namely Garšāsp, Nariman (Nairi Manah) and Sām—were developed from the same mythical hero of the Avesta: Keresāspa.[285] Hence, in some Pahlavi texts such as the *Bundahišn* and the Mēnōg ī Xrad, it is Sām who slays Gandarewa.[286]

Unlike the Avesta, the Pahlavi literature of Iran depicts the fight between the hero and the monster in more detail—in the Pahlavi Rivāyat, for instance, when Garšāsp is propagating his heroic deeds, he describes how Gandarewa[287] wrenches him into the sea and they fight for nine days and nights. Garšāsp defeats Gandarewa the first time by skinning the monster's leg from the ankle and using the skin to bind its hands and legs. After this Garšāsp takes the monster out of the water and asks a lieutenant to guard it, however Gandarewa breaks free and returns to the water with Garšāsp's family. The second time Garšāsp fights with Gandarewa, he jumps one thousand paces with each step and enters the sea, this time killing the monster outright. On yet another occasion Garšāsp declares that he had fought with brigands who were so gigantic their ears reached the sun, and the sea was up to their knees. Garšāsp was as high as their ankle, so he struck them in the ankle and killed them. As is evident, almost all of the motifs of Moses and Og's fight are present in this text.[288]

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[285] Bahman Sarkarati, "*Bāz šenāsī-ye baghāyā-ye afsāneh-e Garšāsp dar manzūmehhā-ye hemāsī-ye Īrān*" (Traces of the Garšāsp's myth in Iranian epics), *Nāmeh-ye Farhangestān* 10 (summer 1376 (1997)): 10.

[286] It worth noting that in the Pahlavi and Sogdian versions of Mani's *Kavan* (Book of Giants), Sām and Narimān are mentioned. However, Henning believes that in the original version of the book, written by Mani himself, the Iranian names were not used. What Mani did in his original version that was in Syriac, translated from an older Aramaic version of the "Book of Giants, was to replace the name of one of the main characters; "Ohya" with "Ogias the Giant" (King Og of Bashan). Later in other versions written by Mani's disciples the same character (Ogias) was replaces by mythical Iranian hero; Sām. Therefore in those versions Sām/Garšāsp is equivalent to Og. See W. B. Henning, "The Book of Giants,*" Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XI, no. 1 (1943): 52-59.

[287] In the Pahlavi Rivāyat, Jam had sexual relations with a demoness, and Gandarewa was born from it. Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, 55.

[288] Ibid., 105-107.

In another, rather recent, Middle Persian text called the *Dāstān-e Garšāsp, Tahmuras wa Jamšid, Gelšāh wa matnhā-ye digar* (The Story of Garšāsp, Tahmouras, Jamšid, Gelshah and Others), the fight between Garšāsp and Gandarewa is described in almost the same terms as in the Pahlavi Rivāyat, however here Gandarewa's teeth are mentioned as well, and are likened to a tall column equivalent to 80 fathom.[289] Moreover, in the same text when Garšāsp describes Gandarewa he declares that the monster's feet are in the sea and his hands are in the sky, and that he catches fish from the sea and cooks them by the sun and eats.[290]

Garšāsp and Gandarewa's battle is mentioned in a few other Pahlavi texts as well, however the overall description is the same as the previous instances. Overall, the key components are: a hero of the size of a natural human being with paranormal powers (Moses/Garšāsp); a monster (aquatic in most of cases) who is threatening the country, nation or the hero's family members; a mountain or huge rock taken from a mountain.[291] In most epic accounts the monster or enemy's weak point (ankle/leg) is mentioned, along with the hero's weapon. Moreover, in some texts the monster's teeth are highlighted, and the hero is depicted as having the ability to leap very high and is often also portrayed as having a friend or assistant who helps them.[292] Regarding the latter, Sarkarati, in his article "Traces of the Garšāsp," notes that the dragon slaying heroes of most Indo-European mythologies have an assistant or friend accompanying them—such as Aurvandil and Thor, Mimir and Siegfried, Iolaus and Heracles etc.[293]

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[289] Katayoun Mazdapoor, tr., *Dāstān-e Garšāsp, Tahmuras wa Jamšid, Gelšāh wa matnhā-ye digar. Āvānevisi wa tarjoma az matn-e pahlavī* (Tehrān: Āgāh, 1378 (1999)), 142.
[290] Ibid.,143.
[291] The mountain is a key point; usually the monster is being measured by mountain.
[292] In the following pages a Persian classical text will be mentioned in which Aaron assists Moses fighting Og.
[293] Sarkarati, "Traces of the Garšāsp," 30.

2.2.3 Og of Bashan in the Classical Iranian texts and *tafsīr*

As noted in the previous section, the myth of Og the giant or its equivalent can be found in a number of cultures, and tracing how the story of Og (Uwj bin Anaq in Iranian/Islamic literature) entered into Iran's Islamic texts is an important issue to work on. It is most likely that this narrative also entered into Iran's classical literature through what is called Isra'iliyat (Midrashim) by Muslims.[294] Although, as mentioned earlier, the depiction of Og is more fully elaborated in Iranian works than Talmudic ones, the Og of classical Persian literature and *tafsīr* should still be understood as a mixture of the Pahlavi descriptions of Gandarewa and the Talmudic depictions of King Og of Bashan.[295]

For instance, Ṭabarī, author of a well-known *tafsīr*, was one of the authors who often consulted *Isra'īliyat* (Midrashim). In his *tafsīr* Ṭabarī depicts Og/Uwj as a giant man who has lived since Adam's creation, and states that during the time of Noah's flood (remember that the presence of Og during the Flood was mentioned in Nid. 61a) the water reached only his knee or his stomach, and that he used to catch fish and fry them by holding them near the sun. Ṭabarī furthermore states that God wanted this giant man to live until the time of Moses.[296] Og is also mentioned in the eleventh century *Tafsīr-i Sur Ābādī* (*tafsīr al-tafāsir*) of Abu Bakr Atiq, and the twelfth century tafsīr, *Rawz al-jinān wa ruh al-jinān*. In the aforementioned *tafsīr*s the myths pertaining Og are quite similar to what we've seen so far.

However, *tafsīr*s are not the only Iranian works where Og/Gandarewa is present. Og/Gandarewa can also be detected in a number of Iranian epics such as the Šāh-nāma and Asadī

[294] Og of Bashan is absent from Quran.
[295] Regarding the connections between Gandarewa and Uwj ibn Anaq, see: Mehran Afshari, "*Az Uwj ebn-e Anāq tā Gandareva Dēw*" (From Uwj b. Anaq to Ganadarava the Demon), *Pazh* 4 (winter 1387 (2008)): 157-164.
[296] Mohammad Jarir Tabari, translation of *Tafsīr i Tabari*, ed. Habib Yaghmaei, vol. 1 (Tehran: Toos, 1367 (1988)) 88-90.

Tūsī's Garšāsp-Nama. In both epics the monster is described the same as in Pahlavi literature: in Garšāsp-Nāma, just like in the Talmud and Pahlavi literature, it is also mentioned that the monster has huge tusks that will be pulled out by the hero.

Interestingly, in the Sām-Nāma—an epic by an unknown poet—instead of Gandarewa one encounters Og/Uwj. In this work he is an aquatic monster, the sea reaches his waist, he catches whales and fries them by the sun, is taller than mountains, etc. Ultimately Sām, a mythical Iranian dragon slayer, kills Og/Uwj.[297] It can therefore be inferred that even the poet who created Sām-Nāma could see the resemblance between Gandarewa and Og of Bashan. In fact, the Sām-Nāma—which is a rather recent epic according to Jol Mol in his introduction to the Šāh-nāma—is originally a tale from the Sasanian era.[298] It is very probable that in the Sasanian version the aquatic monster was Gandarewa, and, based on its similarities with Og/Uwj, the final composer of the Sām-Nāma decided to replace the ancient Gandarewa with a monster more well-known in his time, namely Uwj bin Anaq.

The Šāh-nāma mentions other monsters as well, such as the *dēw-e sepīd* (the white monster/demon) who fought Rostam. In the Šāh-nāma the *dēw-e sepīd* attacks Rostam with a millstone that he holds above his head, and, significantly, the millstone has a hole in it, similar to the huge ant-eaten stone that Og wanted to cast upon Israel. In another similarity, Rostam's first strike against the *dēw-e sepīd* is on the leg.[299]

Zakarīyāʾ b. Moḥammad Qazvīnī also mentions Og in his book *ʿaǰāʾeb al-maḵlūqāt wa ḡarāʾeb al-mawǰūdāt (Marvels of created things and remarkable features of existent things)*

[297] As mentioned earlier Sām and Garšāsp are the same personage.
[298] For further reading See Vahid Rouyani, "Who wrote Sām-Nāma?", *The Journal of the Department of Literature and Humanities of Mashhad* 158 (Fall 1386 (2007)): 1.
[299] Rostam and Garšāsp resemble in many ways and traditions state that Garšāsp was one of Rostam's ancestors. The monsters they had fought with (white monster and Gandarewa) have characteristics that obviously resemble king Og.

(1203-1283 CE).[300] Here one finds illustrated episodes including Og's fight with Moses and his fishing and frying of whales while he stands just about knee-deep in the ocean. The giant Og is mentioned again in another Persian text written and illustrated by an unknown author and painter in 1300 CE. This book, originally found in Iraq, contains several stories of Iranian national heroes and presently belongs to the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. This story is told just like the Talmudic narrative, and tells of how Moses, accompanied by Aaron, fought and killed Og/Uwj. According to the narrative Moses, who weighs eight cubits, leaps eight cubits in the air and strikes Og/Uwj on his ankle with his famous staff (also said to be eight cubits) and kills him.

Finally, King Og is sporadically mentioned in Persian poetry. For instance, Sa'di Shirazi, Nizami Ganjavi and Mawlawi Balḵi all mention Og as a symbol of enormity and power. As Sa'di recites in one stanza: "A barley seed might prevent a huge disaster/Did you know that Og was killed merely by a staff?"[301]

The fact that Og/ Uwj's aquatic characteristics are absent from the Talmud is an interesting issue and should be addressed. Kosman believes that the baraita in Nid. 61a that identifies Og as the only survivor of the Flood explains the aquatic motifs in later texts. As he states:

> There is a simple reason for this: if we regard Og to be a fugitive who survived from the Flood generation, then it is plausible that it was his height (the only characteristic of his of which we know from the written sources) that saved him. If this was the case, then his height had to be completely imaginary, since he had to be taller than the highest mountains that were covered by water during the Flood …[302]

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[300] Qazwīnī, Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdt. Wasit, 679 (1280). Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.arab.464, fol. 169r (Courtesy of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek). For a digitized copy of a 1566 manuscript kept in Cambridge University Library see http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-NN-00003-00074/11.
[301] *Būstān*, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Mošarref Sa'di Širāzi, ed. Moḥammad Alī Forūgī, Tehran : Alamgir, 1384 [2005], chapter II.
[302] Kosman, "The Story of a Giant Story," 8.

However, this theory does not seem plausible, as it is obvious that Og's imaginary proportions, just like his aquatic characteristics, were likely inspired by on the monstrous proportions of Gandarewa.[303]

By examining the aforementioned narratives some key points become clear. The Talmud Bavli, except for Ber. 54b, mentions Og only very briefly and sporadically. Despite this, Og's monstrous proportions, tusk-like teeth, life in the sea during the flood, being defeated from his ankle, and using a huge rock to fight can be clearly seen. Additionally, Moses's extraordinary power in leaping and defeating the monster by crashing his ankle is mentioned as well. When one considers the Iranian Islamic epopees and *tafsīr*, it is clear that the resemblance between Og/Uwj and Gandarewa was seen by the poets and authors of the post-Islam literature of Iran. The question is whether or not the resemblances reflected in their compositions were incidental, or if there is a well-founded base for them. In my opinion, the totality of these considerations suggests that the authors of post-Islamic literature in Iran deliberately changed Ganderawa's name to Uwj in their compositions

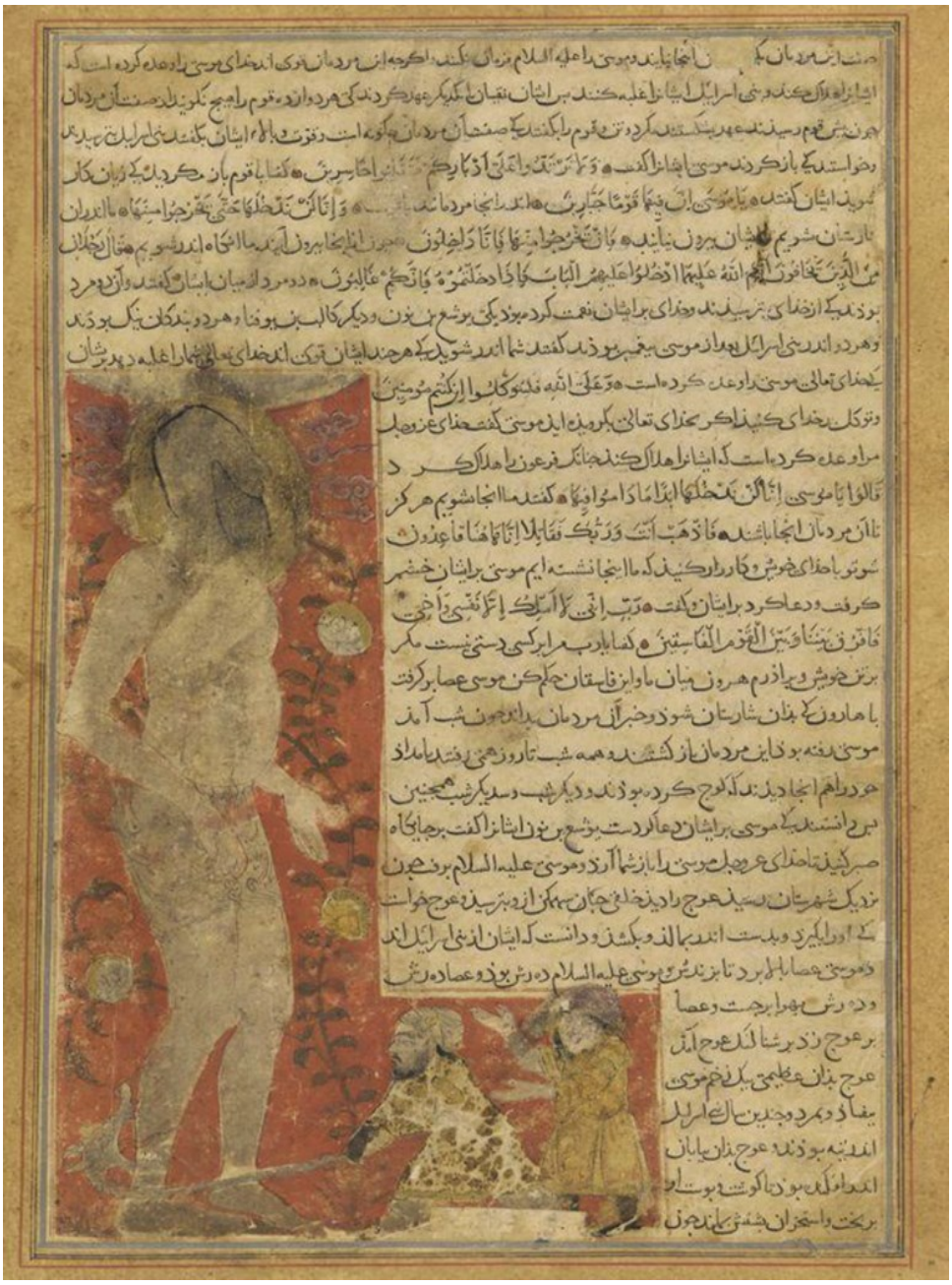
Conclusion

We suggest it was not incidental that the Babylonian rabbis choose to include the heroic scene where Moses slays Og the giant in the Talmud; this inclusion is in line with a longstanding tradition of narrative transmission between the Avesta (and later Middle Persian texts) and Talmudic narratives. Evidently some sections of the Zamyād-Yašt (Yašt 19) contained mythical motifs that were widespread among Iranians, and consequently the Middle Persian/Pahlavi texts

[303] In one narrative Garšāsp was cooking on its back, and in another narrative he rode on his back for three days and nights until he reached his head. See: B.N. Dhabhar, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat* (1913), 65-70.

elaborated on those myths and created more detailed narratives—narratives such as Jamšid's life and deeds that in turn inspired the Talmudic Solomon, or the narrative of Garšāsp and Gandarewa's fight that clearly impacted Moses and Og's heroic battle. However, it is important to note that the case in the appendix (Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī and Rabbi Judah Hanasi) is different. In this case it seems clear that it was Aṭṭār who was impacted by the Talmudic narrative, although there is a possibility that the parable existed in pre-Islamic Iranian texts that have been demolished or are currently inaccessible.

Studying the transmission of mythical figures and motifs—from the Avesta (or older Mesopotamian myths) to Middle Persian, from Middle Persian to the Bavli, from the Bavli to *tafsīr*/Isra'īliyyat, and from here into classical Persian literature—is thus clearly a fruitful subject for both Talmudists and Iranists to focus on. What I have demonstrated in this chapter can pave the way for Irano-Talmudica scholars to pursue this transmission process when relevant. Put differently, this chapter demonstrates that Irano-Talmudica scholars can broaden their area of research by examining the role of Babylonian Jewish sages in this long transmission process. My own research suggests that the role of Jewish sages in the transmission and transmutation of Iranian mythical figures from Middle to Classical Persian could be as important as the transmission currently under investigation (the transmission of these figures from Middle Persian to the Talmud Bavli).



Moses and Aaron Strike the Giant ‘Uwj b. Anaq, Freer Gallery of Art, 1300 A.D.

Chapter III:

The World to Come in Pahlavi Literature and the Babylonian Talmud

The following chapter focuses on the second aim of this dissertation, which is to demonstrate the value of Talmudic study for Iranists by exploring the influence of Talmudic themes, motifs and narration styles on Iranian materials. My specific focus will be a comparison of Bavli tractate Giṭ. 56b-57a with the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, and it will be argued that this comparison suggests that tractate Giṭ. 56b-57a was the motivating inspiration behind the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*—a composition which shares the tractate's themes and motifs regarding punishments in hell.

Zoroastrians and Jews share a common dilemma regarding the hereafter and eschatology. Indeed, the original ancient texts that serve as the heart of these religions (the Gāθās and Torah) largely lack eschatological discussions and descriptions of "The world beyond death." Later sources, such as the Young Avestan texts and the biblical Neviim, contain sporadic eschatological and other-worldly discussions. One finds more organized discussions of the hereafter and the end of the world only in the Pahlavi texts and the Talmud and Midrash.

Many scholars believe that the Avesta contains some eschatological ideas which could have influenced Jewish texts.[304] Some, such as Jean Kellens, qualify that one can find only hints of individual eschatology in the Avesta.[305] In any event, the issue of who influenced whom is still open to discussion and investigation. However, the more important fact—that discussions of

[304] Shaul Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies,1994), 28.

[305] As Shaked states, "Kellens (1987b; Kellens and Pirart 1988/91) has denied the existence of Gathic eschatology. In his latest article (Kellens, find this publication), he seems to accept individual eschatology, but not notions of collective or universal eschatology in the Gāθās. This seems also to be the position of Humbach, who in the introduction to his most recent book (1991) makes no allusion to eschatology. According to this approach the Gāθās are understood as ritual texts, their terminology to be interpreted from the usage of the Vedic texts" (Ibid., 27).

the hereafter and the end of the world in the two aforementioned traditions bear some similarity—is beyond doubt. In fact the resemblances between the Zoroastrian and Judaic canonical texts have been deeply explored.

Nonetheless, the possible connections between the Talmudic and Middle Persian materials is something that requires further investigation. This chapter initially aims to take a step in this direction by examining the shared ideas in these two textual traditions regarding the hereafter and eschatology among Sasanian Zoroastrians and Jews. To begin, a general overview of eschatology, heaven and hell in Talmudic and Middle Persian texts will be provided. Following this, the concept of ascending to the heavens while alive will be presented and subsequently explored, using examples from the Talmud and the Middle Persian texts. And finally a comparison of Bavli tractate Giṭ. 56b-57a with the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* will be provided.

3.1 Chronology of Eschatological Themes within Zoroastrian and Jewish Traditions

Discussions of universal eschatology concerning the fate of mankind and the end of the world are very vivid in Sasanian Zoroastrianism. Regarding the earlier appearance of eschatological notions in Zoroastrianism, Shaul Shaked states that, "There can be little doubt that the eschatological conceptions are quite old in Zoroastrianism. They have their origins, indeed, in the Gāθās of Zarathushtra, but the question as to when each individual trait in this complex of ideas made its first appearance in Iran is not easy to answer."[306] Moreover, in agreement with this claim, Philip Kreyenbroek states that "the concepts of heaven and hell, a judgment of the soul, and a final battle between the cosmic forces are attested in the Gāθās. That final struggle, which may imply an end to time as we know it, involves fire and molten metal and will cause the

[306] Ibid.

world to become 'perfect'."[307] Kreyenbroek is not alone among scholars in believing that concepts such as heaven and hell, judgment of the soul and the final battle were mentioned in the Gāθās. Regarding the notions of resurrection and the savior figure (Sōšāns), on the other hand, he is less categorical:

> There is no clear reference [in the Gāθās], however, to a physical resurrection of the dead, nor does the word *saoshyant* appear to have the meaning it was to acquire later. Both concepts are found together, however, in *Yasht* [for instance in Yt.19:89-92, 48:9 and 53:2], which contains references to many of the features of Zoroastrian eschatology as described in the later tradition.[308]

It should be kept in mind that scholars such as Kellens and Humbach do not share these ideas regarding the Gāθās, understanding as they do the texts to be purely ritual manuals which cannot be understood without knowing the related ritual performances. However, I believe that Shaked is more correct in interpreting the texts somewhere in between these two extremes. In Shaked's view Gāθās are neither provincial Vedic texts nor exclusively representative of later Zoroastrianism.[309]

Putting aside the issue of the timing of the eschatological ideas expressed in Jewish and Zoroastrian traditions, their resemblance cannot be denied. In this regard, Shaked believes that Jewish and Zoroastrian eschatology and discussions of the apocalypse could not have developed independently of each other.[310] Moreover, he asserts that "certain scholars, among them Flusser, Boyce, and Hultgård, have recently treated various problems arising from the comparison of Iranian and Judaeo-Christian notions in this field, and have generally inclined to accept the idea

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[307] Philip Kreyenbroek, "Millennialism and Eschatology in the Zoroastrian Tradition," in Abbas Amanat and Magnus Thorkell Bernhardsson, eds., *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 45-46.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 28.
[310] Ibid.

that there was in Iran a body of well-developed eschatological faith before Judaism evolved its own version."[311]

With regards to the chronology of eschatological themes within Zoroastrian and Jewish traditions two major ideas are attested. One largely doubts the emergence of eschatological themes in the Avesta, specifically in the Gāθās, implying that its influence on Jewish tradition is doubtful as well. The opposite position finds eschatological themes throughout the whole of the Avesta, and suggests that its influence on Judaism is certain. As noted above, however, there are a group of scholars whose views lie somewhere in between these two extremes. [312]

3.1.1 Universal Eschatology

According to the Pahlavi books, the whole history of creation happens over a 12,000-year time span. The first three-thousand-year period is the period of spiritual creation of Ohrmazd, and the second three-thousand-year period is the time during which Ohrmazd creates his subjects. The third three-thousand-year period is when the creation of Ohrmazd and of Ahriman (good and evil) are mixed in the world,[313] and the last three-thousand-year period is the time during which Ohrmazd and Ahriman's creations will eventually be parted, and three saviours from Zoroaster's seed will rise at the commencement of each millennium.[314] During the final 57-year stage of the world's history, called *Frašgird* ("the Renovation"), Sōšāns, the third and last saviour, emerges and incites the resurrection.

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[311] Ibid.
[312] The chronology of eschatological themes within Zoroastrian and Jewish traditions is not a major concern of this chapter and is provided merely as an introduction to the discussion. In this chapter mainly Sasanian Zoroastrian and Jewish texts are examined, but also some later texts where relevant.
[313] The Pahlavi expression for "Period of Mixing" is *gumēzišn*.
[314] For a detailed explanation, see Kreyenbroek, "Millennialism and Eschatology," 36-39.

Overall, Zoroastrianism is believed to be one of the oldest traditions in which millenarian ideas were expressed. Kreyenbroek traces Iranian references to millenarian ideas back to the late Achaemenian period.[315] He asserts that there is "no need, therefore, to look for an alien origin of the notion of cyclical history in Zoroastrianism."[316] Millenarian ideas are expressed in the Babylonian Talmud as well. One of the main motifs of the Jewish apocalypse is the calculation of world periods. The rabbinic calculation of a seven-thousand-year duration of the world is noted in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanh.. 97ab; ʿAbod. Zar. 9a), and is also found in the Testament of Abraham and II Enoch (33.1-2).[317]

In the Babylonian Talmud, we read that "R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day…" (Sanh. 97a-b).[318] Furthermore, attributing specific actions to defined eras in world history is expressed in the Bavli: "The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era, but through our many iniquities all these years have been lost" (Sanh. 97a-b). Kaufmann Kohler describes the transformation of the idea:

> The Perso-Babylonian world-year of twelve millenniums … was transformed in Jewish eschatology into a world-week of seven millenniums corresponding with the week of Creation … Of these the six millenniums were again divided, as in Parsism [Zoroastrianism], into three periods: the first 2,000 years devoid of the Law; the next 2,000 years under the rule of the Law; and the last 2,000 years preparing amid struggles and through catastrophes for the rule of the Messiah.[319]

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[315] Ibid., 50.
[316] Ibid., 51-52.
[317] David Winston, "The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran: A Review of the Evidence," *History of Religions* 5/2 (1966), 197.
[318] Also see Roš Haš. 31a.
[319] Kaufmann Kohler, "Eschatology," in Isidore Singer, ed., *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901-6), 211.

Thus, while Debbei Eliyahu's specific chronology differs from the Zoroastrian, the progression of a "golden era," a "corrupt era," and the final messianic times is common to the two traditions. Moreover, just like the days of the saviour in Zoroastrianism, the days of the Jewish Messiah are also counted in the Talmud: "R. Eliezer said: The days of the Messiah will last forty years…. R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Seventy years…. Rabbi said: Three generations…." (Sanh. 99a). Though the days of Sōšāns[320] will last 57 years in the Middle Persian texts, these numbers are very similar in both Talmudic and Zoroastrian traditions.

One distinguishing aspect of Iranian saviour figures is the fact that the sun will stand still when they arise. This phenomenon is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the Talmud. Joshua 10:13 states, "And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day." From this verse, the Talmudic rabbis developed the idea of the sun standing still for people of prominence. For instance, in tractate Sukkah 28a, it states that, "Our Rabbis have taught: Hillel the Elder had eighty disciples, thirty of whom were worthy of the Divine Spirit resting upon them, as [it did upon] Moses our Master, thirty of whom were worthy that the sun should stand still for them [as it did for] Joshua the son of Nun, [and the remaining] twenty were ordinary" (Sukkah 28a). Furthermore, in Av. Zarah 25a it states that, "A Tanna taught: Just as the sun stood still for Joshua, so did the sun stand still for Moses and for Nakdimon b. Gorion." Although there is no discussion of the sun standing still with the messiah in the Bavli, we read in Pesaḥ. 54a and Ned. 39 b that the Messiah (or his name) existed before the creation of the sun**.** Since associating the "sun standing still" with prominent people is a common motif among rabbis, and goes back to the Joshua in the

[320] Zoroastrian Messiah.

Bible, it can be inferred that Zoroastrian priests who recorded the extraordinary events of the Messianic times incorporated this Jewish idea into their writings.

According to the *Bundahišn* Bd:19, [321] "Regarding end of the world and resurrection", ten years before Sōšāns [the last Zoroastrian messiah] arises, people "resist eating food, and will not die" (Bd 19:221). Sōšāns will then perform the resurrection of the dead. There is likely a relation between this idea and Rav's saying in Ber. 17a: "In the future world there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence…" (Ber. 17a). Regarding propagation in the *Bundahišn*, we read "[they] provide everybody with children and wives, and they [men] will copulate with women as they do in the world, however there will be no begetting of children" (Bd 19:226).

In addition, the *Bundahišn* states that Sōšāns will raise the dead over a period of 57 years. There is an order to these resurrections: "First they will make Gayomard's bone[s] rise, then those of Mašī and Mašyānī [the Zoroastrian equivalents of Adam and Eve], and then those of other people [mythical heroes]" (Bd 19:223).

The seventh-century Pirqe Mashiah, a Hebrew Midrash of apocalyptic type, contains a number of eschatological themes, primarily the glorification of Jerusalem, the temple, the messiah and the events accompanying his arrival, and Eden and Gehinnom. This text is of particular interest, for its allusions to events of the seventh century and for its illumination of relations between Jews, Christians and Arabs at this time. Furthermore, the use of earlier material in the text illustrates the development of messianic ideas. In this work we read that:

[321] All translations of the *Bundahišn* are based on Mehrdad Bahar's Persian translation, which is based on three manuscript copies of the Iranian *Bundahišn* (DH, TD1 and TD2; Mehrdad Bahar, tr., *Bundahišn*, (Tehran: Tus publications: 1990 [1369]). I have translated Bahar's Persian to English.

> When Messiah emerges, Israel will say to him: "Go out and bear good tidings to the sleepers of Machpelah that they should arise first". At that hour he will go up and bear good tidings to the sleepers of Machpelah, and say to them: "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Arise! You have slept enough!" And they will respond and say: "Who is this who uncovers the dust from upon us?" And he will say to them: "I am the messiah of the Lord. Salvation is near! The hour is near!" And they will reply and say: "If it is indeed so, go out and announce to the first man that he might arise first". At that moment he will say, to the first man: "Enough of your slumber!" And he will say: "Who is this who chases the sleep from my eyes? And he will say: "I am the messiah of the Lord from the sons of your sons". Immediately the first man will stand up and all his generation, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the righteous and all the tribes and all the generations from one end of the world to the other end, and they will make the sound of praising and singing heard, as it was said, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good tidings."[322]

This narrative indicates that "the first man, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" will rise first and then people of the world will be resurrected. This idea that resembles the order of resurrection in *Bundahišn*, is undoubtedly based on a Talmudic one which is as follows:

> Elijah used to frequent Rabbi's academy. One day — it was New Moon — he was waiting for him, but he failed to come. Said he to him [the next day]: "Why didst thou delay?" — He replied: "[I had to wait] until I awoke Abraham, washed his hands, and he prayed and I put him to rest again; likewise to Isaac and Jacob." "But why not awake them together?" — "I feared that they would wax strong in prayer and bring the Messiah before his time." (B. Meṣiʿa. 85b).[323]

In both traditions, the messiah will raise the first man, the first patriarch(s), and then resurrect all of humankind.[324]

According to the *Bundahišn*, "During fifty-seven years Sōšāns will raise dead, [they] raise all the people, whichever men are righteous and whichever are wicked… [And] then, when he has restored all of the material life's physical body, then they will give them their [material] shape…" (Bd 19:223). Then, everyone will gather and people will see their good and bad deeds, and for three days the wicked will go to hell and suffer punishments in their physical body, while the righteous will enjoy the highest level of heaven. Thus, both the Pahlavi texts and the Talmud believe that the messiah will revive people with their physical body. However, in addition to this

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[322] Helen Spurling, "Pirqe Mashiah: A translation, commentary and introduction," (unpublished Ph.D diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), 163-164.

[323] See Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[324] See Shaul Shaked, "Eschatology in Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian Influence," in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (vol. VIII), ed. E. Yarshater (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998), 565-569. Shaked explains that "It is not quite clear whether the idea of resurrection is already expressed in the Gāθās. Yasna 30.7 and 34.14 are regarded by Lommel (pp. 232 ff.) as indicating the existence of this belief."

common idea, there is another shared theme in both Talmudic and Pahlavi texts: convincing adherents who doubt the notion of resurrection. Regarding this theme, Shaked believes that, Resurrection probably was a doctrine that was challenging for both Jews and Zoroastrians of the period.[325]

In Sanh. 91a, a *Min* (a heathen or a heretic) asks Rav Ammi, "Ye maintain that the dead will revive; but they turn to dust, and can dust come to life?" And in the *Bundahišn*, it is Zoroaster himself who asks Ohrmazd about the resurrection: "Zardušt asked of Ohrmazd, 'Whence shall they acquire the body which the wind has blown away, and the water has dragged down, and how shall resurrection occur?" (Bd 19:221). The answer to this question in both Talmud and *Bundahišn* is somewhat similar. In Sanh. 91a, Rav Ammi provides the following parable:

> This may be compared to a human king who commanded his servants to build him a great palace in a place where there was no water or earth [for making bricks]. So they went and built it. But after some time it collapsed, so he commanded them to rebuild it in a place where water and earth was to be found; but they replied, "We cannot". Thereupon he became angry with them and said, "If ye could build in a place containing no water or earth, surely ye can where there is!"

Furthermore, in the *Bundahišn* Ohrmazd explains that he fashioned his creation at the beginning of the time when there was no substance and no help from the others; this means he can do it again in the time of resurrection, and the second time it will be easier for him: "Behold, when they [creation] did not exit, I made that [which was not], how can I not recreate what already existed? For at that time I will demand the bone from the spirit of the earth, the blood from the water, the hair from the plants, and the life from the wind, as they had received at the beginning of creation" (Bd 19:222-223). One may note here the existence in both Rav Ammi and

[325] Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 32.

the *Bundahišn* of the idea that if God could fashion his creation with no substance and help in the beginning of the time, he can do it again.

A related issue is that of gathering human parts from nature during the resurrection. According to the *Bundahišn*, the body of mankind is an illustration of the material world. In Bd 13, we read that "skin is like the sky, flesh like the earth, skeleton like the mountain, veins like rivers, blood within the body like the water in the river, stomach like the sea and hair like the plants. Where the hair have grown thick like the forest, essences of the body like the metals, innate wisdom like humanity…" We can find a kind of similar idea in the Midrash as well. The Avot *de-rabbi* Nathan[326] states that "All that God created in the world, He created in man." Among numerous examples of this ideal are, "the hair of a human being corresponds to forests, the teeth to doors, the lips to walls, the fingers to nails, and the neck to a tower."[327] In Second Enoch, a similar idea is expressed:

> On the sixth day I ordered My Wisdom to make man- of seven substances, (i) His flesh from the earth; (2) his blood from the dew; (3) his eyes from the sun (4) his bones from the stones; (5) his thoughts from the swiftness of the angels, and the clouds (6) his veins and hair from the grass of the earth (7) his spirit from My spirit and from the wind.[328] (2 Enoch: XXX:8)

Therefore, God has several collaborators when the time of the resurrection comes; collaborators from nature, which he did not have when he started the creation of the world.

Still, it is obvious that the idea of resurrection was not clearly understood by the adherents of either Zoroastrianism or Judaism even by the Sasanian era.[329] Shaked believes that among Zoroastrians, "The inordinate attention paid to [resurrection], and the effort made to

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[326] The *Avot d-rabbi Nathan* is an Aggadic work of 700-900 C.E., which is usually printed with the minor tractates of the Talmud.
[327] See Ronald L. Eisenberg, *What the Rabbis Said: 250 topics from the Talmud* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 34.
[328] Robert Henry Charles, tr. and William Richard Morfill, ed., *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 39-40.
[329] In the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* people who have been doubtful of heaven and hell and the reality of the resurrection of the dead and the future body are in hell.

convince us that faith in the Resurrection is not absurd, seems to indicate that in the eyes of many people this was a subject fraught with difficulties, if not simply embarrassing."[330] He further explains that, "In Judaism too the topic of resurrection was under attack around the beginning of the current era."[331] Shaked asserts that the insertion of the concept of the resurrection into the main daily prayer of Jews, the Amida, and a section of the Mishna (Sanh. 10:1) indicates that it was not commonly acknowledged among the people.

Other common ideas can be found in both traditions concerning the notion of resurrection. For instance, both the Talmud and the *Bundahišn* contain the idea of man's body being planted in the earth like a seed, which will sprout up in many forms (or as Rabbi Meir states, will be "multi-clothed").[332]

According to the *Bundahišn*, the Resurrection will be followed by a process of purification by fire:

> Then Ariyaman Yazad burns the metal which is on mountains and in valleys, and (that melted metal) turns to a river on earth. And then (they) pass all the people through that melted metal and purify them. To righteous that seems like a river of warm milk. If one is wicked then that seems to him like melted metal… …Gōzihr the snake burns by that melted metal and the metal rushes into the hell and that filth and dirt in the middle of earth-which is hell- burns by that metal and purifies. The hole through which Ahriman rushed (to earth) will be sealed by that metal…(Bd: regarding end of the world and resurrection:19:225, 227-228)

Moreover, Shaked considers that references to final purification with fire can even be found earlier in the Avesta: "The Gāθās also make reference to the molten metal (Y. 51.9, 32.7, 30.7), which, although the context is not very clear, can be taken in the sense which developed around this notion in the Pahlavi writing, that of a mechanical judgment, whereby people have to wade through a river of molten metal, with the righteous emerging safe and sound."[333]

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[330] Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 32.
[331] Ibid.
[332] See the Babylonian Talmud, Sanh. 90b and Ketub. 111b, cf. Bd 19:222.
[333] See Shaked, "Eschatology in Zoroastrianism," 565-569.

Once more commonality that we can identify is the purification by fire in the "World to Come" in the Midrash (but not the Talmud itself). However, the Talmud does contain narratives in which hell is associated with fire.[334] Interestingly, the "river of fire" and the horrible scenes of hell that are described in Second Enoch resemble the descriptions of hell in Middle Persian texts — especially the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.[335] After purification by fire and passing through the river of molten metal, the *Bundahišn* states that the soul and body of each person will meet. Each human being (now resurrected) should then become immortal. Then, the final *Yazišn* takes place:

> Sōšāns and his companions begin the resurrection Yazišn, and they will slay the *hadhayōš* [mythical ox] for that Yazišn. From the fat of that ox and the white hōm they will prepare Anōš [the immortal beverage], and give it to all people; and all humans will become immortal up to eternity. (Bd: Regarding end of the world and resurrection:19:226)

Thus, Sōšāns himself is in charge of final resurrection by making the immortal beverage out of the ox Hadhayōš's fat and white *hōm* (Av. *haoma*, a hallucinogenic beverage used in rituals).

Sacrificing the ox Hadhayōš itself is a common eschatological motif between Pahlavi texts and the Talmud. The *Bundahišn* introduces Hadhayōš as follows:

> Regarding the *hadhayōš ox* which is also called Srisok, it [scripture?] says that in the beginning of creation it transported people from region to region, and at the resurrection they will arrange immortality out of it. In the Scripture it says [that ox] is alive in the name of that honourable man who has built a fortification around one third of this earth [to protect the ox] that will last till resurrection when it is [the ox] requisite. (Bd: Regarding the quality of that creation: 9:153)

A counterpart to Hadhayōš also exists in the Jewish tradition. According to the Talmud, "Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a banquet for the righteous from the flesh of *Leviathan*; for it is said: Companions will make a banquet of it" (B. Bat. 75a). And in the following narrative, the rabbis relate another story about

[334] See B. Bat. 74a, and 84a, Šabb. 39 a-b.

[335] See Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 741. In this book we read that the "river of fire" (Aramaic: *Di-nore*) goes out from under the Throne of Glory, and flows down upon them, and goes from one end of the world to the other.

the *Leviathan* being slaughtered by the Lord, and how it will be served in the final banquet of the God. In B. Bat. 74b, Rab Judah asserts that Leviathan was created male and female, but god castrated the male and "…killed the female preserving it in salt for the righteous in the world to come; for it is written: And he will slay the dragon that is in the sea" (B. Bat. 74 b). Moreover, Schwartz cites an interesting myth mentioning a Messiah-ox: "Others say that God will serve the Messiah-ox and messianic wine at the banquet. The Messiah-ox makes its home in Paradise, where it waits to fulfill its destiny when the Messiah comes. Then it will be slaughtered and served at the messianic banquet...." [336] In some other myths as well, some other creatures (namely the *Behemot*, *Ziz* and the Messianic ox) are said to be feasted upon in the World to Come.

The *Bundahišn* concludes its discussion of universal eschatology with a strange speculation about whether or not people are clothed in the World to Come. Though it seems like a strange idea, it appears that the author of the text included it intentionally to persuade people to give charity to the poor. At the end of Chapter 19, it states that, "It [scripture?] also says that who has performed no Yašt, and has ordered no *gētgi-xrīd* and has given no garments as charity to the needy, will be naked there; if you perform a Ohrmazd Yašt the [worship of Ohrmazd] in his name, the spirit of Gāθās will serve the purpose of clothing to him" (Bd 19:227).[337] And again, in the Talmud, the subject of people being naked or garmented in the World to Come is a matter of discussion. In one instance in the Bavli, (Sanh. 90b) Queen Cleopatra wonders about the aforementioned topic, and on another occasion, R. Hiyya b. Joseph states: "The just in the time to come will rise [apparelled] in their own clothes…" (Ketub. 111a). As it can be seen, even a

[336] Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, 508.
[337] There are two Pahlavi terms in this section regarding giving charity and doing some specific ritual for the diseased person: namely, *ahlaw-dād* and *geti-xrit*.

strange idea such as people being naked or clothed in the World to Come can be shared by the Jews and Zoroastrians of the time. The aforementioned section demonstrates that most of the main themes of Universal eschatology were shared between Middle Persian texts—mainly the *Bundahišn*—and the Talmud. The difference is that in the *Bundahišn* we have a chapter dedicated speficially to universal eschatology, whereas the Talmud does not—here, the notions are scattered throughout the text.

3.1.2 Individual Eschatology

What happens to the human soul and body after death is the subject of individual eschatological texts. This topic is very important and sensitive, and most of the religious texts that are not based on this subject often discuss it some way. In the following section, the subject of individual eschatology will be discussed briefly, mostly based on the *Bundahišn*, *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, Babylonian Talmud and Midrash.

According to Pahlavi materials, after someone dies, their soul does not leave the body right away. Rather, during the first three nights after death, the soul of a righteous person sits at the head of the body and recites the Uštavaiti Gāθās joyfully. A wicked person's soul also sits near the head, but it whines and recites Yasna 46. The demon Wizarš sits there too with his associates, trying to find an opportunity to irritate the deceased person. The *Bundahišn* describes the first three nights as follows:

> When men pass away, the soul sits near the body—where the head is—for three nights. During those [three] nights [the soul] sees much attack from the *dēv* Vizareš and its companions, and [the soul] turns the back towards the fire which is kindled there. That is why the fire is kept burning during those three nights up to day, there where its head was. And if the fire is not there, turns its [death body's] back towards the Warharān fire or towards the ever-kindling fires. During those three nights, when tearing and disintegration come to the body, it feels as uncomfortable to it [body] as to a man when they demolish his house. Those three days, the soul, sits near the body with the hope, "Maybe if the blood runs, and the wind enters the body, and I be able to return to life!" (Bd 15:200)

What is striking about the *Bundahišn's* vision of the soul and body of the dead is the lingering of the soul around the body for three nights, hoping to return to it, and feeling uncomfortable about damaging its body. On this point, the Babylonian Talmud states that, "R. Hisda said: A man's soul mourns for him [after death] seven whole [days]," [338] and "R. Isaac also said: Worms are as painful to the dead as a needle in the flesh of the living" (Šabb. 152a). Thus, Babylonian Talmudic sages believed that the soul does not depart right away, and mourns for the deceased person for seven days. Furthermore, the deceased person feels the pain of its body tearing as the soul leaves it.

These Talmudic quotes might not be adequate for comparing the two traditions regarding individual eschatology. However, more relevant materials can be discovered through apocrypha of the Old Testament and Midrash.[339] Interestingly, in the Talmud Yerushalmi, Moʿed Qaṭ. 3.5, it states: "During the three days [following death] the soul hovers in flight over the body, thinking it may be able to return to it, but when it sees that its appearance becomes discolored, it abandons it and departs."[340] This is worth further investigation in order to understand why the Talmud Yerushalmi (rather than the Bavli) incorporates this Zoroastrian notion. Was it not a Zoroastrian

[338] When Ardā-Virāz was temporarily dead, his body was guarded and protected by the Avesta reciting for seven days and nights according to AVN 2:32-36 his seven sisters and a number of priests were reciting Avesta the whole time, and were protecting him from any harm.

[339] According to Shaked, "Judaism by the end of second temple period got most of its eschatological ideas through the apocrypha of the Old Testament, the Jewish writings of the period just before the emergence of Christianity" (Shaked, "Eschatology in Zoroastrianism," online edition).

[340] Winston, "Iranian Component in the Bible," 196. I believe that the Tamud Yerushalmi had at least some affiliation with Iranian culture and worldview. Throughout history Iran's worldview spread across the region and even beyond—for instance, it is documented that there were Manichean preachers who used to travel to other lands and share their ideas and beliefs with the people they met. Many works have been published regarding Judaism's contacts with Iranian ideas and beliefs since Achaeminid era. Regarding Yerushalmi, Herman states: "While some Yerushalmi traditions have parallels in the Bavli, and apparently originated in Babylonia, there are also traditions that appear to have been composed in Palestine, and might have been authored by a circle of Amorai of Babylonian ancestry" (*A Prince Without a Kingdom*, p. 17).

notion originally? Or did some compilers of the Bavli see the resemblance and (due to their traditional animosity towards Zoroastrian priests) omit it from their materials?

The same idea is presented in the Tanhuma, Miqeiz 4 where it explains that mourners are forbidden to work during seven days following burial, but poor can start working after three days and the reason is "After three days the flesh becomes putrid, the countenance changes, and the soul pleads for itself as is said 'But his flesh grieveth for him, and his soul mourneth over him'"[341] Moreover, in the Testament of Abraham (Rec. A 20) we read that they wait three days before burying Abraham and Winston suggests that Presumably the reason that burial was delayed for three days stemmed from this Iranian notion. [342]

The second phase of individual eschatology is when the soul of the departed person disappointedly leaves the body after three days. For the righteous, the soul leaving the body is accompanied by pleasant feelings: "A maiden shape comes to receive [him] in a good shape, [wearing] white garments, of fifteen years, who is fair on all the sides, by whom the soul is gladdened" (Bd 15:251). For the wicked, however: "A terrifying maiden shape comes to receive [him]… ugly shape that rudeness is hidden within her, she is terrifying from all sides, owing to which fear and dread come to the soul" (Bd 15:252).[343] At this stage the journey to the afterlife begins:

> … that virgin guides it [the soul] to a ladder whereon there are three steps, and by that ladder, with three steps representing good thought, good words and good deeds it ascends to Garōdmān [the highest level of heavens].By the first step it reaches to the star station, by the second it reaches to the moon station, and by the third he reaches to the sun station where the Garōdmān is.

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[341] *Sefaria: A Living Library of Jewish Texts Online*, <http://www.sefaria.org>, accessed April 07, 2017.
[342] Winston, "Iranian Component in the Bible," 196. Also as Barclay states: "When the dying man sees it [Angel of Death], he shudders and opens his mouth The Angel of Death then lets it [the gall] fall into his mouth. The sick man dies, corrupts, and becomes pale. Three days the soul flies about the body, thinking to return to it, but after it sees the appearance of the face changed, it leaves it and goes away." Joseph Barclay, The Talmud (London: J. Murray, 1878), 28-29.
[343] Unlike the Hāduxt Nask, the *Bundahišn* mentions the "astral body of a cow" and "a garden" which will be shown to the departed soul before the beautiful maiden appears.

> If one has been wicked with stinginess, when that breeze affronts his soul, and the maiden arrives in that breeze, and it asks her that question. [That maiden who represents his deeds] turns into a sharp sward that is sharp all over and replies to that soul "O wicked! if thou wilt, if thou wilt not, thou shalt have to walk over this [sharp sword] with paces." (Bd 15:253-254)

The maiden's appearance thus represents the good or bad words, deeds and thoughts of the departed soul. It leads the souls of the righteous and wicked over the Činwad Bridge to be judged by the *Yazats*, such as Mihr, Srōš, and Rašn. According to the Hāduxt Nask, the maiden is accompanied by two dogs.[344] When the departed soul crosses the bridge, the bridge becomes wide and comfortable for the just, and thin and perilous for the wicked.

In several Pahlavi texts, a threefold division of realms is introduced: paradise, the middle section (*hamistagān*, for those whose virtues and sins are equal), and hell. The souls are sent to these three realms according to their values. These descriptions offer the best and more coherent description of the fate of human souls after death provided in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*.[345]

In the Talmud, however, the "Angel of Death" takes the souls. He is mentioned numerous times in the Bavli. For instance, in ʿAbod. Zar. 20b:

> It is said of the Angel of Death that he is all full of eyes. When a sick person is about to depart, he stands above his head-pillow with his sword drawn out in his hand and a drop of gall hanging on it. As the sick person beholds it, he trembles and opens his mouth [in fright]; he then drops it into his mouth. It is from this that he dies, from this that [the corpse] deteriorates, from this that his face becomes greenish?

[344] In *The Iranian Talmud* (121-123), Shai Secunda examines Hāduxt Nask and compares it with the Babylonian Talmud, Soṭa 3b.

[345] For further reference see AVN 4-9, Bd 15, and Shaked, "Eschatology in Zoroastrianism." In the testament of Abraham the angel Michael realizes that the sins and good deeds of a certain soul are equally balanced, and he therefore sets it up in the middle to expect the final judge of all (Rec. A 12; 14; see Winston, "The Iranian Component in the Bible," 195.

Scholars such as Tylor Burnett and David Winston believe that the idea of "Bridge of Gehinnom" entered the Jewish Midrash through Zoroastrianism.[346] In Yalkut Shimoni in the Book of Isaiah, the latter is mentioned. Winston asserts that:

> When the Midrash indicates that the wicked will be made to pass over the bridge of Gehinnom, which will then suddenly appear as narrow as a hair and they will fall into the abyss, this is certainly the Persian notion of the Chinvat [Činwad] bridge which appears wide and comfortable to the righteous, who are helped over it by a heavenly maiden, but for the ungodly it is so narrow and hair-sharp "like a razor's edge," that they fall helplessly into hell. [347]

After crossing the bridge, a third phase appears: entering heaven or hell. There are many sources (both Middle Persian and Jewish) that describe heaven and hell in great detail. In what follows, the tradition of visiting heaven while alive will be examined. Then, the general picture of heaven and hell will be discussed as evoked in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, the Babylonian Talmud and Jewish apocrypha.

3.2 Ascending to Heaven in Zoroastrian Sources

In the introduction of Jamasp Asana's edition of the Ardā-Virāz Nāmag (The Pahlavi book in which pious Virāz ascends to heaven and hell while alive), Katayun Mazdapour asserts that the notion of ascending to heaven while alive—and bringing news from the other world to people of the material world—has some connection to Iranian mythology.[348] For instance, in Dk 7, when Zoroaster asks Guštāsp to convert to the Mazdyasna (Zoroastrian) religion, Guštāsp does not show any interest until the prophet takes him to the other world and shows him his place in

[346] Edward B. Tylor, *Researches Into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (New York: H. Holt, 1878), 358-359. Tylor introduces several traditions in which the notion of the "bridge of the dead" is present, for instance, Scandinavian mythology, Hinduism, Islam etc.
[347] Winston, "Iranian Component in the Bible," 211-212.
[348] For more on the notion of ascending to heaven while alive, see Mazdapour's introduction too Dastur Kaikhusru Jamaspji Asana and Katayun Mazdapour, eds., *Arda Viraf Nameh* (Tehran: Toos, 1381[2002]).

heaven.[349] Another example is Kartir's inscription in *Sar Mašhad*, which was written around 290 C.E. In Kartir's inscriptions in *Naqš-e Rostam* and *Naqš- e Rajab*, a sort of revelation is mentioned which greatly resembles *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, in term of ascending to heaven while alive in order to prove the rightness of your religious belief. Shaked believes that such a genre has a long history in Iran, and he refers to Oracles of Hystaspes as evidence for this idea.[350]

In the medieval Zoroastrian apocalyptical text Zand i Wahman Yasn, Zoroaster himself ascends to heaven.

> And He [Ohrmazd] hold Zardušt's hand… And he gave the wisdom of omniscience to Zardušt's hand in the form of water, and said to him: "Drink up". And Zardušt drank it, and omniscience was merged with Zardušt… and on the seventh day and night [Ohrmazd] took back the omniscience from Zardušt, Zardušt thought that [I] saw a good Ohrmazd-created dream, and I am not awake yet.[351]

Here, Zoroaster asks Ohrmazd for immortality, but instead, Ohrmazd bestows him the wisdom of all knowledge for seven days. During this period, he can see The Other World and the future of Iran. [352] Just like Ardā-Virāz, Zoroaster returns to the material life after seven days and nights.[353] Evidently, this concept is expressed in other cultures as well. For instance, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is one of the most famous examples of this sort. However, it is believed to be influenced by Jewish and Arabic sources, not the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* directly.

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[349] "Adurfarrōbay Farroxzādān, Denkard 7," in *Sacred Books of the East*, trans. Edward W. West, vol. 5 (Oxford University Press, 1897), part 4: 83-86.
[350] Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 31.
[351] In my translation I have consulted Cereti's edition of The Zand i Wahman Yasn. See: Carlo G. Cereti, *The Zand i Wahman Yasn; A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Roma: Italian Institutie for the Middle and Far East, 1995), Chapter 3:6, 134.
[352] Bolken believes this narrative resembles a section in the Testament of Abraham: "In the Testament of Abraham, Abraham at first refuses to give his soul to the angel Michael, but finally yields and is allowed to see the whole world created by one word before his death (Rec. A 9)."
[353] Martin West indicates that the relief over Darius' tomb shows the path of his ascention in accordance with Dāmdād Nask of the Avesta, which declares: "When they sever the consciousness of men it goes out to the nearest fire, then out to the stars, then out to the moon, and then out to the sun." However, this ascent happens after Darius' death, since it is carved on his tomb ("Darius' Ascent to Paradise," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 45 (2002): 51-57).

3.3 The Heavenly Journeys in Jewish Sources

In Jewish materials, the notion of ascending to the other world is very common. There are numerous books in which prophets and sages describe their heavenly journeys, or visions of the other world. In Tractate Der. Er. Zuṭ[354] Chapter 1, we read:

> Nine entered the Garden of Eden when they were still alive, and they are: Enoch (Chanoch) the son of Jared, Elijah Messiah, Eliezer the bondsman of Abraham, Hirom the king of Zor, Ebed-melech the Cushi, and Jabetz the son of R. Jehudah the Prince, Bothiah the daughter of Pharaoh and Serech the daughter of Ascher, and, according to others, also R. Jehoshua b. Levi.

R. Yehoshua ben Levi is one of the sages whose heavenly journeys are gathered in two books named the Ma'aseh de Rabbi Yehoshua and Masseket Gan Eden we Gehinom.[355] Rabbi Yehoshua is also famous in the Talmud for his conversations with the Angel of Death. For instance, in Ber. 51 a: "R. Joshua b. Levi says: Three things were told me by the Angel of Death…"

However, the most famous Talmudic narrative regarding ascension to heaven while alive is related in Ḥag. 14b:

> Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the 'Garden',[356] namely, Ben 'Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, water, water! For it is said: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes. Ben 'Azzai cast a look and died…. Ben Zoma looked and became demented…. Aher mutilated the shoots. R. Akiba departed unhurt.[357]

Enoch is another figure who visited heaven and hell while still alive. The Book of the Secrets of Enoch, which describes heaven and hell, resembles the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* in many respects. One late Jewish Midrash, called The Ascension of Moses, is constructed very much like the Ardā

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[354] The fact that dating of this text is problematic should be acknowledged.

[355] Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi is an Amora who lived in the Land of Israel in the first half of the third century. Although he is a Palestinian Amora, his narrations regarding heaven and hell more or less resemble the Zoroastrian narrations. Indeed, the role of Christian narrations that share the same themes should also be borne in mind in these kinds of comparisons.

[356] Originally the Persian word *pardes* is used, although *Gan Eden* is more common in the Talmud.

[357] There are disagreements between scholars and interpreters regarding this Aggadah. Rashi believes that the four ascended to heaven, while others believe that *pardes* here means an actual garden. Others believe it was only a vision, not an actual act of ascending.

Virāz Nāmag as well. It exists in several different Hebrew versions, as well as a Judaeo-Persian one. [358] Additionally, there are pseudoepigraphical texts such as The Ascension of Isaiah, The Testament of Abraham, and others, which share the same genre.

3.4 Heaven and Hell According to the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* and the Talmudic Narrations

Although the first section of this chapter acknowledges that many of the eschatological themes shared between these two traditions are likely to have originated in Iranian thought, here it will be argued that the shared motif between the two texts under investigation—that punishments in hell are suited to the crime in both the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* (AVN) and tractate Giṭ. 56b-57a—was originally Jewish. While there are also Christian texts that share the same theme, my hypothesis is that the Jewish narrative has motivated the Christian texts as well.

Since descriptions of heaven and hell were provided through the supernatural visions of sages, some of the sources in which these visions and heavenly journeys were recorded have been already introduced in the previous section. What follows compares Ardā-Virāz's description of heaven and hell with some Talmudic tractates, such as Giṭ. 56b-57a.

The Middle Persian *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, which runs to about 8,800 words, is a description of heaven and hell as seen by the priest Virāz in a seven-day's vision incited by using narcotics. The text was first edited with an English translation, by Dastur Hoshang and Martin Haug in 1872, and a French translation was published in 1887; later translations include one in English by Fereydun Vahman and another in French by Philippe Gignoux. In her *Mythological History of Iran,* Zhāleh Āmūzgar suggests that Ardā-Virāz is probably an ancient character who was

[358] Amnon Netzer has edited and published the Judaeo-Persian Ascension of Moses, "A Midrash on the ascension of Moses in Judeo-Persian" in *Irano-Judaica II*, eds. Amnon Netzer and Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1990), 105-143.

attributed to the Sasanian period at a later time. She believes that the origins of this apocalyptic narrative must be very ancient despite the fact that its extant version probably dates to the Sasanian period.[359] The AVN's description of heaven, being very concise, will be examined only briefly, while the accounts pertaining to hell will be studied in more detail.

3.4.1 Heaven in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* and the Talmud

Ardā-Virāatz's brief and somewhat cursory description of heaven depicts a place where every person who has perfectly carried out his or her duties in the material word enjoys a perfect life. Heaven is a place in which souls can visit great religious leaders, heroes, *Yazata*s, and even Ahura Mazdā himself. It is a place of light and harmony, full of golden and silver thrones, carpets and clothes ornamented with precious stones, etc. In Ardā-Virāz's heaven, people who were not practicing rituals and prayers, but performed other good deeds, still have a promised place.

During the course of his journey to heaven besides visiting Amahraspandān (Archangels) and prominent religious figures such as Zardušt, Wištāsp, Jāmāsp etc. Ardā-Virāez visits different classes of spirits such as the "souls of those who did not perform Yašts, and did not chant Gāhān… but did other sorts of good deeds, souls of good kings, liberals, nobles, religious people, those who performed Yašt and recited Gāhān, thruthfuls, righteous women who praised the good creation of god and respected their husband or guardian… souls of warriors and heroes, farmers, artisans, shepherds, cultivators, teachers etc." (AVN 7-15).[360] These descriptions

[359] Zhāleh Āmūzgar, Tarikh Asātiri-ye Iran, *Mythological History of Iran* (Tehran: SAMT publications,1384 [2006]), 30.

[360] I have consulted Gignoux's edition for translation of *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* (Philippe Gignoux, *Le Livre d'Ardā Vīrāz, Transliteration, transcription et traduction du texte Pehlevi, Nouvelle édition, revue et augmentee*, tr. Jaleh Amouzegar, Téhéran: Institute Francais de recherché en Iran et Editions Mo'in, 1382 [2004]).

comprise the bulk of Ardā-Virāz's reflections on heaven. Interestingly, the Talmud does not provide considerable information concerning heaven either.

There are three expressions used to describe heaven in the Talmud: *Gan Eden*, *Olam Ha Ba* and *Pardes*. Generally, *Olam Ha B*a (The World to Come) refers to the world after resurrection, where everyone enjoys an eternally joyful life in the material world. However, sometimes in the Talmud, the expression may be referencing heaven. The Persian expression, *Pardes,* is used just once in the Talmud, Ḥag. 14b, which was discussed previously. Finally, *Gan Eden* (Garden of Eden) is the garden in which Adam and Eve resided before the fall. According to the Talmud, the Garden of Eden was created before the world (Ned. 39b). It is a garden full of roses (B. Bat. 84a), its aroma is very strong (B. Bat. 75a), and there are canopies ornamented with precious stones and gold (B. Bat. 75a) etc. According to R. Joseph, people are positioned in these canopies according to their merits:

> R. Joseph the son of R. Joshua b. Levi, became ill and fell into a trance. (Or according to some he actually died) When he recovered, his father asked him, "What did you see?" "I saw a topsy-turvy world," he replied, "the upper [class] underneath and the lower on top" he replied: "My son," he observed, "you saw a clear world. And how are we [Torah scholars] there?" "Just as we are here, so are we there. And I heard them saying, 'Happy is he who comes hither with his learning in his hand'. And I also heard them saying, 'Those martyred by the State [Roman government], no man can stand within their barrier'…" (Pesaḥ. 50a)

R. Joseph's narrative might imply that he, just like Ardā-Virāz, saw different classes of spirits in the heaven namely upper class (rich, monarchs), lower class (probably workers generally; Agriculturalists, artisans, shepherds), Torah scholars and martyrs (probably whom fought the Roman state). R. Joseph's classification of people is actually the traditional grouping of people in Iranian institution, hence Ardā-Virāz also visits the aforementioned classes of spirits.

R. Joseph's narrative is comparable to a paragraph in Zand i Wahman Yasn, in which Ahura Mazdā tells Zoroaster about the placement in the other world of people who are highly ranked in the material world:

> … And I tell you this O Zardušt: "That whoever in that time goes after body (material world) can not save [his] soul, since his body is fleshy, his soul is frail in the hell. Whoever goes after soul, his body [is] frail in the material world, [he is] destitute and poor, and his soul is stout in heaven" (ZWY 4:68).[361]

Thus R. Joseph's "topsy-turvy world" in which "the upper [class] underneath and the lower on top" is shared by the author of Zand-i Wahman Yasn as well. Evidently, the amount of information that both texts provide regarding heaven is very minute in comparison to hell, which will be examined in the following section.

3.4.2 Hell in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* and the Talmud

Prior to arriving in hell, Ardā-Virāz sees a river: "I saw a river, fearful and hard to cross, in which were many souls and frawahrs (guardian angels), some of them could not cross, some of them crossed with difficaulty, and some crossed easily" (AVN 16). And his companion angels explained: "This River is made of many tears of people who shed tears when some one dies, and do lament, mourn and cry…" (AVN 16). Afterwards, Ardā-Virāz returns to the *Činwad* Bridge, and eventually begins his journey into hell. The inverse of heaven, hell is described in detail by Ardā-Virāz. Not only the physical characteristics are described, but also a detailed list of sins and their associated punishments is provided. Two angels named *Srōš* and *Ādur* accompany Ardā-Virāz on his visit to hell. At first, hell appears to him "like a pit, that a thousand cubits[362] would not reach its bottom" (AVN 54). His journey in hell begins thus:

> And then pious Sroš and Ādur the Yazad, took hold of my hand, so that I precede unhurt. In that manner I saw heat and cold and draught and hunger that I had never seen nor heard of in the world… and I saw the frightful hell's mouth that was like the most frightful pit… and regarding darkness, it was so that darkness was graspable, and regarding stink, it was so that when the breeze reached someone's nose they would collapse and tremble and fall… and everyone thinks: 'I am alone". And when three days and night passes [they] say that: "nine thousand years is completed and I am not released". In every place the minimum

[361] Cereti, *The Zand i Wahman Yasn,* 139.
[362] Gignoux read this word as "*vāz*" meaning "cubit," however the word can also be read as "*vāj*," which allows for Fereydoun Vahman's translation as "call or voice." See Fereydun Vahman, *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag: The Iranian 'Divine Commedia,'* (London: Curzon Press, 1986).

> amount of noxious creatures (*xrafstras*) is as high as a mountain, and [they] tear and maul the souls of wicked so that it is unworthy of a dog [a dog would not eat that perished body]. (AVN 18)

Ardā-Virāz also describes meeting Ahriman on his journey. "Then I saw the Gannāg Mēnōg (Ahriman) who is full of death, the world-destroyer, whose religion is evil (duš-dēn), who mocked the wicked in the hell and said: 'Why are you eating Ohrmazd's bread and work for me? And [why] don't you think of your creator and do as I wish you to do!' In this manner [he] speaks to the wicked very mockingly" (AVN 100). Thus, we learn from these accounts that on the way to hell, there is a river of tears, and that hell itself is both cold and hot, has greedy jaws, and is like a pit. The darkness is also very intense, disgusting odors are prominent, and Ahriman, The World Destroyer, resides there. Moreover, in hell, Ardā-Virāz hears "… Ahriman and dews (devils) and druzes (demons) and many other souls of the wicked from that place [from there] were groaning and crying." (AVN 53). This general depiction of hell is similar to how it is portrayed in the Talmud.

3.4.5 The Jaws of the Dark Hell are like a Pit: "Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure…"[363]

The Talmudic hell has a mouth like a pit. Regarding this mouth, the Talmud states that "…Moses said thus: If a mouth has already been created for it [sc. Gehenna], 'tis well; if not, let the Lord create one, He said thus: If the mouth is not near to this spot, let it draw near" (Ned. 39b). In Šabb. 33a, hell is also described as a deep pit: "Rabbah b. Shila said in R. Hisda's name: He who puts his mouth to folly, Gehenna is made deep for him, as it is said, A deep pit is for the mouth [that speaketh] perversity". Moreover, according to R. Joshua b. Levi, Gehenna has seven names, among which "pit", "destruction", and "Tumultuous Pit" are used in reference to the

[363] Sanh. 111a.

Jewish hell (Eiruvin 19a). In addition, there is a Prince of Gehenna who has teeth which gnash against the wicked (Sanh. 52a). Gehenna is always hungry (Šabb. 104a), and cries, "Give me the heretics and the sinful [Roman] power" ('ʿAbod. Zar. 17a). Furthermore, Gehenna is described as being like the night. In the Bavli, it states that, "every man has his sword upon his flank because of the dread in the night. [The dread of Gehenna, which is likened unto night]" (Sanh. 7b).

3.5 How Punishment Fits the Crime in the Talmud and the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*

After Ardā-Virāz provides a general picture of hell, he explains how each sin is punished. For instance, the punishment for a man who "…in the world did not keep right measure, nor bucket nor stone weight[364] and nor unit. [And] mixed water with wine and mixed dust with grain, and sold them to the people at a high price" is to be forced to everlastingly measure dust and ashes, with a bushel and gallon, while the Guardians of Hell make him to eat them. (AVN 27). Furthermore, the punishment for a man who killed a pious man is to be killed a torturous and cruel death, eternally (AVN 21). In general, as it will be observed in the upcoming discussion, the repetition of a certain punishment eternally is a common theme in both the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* and the Talmud.

In what follows, tractate Giṭ. 56b-57a will be examined in relation to the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*. This tractate narrates a supernatural incident concerning the son of Titus' nephew, who decides to convert to Judaism. In general, the Talmud's depiction of Titus is very negative, since Vespasian and Titus showed cruelty toward the Israelites when suppressing their revolt. Titus is also the destroyer of the Jerusalem temple. Giṭ. 56b states that "Vespasian sent Titus who said, where is their God, the rock in whom they trusted? This was the wicked Titus who blasphemed

[364] In Pahlavi "sang", meaning "stone," is used as a unit of weight.

and insulted Heaven. What did he do? He took a harlot by the hand and entered the Holy of Holies and spread out a scroll of the Law and committed a sin on it…" (Giṭ. 56b).

On the other hand, the Talmud says Onkelos (the son of Titus' nephew, Kolonikos) wished to convert to Judaism. He magically raised Titus, Balaam and the Sinners of Israel (or in some manuscripts, Jesus) from the dead, and asked their opinions about the people of Israel and converting to Judaism:

אונקלוס בר קלוניקוס בר אחתיה דטיטוס הוה בעי לאיגיורי אזל אסקיה לטיטוס בנגידא אמר ליה מאן חשיב בההוא עלמא אמר ליה ישראל מהו לאידבוקי בהו אמר ליה מילייהו נפישין ולא מצית לקיומינהו זיל איגרי בהו בההוא עלמא והוית רישא דכתיב (איכה א, ה) היו צריה לראש וגו' כל המיצר לישראל נעשה ראש אמר ליה דיניה דההוא גברא במאי א"ל.

במאי דפסיק אנפשיה כל יומא מכנשי ליה לקיטמיה ודייני ליה וקלו ליה ומבדרו אשב ימי.

אזל אסקיה לבלעם בנגידא אמר ליה מאן חשיב בההוא עלמא א"ל ישראל מהו לאידבוקי בהו א"ל (דברים כג, ז) לא תדרוש שלומם וטובתם כל הימים א"ל דיניה דההוא גברא במאי א"ל בשכבת זרע רותחת.

אזל אסקיה [ליש"ו] בנגידא (לפושעי ישראל) א"ל מאן חשיב בההוא עלמא א"ל ישראל מהו לאדבוקי בהו א"ל טובתם דרוש רעתם לא תדרוש כל הנוגע בהן כאילו נוגע בבבת עינו.

א"ל דיניה דההוא גברא במאי א"ל בצואה רותחת דאמר מר כל המלעיג על דברי חכמים נידון בצואה רותחת תא חזי מה בין פושעי ישראל לנביאי אומות העולם עובדי ע"ז.

> Onkelos son of Kolonikos was the son of Titus's sister. He had a mind to convert himself to Judaism. He went and raised Titus from the dead by magical arts, and asked him; "Who is most in repute in the [other] world?" He replied: "Israel." "What then," he said, "about joining them?" He said: "Their observances are burdensome and you will not be able to carry them out. Go and attack them in that world and you will be at the top as it is written, her adversaries are become the head etc.; whoever harasses Israel becomes head." He asked him: "What is your punishment [in the other world]?" He replied: "What I decreed for myself. Every day my ashes are collected and sentence is passed on me and I am burnt and my ashes are scattered over the seven seas."

> He [Onkelos] then went and raised Balaam by incantations. He asked him: "Who is in repute in the other world?" He replied: "Israel." "What then," he said, "about joining them?" He replied: "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever." He then asked: "What is your punishment?" He replied: "With boiling hot semen." (Because he enticed Israel to go astray aftexr the daughters of Moab. V. Sanh. 106a)
>
> He then went and raised by incantations the sinners of Israel (or Jesus) He asked them: "Who is in repute in the other world?" They replied: "Israel." "What about joining them?" They replied: "Seek their welfare, seek not their harm. Whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye." He said: "What is your punishment?" They replied: "With boiling hot excrement, since a Master has said: 'Whoever mocks at the words of the Sages is punished with boiling hot excrement' (Talmud Giṭ. 56b-57a).

In the Babylonian Talmud, the punishments of Titus, Balaam and the Sinners of Israel's are somehow suited to their sins. The characteristics of these punishments resemble those described in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* as well. In the narrative, the sins highlighted are the destruction of the temple, killing Israelites (Titus), enticing people to go after women of the city of Moab (Balaam), and mocking the words of the sages (sinners of Israel/ Jesus). Furthermore, the punishments are eternal burning and turning to ashes, being boiled in hot semen, and boiling in hot excrement.[365] Considering these sins and punishments in the Bavli, it is sensible to examine some cases in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag.*

In the first case, for those who attack and murder Israelites, a recurring and violent death is specified. This is similar to the murderer in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* whose punishment is a recurring and torturous death (Chapter 21). Furthermore, Ardā-Virāz expresses that having sexual affairs (Balaam's case) is one of the sins that results in this form of punishment. Additionally, punishments such as being boiled in a cauldron, and being accosted with excrement or semen, are very common punishments in *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*. The following section of the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* discusses the sin of adultery:

[365] There is a curse in Pesaḥ. 110a which is composed based on the quality of different kinds of punishments in hell, as is mentioned in Giṭ. 56b-57a: "May boiling excrement in a sieve be forced into your mouth, (you) witches! May your head go bald and carry off your crumbs; your spices be scattered, and the wind carry off the new saffron in your hands, witches!"

> And I saw the soul of a man whose body was in a brazen pot and [they] were cooking it. His right foot was outside of the pot I asked, what sin this body has committed. Srōš the pius and Ādur Yazad said: "that this is the soul of that wicked man who in his life[366] due to lasciviousness and in a bad manner went to the married women very much. And his whole body became sinful and with his right foot he used to smite, kill and massacre frog[s], and ant[s], snake[s] and scorpion[s] and other noxious creatures. (AVN 60)

The man who copulates with married women in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* is being boiled, however not in hot semen, like what Bavli states regarding Balaam.

Yet, there are other cases in which semen is mentioned for the punishments given. The following section discusses the punishment for men who seduced other's wives or mistresses:

> And then I saw the soul of a man that was hanging inverted from a gallows and was having sexual intercourse. And they put semen in his mouth and ear and nose… This is the soul of that wicked man who did have improper sexual activity [adultery according to Āmūzgar] and deceived and enchanted other wives. (AVN 88)

As it can be seen, the text tries to create horrible scenes emphasizing on the word semen, when it comes to unlawful sexual relations, just like what we saw in Giṭ. 56b-57a. Furthermore, the following is the punishment for women who betray their husbands:

> And I saw the soul of a woman that they dashed inverted and [something] like an iron hedgehog from which thorn has grown was introduced to her body and came out. And semen of demons and druz[es] and corruption and fetidness as much as the length of a finger, was put into [their] mouth and nose. (AVN 70)

And again, a horrifying scene is described in which we see an emphasis on the expression "semen of demons and demonesses" when it comes to adultery.

The following chapter demonstrates that people who polluted the bath[367] were punished by means of something which is known as a main source of pollution namely excrement:

> And I saw the soul of a man who [they made him] to eat excrement, filth and dirt. And demons bashed him with stone and clod… This is the soul of those wicked men who went much to bathhouse and contaminated the water and fire, and earth with dirt and filth, and they went in [the bathhouse] virtuous and came out wicked (AVN 41).

Ardā-Virāz narrates that the punishment for those who did not keep just measures is "… and blood, filth and brain of people was put into their mouth and nose, and they were crying we keep

[366] Gignoux reads *pad zindagan*, which he translates as "among the living." I agree with the reading, but translate it as "while *he was* living," or "in his lifetime."
[367] The text refers to the rules and regulations of using public baths and water.

right measures." (AVN 80). Additionally, Ardā-Virāz says that the man and woman who ate *Nasa* (dead matter, pollution), and killed the sacred animals of Ohrmazd, are punished by eating their own excreta (AVN 98).

Similarly horrific punishments are found in the Talmud, for example in a passage on spies:

> R. Shim'on (Reish) b. Laqish said: "They died an unnatural death." R. Ḥanina b. Pappa said [that] R. Shila of Kefar Tamarta expounded: "This teaches us that their tongue was elongated, and fell to their navel, and there were worms issuing from it and entering their navel and from their navel and entering their tongue." R. Naḥman b. Yitzḥaq said: "They died of croup."

Secunda notes that R. Shila's strange depiction of the spies' punishment for slander, which is "elongated tongues" and "penetrating worms", seems to come out of nowhere. After he introduces the Jewish narrative's parallel from the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, however,[368] it becomes clear that R. Shila's description matches to what Ardā-Virāz had to say regarding the punishments for slander and lying. [369]

3.6 Conclusion

There exist Apocrypha related to Rabbi Yehoshua, who is famous for his conversations with the Angel of Death, and his heavenly journey in the Talmud. For example, on a journey Rabbi Yehoshua meets Elijah and Elijah asks him whether he wishes to visit hell: "Is it your desire that I place you upon the gate of Gehinnom?" I said to him: "Yes!" What Rabbi Yehoshua sees in hell is as follows:

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[368] In the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, the soul of "that wicked man who in this world was slanderous and made people fight against each other" is suffering as follows: "[his] tongue was drawn out from his mouth and the noxious creatures (*xrafstarān*) were chewing [it]" (AWN, 29:1-4). And in another chapter, the soul of a man "whose tongue was being gnawed by worms" had "told many lies and falsehoods, and from it came much harm and damage to creatures" (AWN, 33:1-4).

[369] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 118-121.

> … People who are hung by their noses, and people who are hung by their hands, people who are hung by their tongues and people who are hung by their feet. He showed me women who are hung by their breasts, and he showed me people who are hung by their eyes. He showed me people that are forced to eat their (own) flesh, and people that are forced to eat the coals of broom, and people sitting alive while worms eat them…people who are forced to eat fine sand…[370]

Nearly all of the punishments Rabbi Yehoshua visualizes here can be found in the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*. Overall people being punished on the limbs by which the crime was committed is a common theme of *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* and the Jewish Apocryphal texts. And as is well-known, there is a series of later Christian Apocalypses (such as the Apocalypse of Peter) in which the main theme resembles what we saw in the Talmud, *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* and Jewish Apocrypha. In particular, hell-torments are suited to the sin of the sufferer.[371] Overall, it is believed that Christian Apocalypses were influenced by Jewish Apocrypha.

This chapter's aim has been to show the resemblances the Babylonian Talmud and Middle Persian texts (mainly the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*) share concerning the hereafter and specifically—hell. There are ancient traces of similar motifs regarding the hereafter and heavenly visions in Iranian and Jewish materials. Hence, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the dates of these materials and their chronology. The only fact that is indisputable is the lateness of the Christian materials in comparison with Zoroastrian and Jewish texts.[372] However, it should be borne in mind that there is very little in the Avesta that runs parallel to what the Middle

[370] Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 740.
[371] One significant example of the Christian Apocalypses in which this theme is present is a Latin document from an eighth-century manuscript entitled "The Epistle of Titus, The Disciple of Paul." The following is a section of the latter: The prophet Helias bears witness that he saw Some suffer hanging . . . by their tongues, some by their eyes, others hang head downward; women will be tormented by their breasts, and youths hanging by their hands; certain maidens are burned upon a gridiron and some souls are fixed (? pierced) with perpetual pain. Now by these divers torments is shown the act of every one. . . They that hang by the tongues are blasphemers and also false witnesses… women are commanded to be tormented in their breasts, these are they which gave their bodies unto men in lasciviousness…" James Montague Rhodes ed. and trans., *Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Their Titles and Fragments* (1920) reprint, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).
[372] It should be borne in mind that most of the Pahlavi manuscripts that exist today are from the 9th century onwards.

Persian texts describe of the hereafter, heaven and hell. Moreover, the dating of Pahlavi manuscripts in existence today are very disputable. As Secunda cautions:

> Some scholars assume that the text [Ardā-VirāWz Nāmag] was composed at earliest in late Sasanian times, and perhaps even postdates the Muslim conquest of Iran. In light of the second- and third-century flourishing of a related genre in some Christian texts, there are some scholars who have suggested that Ardā Wirāz nāmag actually represents a derivative work indebted to Judeo Christian literature.[373]

Although concepts such as the hereafter, resurrection, heaven, hell and ascending to heavens are very ancient in Iran, we can agree with the idea that the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* as such is indebted to Judeo Christian literature, and was likely created in an environment in which such a genre was already flourishing. However, as Secunda correctly notes, the author of the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* created an *Iranian* version of this literature which is itself based on older Iranian ideas regarding heaven and hell. According to Secunda:

> Ardā Wirāz Nāmag probably constitutes a reformulation of more ancient Iranian traditions. The prioritization of its sins and punishments reflects a classically Iranian worldview, so for example there is a predominance of worms, reptiles, and other so-called noxious creatures (*xrafstarān*) which in Zoroastrianism are not merely nuances but comprise the army of the Evil Force, Ahriman.[374]

Considering that most of what the Talmud relates regarding heaven, hell and heavenly visions happens in Palestine, and also that the main characters in these narratives are the Palestinian sages, it is perhaps fair to conclude that for certain Zoroastrian (and also Christian) priests in the Sasanian era, this Talmudic narrative (Giṭ. 56b-57a)—which Secunda does not address—served as a model for composing books about sages who make heavenly journeys and observe how punishments suit certain crimes. On the other hand, a weaker argument could also accrue here: since the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* is a whole book written in accordance with an established apocalyptic genre, and since Talmudic narrations regarding The World to Come

[373] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 118.
[374] Ibid.

seem to have been influenced by the Pahlavi accounts, it might make sense to argue that the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag* inspired the short anecdote of Onkelos Son of Kolonikos.

Conclusion

In the present work we have analyzed the relationship between Talmudic narratives and related narratives in Persian literature that have not previously been worked on by Irano-Talmudica scholars in depth.[375] In particular I have compared the narratives of Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān and Herod, Solomon and Jamšīd, Moses and Garšāsp and some auxiliary narratives. Since Talmudic and Middle Persian sources are ancient, voluminous and complex, and, furthermore, do not explicitly acknowledge when and where specific ideas have been borrowed, the first step for Irano-Talmudica scholars is simply to identify similarities within the narratives. The second step is to demonstrate that important insights can be inferred from these similarities, using a comparative approach.

In the first chapter I showed how historical kernels in Talmudic narratives can allow us to infer that Babylonian sages indeed made use of motifs and elements from well-known Persian narratives to relate their own stories. I argued that it is possible to assume that the redactors of the Bavli had a tendency to fit the facts of their story into pre-existing patterns, which, in the case examined here, dealt with the legendary Kārnāmag ī Ardaxser ī Pābagān. Moreover, as an Iranist it was important for me to try and discern how the Jews of Sasanian Iran perceived a Sasanian king such as Ardaxšēr, whose name does not appear in the Bavli.

In the first chapter, perhaps what is most significant is the insight that rabbis disliked both the early Sasanian (Ardaxšēr's era) and Herodian dynasties, and that their partiality towards the Parthian and Hasmonean dynasties was instrumental in constructing their version of the Herod story. In other words, the creation of the Herod narrative clearly demonstrates the rabbis'

[375] As mentioned in chapter one, the Herod story is examined in relation with Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān in an article by Geoffrey Rubenstein.

negative impression of Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān, since had they thought of Ardaxšēr as a legitimate king (the way KAP depicts him), they would not have used his story to depict Herod's illegitimacy. This ultimately tells us that Jewish sages saw Herod and Ardaxšēr as two illegitimate kings who destroyed previously-favored dynasties in both Iran and Palestine.

Another important insight gained from this comparison deals with sources. The Herod narrative contains details that are absent from the Kārnāmag ī Ardaxser ī Pābagān but present in other Persian sources, such as Ṭabarī, which strongly suggests that Babylonian sages used a variety of sources, some of which are not presently available. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that the Šāh-Nāma is a fruitful source for Irano-Talmudica Studies and can contribute to the field in a number of ways. Despite the fact that it is a newer source compared to our Pahlavi texts, it was produced and compiled based on Middle Persian materials, and should, therefore, be considered as a useful source for dealing with the history of the Sasanian dynasty.

In the second chapter we shift our focus to mythological characters and heroes. Here we show—over and above the specific insights gained from the comparison of these Persian and Talmudic myths—that classical Persian literature (poems and prose) are important sources for Irano-Talmudica Studies. We accomplish this by demonstrating that it is possible to begin to trace the longstanding tradition of narrative transmission between the Avesta (and later Middle Persian texts), Talmudic narratives, Quranic *tafsīr* and classical Persian literature. In other words, our main goal in this chapter was to depict how Babylonian Jewish sages, who were familiar with Iran's history and literature, used this knowledge to create transformed versions of well-known mythical and heroic figures, and, furthermore, show that these composers of the Bavli played a significant role in the long and complicated transformation process that occurred from the Avesta to classical Persian literature.

In the third chapter we shift our focus from narratives dealing with historical or mythical characters to narratives dealing with religious issues and beliefs, especially ones pertaining to the hereafter, which is a controversial issue in both Iranian and Jewish holy books. The primary aim of this chapter was thus to highlight the resemblances the Babylonian Talmud and Middle Persian texts (mainly the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*) share concerning the hereafter, particularly with regard to hell.

While our comparison clearly demonstrates that there are similar motifs regarding the hereafter and heavenly visions in Iranian and Jewish materials, we aimed to show how difficult and controversial it can be to decide which tradition borrowed from the other.

This is a genre shared by Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, so even if we maintain that, in general, notions pertaining to the hereafter, resurrection, etc., were originally Iranian, we still cannot be sure that the specific genre of certain religious texts—such as the *Ardā-Virāz Nāmag*, Gittin and a number of Christian Apocrypha—that resemble one another was originally Iranian.

As mentioned in the Introduction, we were not concerned with "proving" whether or not Babylonian rabbis were influenced by the Iranian world. In this work the influence of Iranian religion and culture is taken as a given, and our analysis clearly suggests that this is indeed the case: Babylonian rabbis were profoundly influenced by the surrounding Iranian culture. However, this idea is still opposed (to a certain extent) by some Talmudists, who believe that reading and interpreting the two Talmuds, Babylonian and Palestianian, provides information *only* about Jewish history—while conceding, paradoxically and inconsistently, that reading the Talmud in its *Graeco-Roman* context *does* provide useful background! Still, the collective work of recent Irano-Talmudica scholars—including Yaakov Elman, Shai Secunda, Jason Mokhtarian, Geofrey Herman, Yishai Kiel, and others—has provided such a strong case for Irano-Talmudica

Studies that there is no longer a need to prove that the Iranian world influenced the Jewish sages (and even the Jewish general population of the time).

Thus, our goal in this dissertation has been to explore how, in what areas, and to what extent this influence occurred. It should be borne in mind that when Irano-Talmudica scholars talk about an Iranian culture and worldview, or Sasanian Babylonia, they refer to a collection of ethnic and religious groups which resided in the region. With this fact in mind, Irano-Talmudica scholars try to cautiously pick up what is originally Iranian as first hand material for studying Talmud in its Iranian context. This issue—which we have highlighted in the present study—is very challenging, since proving the originality of a notion or idea in an ancient multicultural land requires overcoming many problems that, in some cases due to poor source material, is impossible.

As noted in our overview of the existing secondary literature, to date the contributions of Iranists to the field of Irano-Talmudica studies has been lacking, especially from Iranists in Iran. While our review does highlight the work of some prominent Western Iranists who have broached the issue, these contributions have so far barely begun to scratch the surface. As an Iranist who has familiarized herself with the Talmud, I do believe—and argue in this work—that the Babylonian Talmud (and in some cases even the Yerushalmi) can be a rich source for scholars of Iranian Studies, especially for scholars specializing in the Sasanian era. In fact, I would even go so far as to argue that every page of the Talmud can be a potential source for their work, and that it would be a valuable exercise for Iranists to divide Talmudic narratives into groups that specifically respond to particular issues within Iranian studies.

The fact that Talmudic narratives can be grouped into such categories—for example anecdotes concerning the Sasanian court, anecdotes concerning the Zoroastrian priests, and

anecdotes concerning the lay people of Iran or specific characters such as the Ablat[376]—should demonstrate to Iranists how full the Talmud is of narratives that connect with Iranian culture in a variety of ways. In our view, this is an area where Irano-Talmudica scholars, especially Iranists, should be challenging themselves. For instance, when the rabbis talk about *Minim* (heretics) and *Shete Reshuyot*[377] (the two powers) might they be referring to a specific Jewish group that was influenced by Iranian dualism? Or, where the Biblical characters have a different and sometimes extraordinary appearances in the Bavli (as we demonstrate in chapter two), is there an Iranian coloring to the narrative?

Talmudic characterizations of the rabbis' Babylonian environment also offer a variety of potential sources for different aspects of Iranian Studies. For instance, Talmudic portrayals of Babylon's architecture or agriculture—which sometimes even offer comparisons with Palestine—provide different glimpses into Iranian Sasanian architecture and agriculture. This is also the case with respect to Talmudic portrayals society and the lives of lay people. However, in my view living styles between Jews, Zoroastrians, Manicheans, Christians, Mandeans, etc., could not have been that radically different, which is a claim supported by the magic bowls. As Jason Mokhtarian states, "the popular magicians who produced the corpus of Aramaic bowls espoused syncretistic forms of cultural expression that broke down the very ethnic, linguistic, and religious boundaries that the rabbis and priests built."[378] This thus seems to confirm that that the Talmud—despite its lack of historicity—does provide rich source material on Babylonian society for scholars studying Sasanian culture.

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[376]Ablat, according to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, was a gentile sage and astrologer in Babylonia. According to the Bavli, Ablat used to call Mar Samuel "the wisest of the Jews." There are two anecdotes in the Bavli and one in Yerushalmi that mention his close friendship with Mar Samuel and popularity among Jews.

[377] שתי רשויות.

[378] *Rabbis, Sorcerers and Kings,* 151.

This is why the present work has argued that it is not only important to study the Talmud in its Iranian context, but also for Iranists to study the Talmud for information regarding Sasanian Iran. I predict that in the future we will also see attempts to read some Pahlavi and Manichean texts in a Talmudic/Jewish context.[379]

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that Irano-Talmudica Studies is a new field that has a long road ahead of it. Iranists have not joint the caravan of Irano-Talmudists just yet, but I hope this will change. While the lack of original evidence has traditionally been understood as a limiting factor in the field, I believe that the sources we do have access to—such as the sea of information that is the Talmud, Midrashic literature, archeological evidence (mostly magic bowls), as well as Pahlavi, Manichean, Iranian, Christian, and a number of classical Persian sources such as Šāh-Nāma, etc.—have not yet been exhausted, and that there is a lot of exciting work yet to be done.

[379] For example, I suggest that the story of Adam and Eve could have served as a model for the primordial humans Maši and Mašiyaneh in the Pahlavi literature, and I believe that their portrayal in the *Bundahišn* should be studied in light of the Jewish scripture and the Talmud. In my opinion the sin committed by Maši and Mašiyaneh and its consequences as depicted in *Bundahišn* was motivated by the Jewish tradition of the time.

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Appendix

The Talmud and Classical Persian literature:

Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī and Judah HaNasi

An important but hitherto neglected issue in Irano-Talmudica studies is that of Talmudic themes and narratives in classical Persian literature. This phenomenon has not gained the attention of Irano-Talmudica Studies so far, but it probably will in the future. There is a huge potential in this area for scholars both Iranists and Talmudists. As it was seen in Chapter Two, myths pertaining to King Salomon or King Og of Bashan (‘Uwj b. Anaq) can be found in the works of classical Persian poets and authors as well- narratives that are sometimes absent from both the Old Testament and Quran. Their introduction into Persian literature is mostly through Quranic commentary (*tafsīr*) which are full of Midrashic and Talmudic narratives—called Isra‘īliyat by Muslims. While the authors of *tafsīr* did not mention the Talmud or Midrash, in many cases it is clear that the Talmud and Midrash were their main source material. This appendix will examine Sanhedrin 91a-b and is interested in exploring the presence of Talmudic motifs in newer Persian literature.

In Sanhedrin 91a-b a debate goes on regarding the body and soul’s responsibility toward sin. The debate revolves around who is responsible for the sins of a human being, the body or the soul, as each blames the other for the wrongdoing.[380] The narrative, elucidated as a parable by Rabbi (Judah HaNasi), begins with a king who has a beautiful fig orchard and decides to hire two watchmen to look after it:

[380] As we have explained in Chapter Three, the notion of resurrection was challenging to both Jews and Zoroastrians of the time, and this tractate is another example indicating rabbis struggle to justify the subject.

> Now, he appointed two watchmen therein, one lame and the other blind. [One day] the lame man said to the blind, "I see beautiful figs in the orchard. Come and take me upon thy shoulder that we may procure and eat them." So the lame bestrode the blind, procured and ate them. Sometime after, the owner of the orchard came and inquired of them, "Where are those beautiful figs?" The lame man replied, "Have I then feet to walk with?" The blind man replied, "Have I then eyes to see with?" What did he do? He placed the lame upon the blind and judged them together. So will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, [re]place it in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people: He shall call to the heavens from above-this refers to the soul; and to the earth, that he may judge his people-to the body.[381]

This narrative represents an interesting example regarding the relationship between body and soul, and was apparently a source of fascination for the twelfth-thirteenth century Iranian poet and Sufi Shaikh Farīd-al-Dīn Aṭṭār of Nīšāpūr.[382]

In his Asrār Nāma, Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī provides his own parable for those who are curious about the relationship between body and soul and their mutual responsibility toward sin. According to Aṭṭār, the human body and soul are like a blind man and a lame man who once committed a robbery. The lame man had to sit upon blind man's shoulder to commit the robbery, and so when they were caught both were punished equally (the lame man was blinded and he blind man's foot was cut off). In the end Aṭṭār suggests that body and soul will be punished equally at the end of time. In the Asrār Nāma we read thus:

> If you need an example regarding [the relationship] between soul and body ask it from me. They (soul and body) are like blind and lame on the way. Once there was a lame and a blind; they were poor and needy. The lame was unable of walking and the blind unable to find his way. Until the lame sat on the blind's shoulder; that one had sight and this one had strength. They decided to commit robbery, and at night they did it. When their act of robbery was revealed, they both were trapped. [As a punishment] the lame was blinded and the blind's hamstrings were cut as they did the action together. Soul and body are two sides of a single [matter], therefore, if there is an agony they both share it.[383]

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[381] Soncino Talmud, Sanhedrin 91a-b.

[382] Aṭṭār could have adopted the aforementioned parable from Pahlavi literature. Although I could not find Aṭṭār's narrative in available Pahlavi books, I assume that its occurrence in the Talmud, and its absence from *tafsīr* (as far as I could find) indicates that it could be found in the Pahlavi literature which has not survived the ages or is currently inaccessible.

[383] See Seyyed Sadeq Goharin, Asrār Nāma, 1338 [1960] 30.

مثال جان و تن خواهی ز من خواه
مثال کور و مفلوج است در راه
یکی مفلوج بودست و یکی کور
از آن هر دو یکی مفلس دگر عور
نمی‌یارست شد مفلوج بی پای

As this type of direct comparison between the two narratives demonstrates, the similarities are striking and the borrowing seems obvious. In other words, Aṭṭār and Rabbi both use the same parable for the same purpose: to illustrate the body and soul's responsibility regarding the actions of the man.

Although the issue that how this parable entered Aṭṭār's work is still debatable, bur its significance for Iranian Studies scholars is certain. Whether Attar obtained it from a Middle Persian text that has copied it from the Talmud, or whether Talmudic sages got it from older Iranian texts and Muslim interpreters of the Quran borrowed it from the Talmud is subject to debate.

We reiterate that the Talmud is a valuable original source for scholars of Iranian Studies in many respects. It can even be considered as an intermediary source between Middle Persian and classical Persian literature.

نه ره می‌برد کور مانده بر جای
مگر مفلوج شد بر گردن کور
که این یک چشم داشت و آن دگر زور
بدزدی برگرفتند این دو تن راه
بشب در دزدیی کردند ناگاه
چو شد آن دزدی ایشان پدیدار
شدند آن هر دو تن آخر گرفتار
از آن مفلوج بر کندند دیده
شد آن کور سبک پی، پی بریده
چو کار ایشان بهم بر می‌نهادند
در آن دام بلا با هم فتادند
چو جان روی و تن روی دورویند
اگر اندر عذابند از دو سویند