

## *A Dream which is not Interpreted is like a Letter which is not Read*

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This rabbinic saying in *bBer* 55a<sup>1</sup> postulates, more explicitly than any other, the notion of a significant resemblance between a dream and a text. It moreover indicates that if a dream is comparable to a text, then its interpretation can be said to correspond to the act of reading. The analogy to a letter further suggests that the dream might be regarded as a text with a specific intent, a particular addressee, and perhaps even a known author.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, if a letter is similar to a dream, the reading of it will in some way be congruous with oneirocritical interpretation. It is this link between exegesis and dream interpretation which will be the topic of the present investigation.

In modern scholarship, S. Lieberman first suggested an analogy between, and indeed a common origin of, some rabbinic exegetical methods and ancient oneirocritical rules.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars began to notice conceptual and formal similarities between biblical dream interpretation and the type of exegesis found in the *Pesher Habakkuk* (*PHab*).<sup>4</sup> On the basis of these findings, it has subsequently been discussed whether such similarities could also be recognized between *PHab* and rabbinic Midrash.<sup>5</sup> W. H. Brownlee even went so far as to suggest not

<sup>1</sup> חלמא דלא מסשר כאגרתא דלא מקריא

<sup>2</sup> Note that a specific link between a letter and a divine message to humans is already established in late biblical documents. See especially II Chron. 21:12–21, where a divine prophecy to Jehoram is communicated through a letter from Elijah.

<sup>3</sup> S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1950), 68–82.

<sup>4</sup> K. Elliger, *Studien zum Habakuk Kommentar vom Toten Meer* (Tübingen, 1953), 118–64, esp. 156–57, where he compares *PHab* to the book of Daniel. His criteria for comparison are both formal and factual. He thus points on the one hand to the frequent use of the technical term *פֶּשֶׁר* in both documents and evaluates on the other hand the fact that both interpreters seek divine secrets regarding the end of days.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the discussion, see G. Brooke, 'Qumran Pesher: Towards the Redefinition of a Genre', *RQ* 10 (1981), 483–5–3; L. H. Silberman, 'Unriddling the Riddle: A Study in the Structure and Language of the Habakuk Pesher', *RQ* 3 (1961), 323–64, esp. 331: 'Here is the connecting link between the relevant passages in *Dan* and the later developments and particularly between them and the *Pesher*. It is not that they are revealed interpretations but far more simply, they are interpretations of dreams ...'; A. Finkel, 'The Pesher of Dreams and Scriptures', *RQ* 4 (1963), 357–70, who equates the exegetical methods of *PHab* to some rabbinic guidelines; B. Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk* (Jerusalem, 1986; in Hebrew) 29–333; M. P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 8 (Washington, 1979), 229–60, who highlights the different *Sitz im Leben* of the various documents and consequently warns of the anachronism implied in such comparisons; H. W. Basser, 'Pesher Hadavar: The Truth of the Matter', *RQ* 49–52 (1988), 389–405; I. Froehlich, 'Le genre littéraire des Pesharim de Qumran', *RQ* 47 (1986), 383–96.

only that exactly thirteen hermeneutical rules could be identified in the *PHab*, but also that these would correspond precisely to the known rabbinic catalogue.<sup>6</sup>

The aspirations of this article are far more modest, in that no conclusions are proposed with regard to the overall nature of rabbinic exegesis or the hermeneutics at Qumran in general. I shall argue instead that in early Palestinian Midrash, and particularly in the Petira,<sup>7</sup> there is clear evidence for the continuation of a certain concept of text which is characteristic both of biblical dream interpretations and the *PHab*.<sup>8</sup> This concept presupposes a remarkable openness of the text.<sup>9</sup> Its main features may be outlined as follows: the dream or Scripture, even though their significance may be intelligible on one level, is understood to contain a concealed meaning which requires solution. This embedded meaning concerns 'real' events which are—in relation to the text itself—still in the future.<sup>10</sup> A specially gifted interpreter is thought to be able to decipher the individual items of the text and, on the basis of their converted meaning, to 'translate' the

<sup>6</sup> W. H. Brownlee, 'Biblical Interpretation among the Sectarrians of the Dead Sea Scrolls', *The Biblical Archeologist* 14 (1951), 54–76; idem., *The Midrash Peshet Habakuk* (Scholars Press, 1979), 23–36. Note that Brownlee does not initially draw a parallel to the interpretation of dreams. In his later discussion of other works, he emphasizes that a study of *PHab* from the point of view of a 'purely symbolical interpretation as in dreams' (ibid. 28) is in his view too narrow.

<sup>7</sup> The פתירה is a somewhat neglected genre of midrashic exegesis, the features of which I shall discuss below.

<sup>8</sup> The main approaches to the question of the relationship between dream interpretation and Midrash which have thus far been taken are the following: a comparison of the rabbinic catalogue of key-words for dream interpretation (such as found in *bBer* 55a ff.) to internationally circulating oneirocritical wisdom such as Artemidorus' famous collection (see H. Lewy, 'Zu dem Traumbuche des Artimedorus', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, N.F. 48 (1893), 398–419); a Freudian analysis of the rabbinic dream material (see Ch. Lauer, 'Das Wesen des Traumes in der Beurteilung der talmudischen und rabbinischen Literatur', *Internationale Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse* 1 (1913), 459–69); an investigation into the different conceptions of the nature and the function of dreams (see B. Stemmerger, 'Der Traum in der rabbinischen Literatur', *Kairos*, N.F. 18 (1976), 1–42; S. Zeitlin, 'Dreams and their Interpretation from the Biblical Period to the Tannaitic Time: A Historical Study', *JQR* 66 (1975–76), 1–18; E. L. Ehrlich, 'Der Traum im Talmud', *ZNW* (1956), 133–45; S. Lorand, 'L'Interpretation des Rêves selon le Talmud', *Revue de l'Histoire de la Médecine Hébraïque* 89 (1970), 69–72 and 90 (1971), 101–3; I. Afik, *Hazal's Perception of the Dream* (Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Senate of Bar-Ilan University, 1990), a study of rabbinic dream interpretation in the context of magic practices (see J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York, 1987), 230–48).

<sup>9</sup> I am using this term in the sense developed by modern hermeneutics. See especially: H. G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen, 1986; first published 1960); W. Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens* (München, 1876); idem, *Der implizierte Leser* (München, 1972); P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 131–93; U. Eco, *The Open Work* (Harvard University Press, 1989); S. R. Suleiman and I. Crosman (eds.), *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> See esp. I. Rabinowitz, "'Peshet/Pittaron": Its Biblical Meaning and its Significance in the Qumran Literature', *RQ* 8 (1973), 219–32.

original account into another coherent yet more mimetic narrative.<sup>11</sup> Thus, whereas the 'dream-text' is a transcript of a vision of the future, its interpretation reverses this process by transforming the imaginative narrative back into an account of imminent events. This type of oneirocritical interpretation is continued in early Midrash, where numerous biblical passages are treated in a fashion typical of dream-texts. This means that these passages are 'solved' by reference to an overall hermeneutic code and initially decomposed into individual items which are 'translated' into the *facta* they are said to symbolize. The interpreter then integrates them into a new and coherent framework of historiography and/or prognosis.

For a proper evaluation of such rabbinic interpretations it is first important to appreciate some significant developments in both the nature of the 'dream-text' and the methods of its interpretation, which occurred during the transition from early biblical to post-biblical Judaism. It emerges that while in the so-called 'symbolical dreams' of the Bible<sup>12</sup> the dream-text is actually a narrative reflecting a vision,<sup>13</sup> the book of Daniel relies on both reports of visions and a written text, and the *PHab* takes, for the first time in this context, a biblical passage as the basis for its own exposition. Corresponding to these changes in the nature of the dream-texts, the methods of interpreting them also developed with time. They naturally become more diversified on the one hand, and more formalised on the other. Moreover, the prophetic message of the text is increasingly dissociated from the function of predicting an individual's future, and is applied instead to an outline of more general, historical events which might already be partly fulfilled. In the following paragraphs I shall outline these developments in somewhat greater detail, first focusing on the nature of the dream-texts and then on the methods of their interpretation.

In the Joseph story the dreams are referred to at two levels. Each is introduced as an unspecified fact ('he dreamt a dream') or as a nocturnal

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also L. H. Silberman's description of this process, which primarily focuses on the 'atomization' of the original account, op. cit. 332.

<sup>12</sup> See E. L. Ehrlich, 'Der Traum im Alten Testament', *BZAW* 73 (1953), 58–124. 'Symbolical dreams' are distinguished from divine injunctions and prophecies communicated in the form of a dream (such as Gen. 20:3–7), because the message of the latter is plain and thus requires no special interpretation. See also J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC Edinburgh, second ed. 1980), 445 and 460–8.

<sup>13</sup> On the issue of oral reports as narratives, see especially: D. P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1982), 21–37; R. Schafer, 'Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 25–49. Regarding the problem of authentic correspondence between the original vision and its narrative account, see especially: P. Ricoeur, 'The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, op. cit. 247–73; idem, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Yale University Press, 1970), 3–36 and 159–229; D. P. Spence, *The Freudian Metaphor: Toward Paradigm Change in Psychoanalysis* (New York and London, 1987), 113–59.

vision ('And Pharaoh awoke and, behold it was a dream'). Subsequently, the dream content is rendered into an oral narrative and in this particular form it is presented for interpretation to the specialists.<sup>14</sup> Being transcripts of visions, these dream-texts naturally qualify as narratives, yet they also reflect the visionary nature of the initial experience. They are consequently replete with expressions pertaining not only to the narrative but also to the visionary dimension of the text. Their narrative nature is highlighted by the biblical narrator in the following expressions: initially he presents Joseph as 'telling'<sup>15</sup> his brothers what he saw in his dreams;<sup>16</sup> then Pharaoh's two ministers are said to 'report'<sup>17</sup> their nocturnal visions to Joseph, each saying: 'in my dream there was ...'.<sup>18</sup> Pharaoh himself later points to the importance of the dream narrative when he addresses Joseph thus: 'I have heard it said of you that when you *hear a dream* you can interpret it'.<sup>19</sup> It is in this context that the implied concept of the dream as narrative is more explicitly formulated when Joseph pronounces that in these dreams, 'God *told* Pharaoh what He has determined to do'.<sup>20</sup>

In the book of Daniel we find a variety of terms in connection with the different dream-texts. In the first instance, the visual and prophetic nature of the dream is highlighted by the fact that Daniel learns the contents of the royal dream not through a human communication but in a 'nightly vision'.<sup>21</sup> In his address to the king, Daniel furthermore stresses this aspect, saying: 'You saw, oh king, and behold, a great image (צלם) ...' (Dan. 2:31). This vision is then, as in the preceding cases, transposed into a narrative on which the interpretation is expounded. Parallel to Pharaoh's dream it is emphasized that this vision contains a divine message as to 'what will be hereafter'.<sup>22</sup> The special contiguity of this dream-text to its interpretation is here implied by the fact that the 'interpreter' actually beholds and repeats someone else's dream before deciphering it. He thus appropriates in a way the dream and becomes, like Enoch, the prophetic propounder the the

<sup>14</sup> As the case of Pharaoh shows, the visual content and the narrative presentation of the dream are not necessarily identical (Gen. 41:1-24); see on this passage also M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana University Press, 1985), 394-403.

<sup>15</sup> The Hebrew terms employed in Gen. 37:5-11 are: ריגד, ריגד, ריגד (emphasized by Joseph's special appeal שמעו נא) and ריגד אתו לאחיו ריגד.

<sup>16</sup> The dream content is introduced by the term והנה (Gen. 37:7 and 37:9).

<sup>17</sup> Gen. 40:9; ריגד, and Gen. 40:16: ריגד.

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 40:9 and 40:16: בחלומי והנה.

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 41:15: ואני שמעתי עליך לאמר תשמע חלום לסתר אתו; the above translation is based on the *Revised Standard Version* (Collins, 1973). Note that Pharaoh in his own dream report frequently uses the visionary term והנה (Gen. 41:17-24).

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 41:25: את אשר האלהים עשה הגיד לפרעה. Notice also that in a similar announcement in Gen. 41:28 a more visual expression is used (הראה).

<sup>21</sup> Dan. 2:19: אדין לדניאל בחזונו די ליליא רזה גלי.

<sup>22</sup> Dan. 2:45: הודיע למלכא מה להווא אחרי דנה.

divine message.<sup>23</sup> In the second instance of a dream report in the book of Daniel, the practices follow more closely the conventions laid down in the Joseph story, and the basis of the interpretation is the king's detailed report to his interpreter (Dan. 4:8–18). Special emphasis is given here to the fact that the concealed events are all predetermined according to the 'decree of the Most High'.<sup>24</sup>

The third occasion which calls for Daniel's exegetical services greatly resembles the preceding ones, because here too the agitated king summons his astronomical and oneirocritical experts for the interpretation of a concealed message which contains a prediction of the future. Yet this occasion differs in one important aspect from the earlier two: the ominous riddle is not a particular dream, but writing on the wall.<sup>25</sup> Although its mysterious origin indicates a divine revelation, it is clearly not a vision but an inscription. It is moreover of great significance that the primary processes of its emergence and its initial appreciation are explicitly said to involve the acts of writing and reading.<sup>26</sup> The cryptic nature of this text is more obvious than in the previous cases, since it lacks its own narrative coherence and consists only of a few disconnected, apparently meaningless words (Dan. 5:25). It is thus here that a written text is for the first time presented in the same way as a dream-text and that it is also conceived as a cryptogram of future events. It is with regard to this shift to pure textuality that the book of Daniel constitutes a turning-point in the relationship between dream interpretation and exegesis.

In the case of *PHab*, it is obvious that the basis for the exposition is one specific biblical passage. The question then is to what extent the concept of the text in *PHab* may be regarded as corresponding to that underlying a dream-text. Apart from the exegetical term פִּשְׁטָר, which has previously been identified as a hint of implied oneirocritical notions,<sup>27</sup> additional evidence to this extent lies in the interpreter's specific attitude towards the text of Hab. The Teacher of Righteousness is thus said to be 'interpreting all the words of His servants the prophets into whose hand God rendered all the future events' (*PHab* 2:8–10). We may gather from this statement not only that the interpreter is highly aware of the prophetic nature of his *Vorlage*, but also that he conceives of this text as a concealed prediction of the future.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding Enoch, see esp.: En. 83:90; J. Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London, 1986), 208–10.

<sup>24</sup> Dan. 4:21: וּמִרְתָּה עֲלֵיָא הִיא דִּי מִטַּת עַל מַרְאֵי מַלְכָא. Note the particular emphasis which is given to the fact that Daniel predictions were fulfilled exactly as he had said (Dan. 4:25, 4:30 and 5:21).

<sup>25</sup> Dan. 5:5: 'Immediately the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand and the king saw the hand as it wrote'; in Dan. 5:7 it is simply referred to as כְּתֻבָּה דְּנִינָה. Note the stylistic similarity between this scene and the first dream report (Dan. 5:6–7 in comparison to Dan. 2:2).

<sup>26</sup> Dan 5:5: אַצְבָּעֵן דִּי יָד אִנֹּשׁ וְכַתְּבָן לְקַבֵּל גּוֹבְרִשְׁתָּא עַל גִּירָא דִּי כְּתֹל יִקְרָה כְּתֻבָּה דְּנִינָה.

<sup>27</sup> This aspect will be discussed in more detail below.

Reflecting a general tendency during the Second Temple Period to identify prophecy with divination,<sup>28</sup> the biblical text is presented as converging with another type of oracular prognosis, namely the dream. Parallel to the latter, the text of Hab. is examined here item by item with a view to deciphering pertinent codes and establishing a reliable account of the future.<sup>29</sup> In comparison to the biblical dream-texts, it is at the same time to be noted that the revelatory origin of Scripture is taken for granted and therefore not particularly emphasized. The prophetic origin of the text thus recedes further into the background, and we may conclude that also in this respect *PHab* signifies an important step in the development from dream-interpretation to scriptural exegesis.

When considering the exegetical methods used by the different interpreters in the transformation of each text into a 'more transparent' exposition, one becomes immediately aware of their variety. Whereas the hermeneutic procedures in the Joseph story are relatively simple and usually only involve the solution of allegories, the hermeneutic methods in the book of Daniel are more formalized and diverse, employing also linguistic devices such as paronomasia. In *PHab*, the exposition reaches the greatest degree of autonomy in relation to the *Vorlage* and is based on sophisticated methods characteristic of textual exegesis, such as the use of alternative text versions or multiple meanings of words.

Regarding the Joseph story, it is obvious that the first dreams are in fact so plain that they require neither an expert oneirocritic nor complex methods of interpretation. Instead, Joseph's family instantly grasp the course of events foreshadowed in them (Gen. 37:7–10). They intuitively substitute the items of nature—sheaves in the one dream and stars in the other—by the respective members of the family, and surmise their future constellation by way of analogy to the position of the respective items in Joseph's dreams.<sup>30</sup> The interpretation is here so spontaneous that it is formally not even presented as a step-by-step decipherment of the dream but as a single rhetorical statement. The significance of these dreams is so obvious to the family, not only because they are coherent and comprehensible narratives but also because they are seen in the context of their *Sitz im*

<sup>28</sup> See J. Barton, op. cit. 179–234; K. Koch, 'Is Daniel also among the Prophets?', in J. C. Mays and J. Achtemeier (eds.), *Interpreting the Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1987), 237–49; see also Josephus' description of Gideon (*JA* 5:215), Daniel (*JA* 10:266 ff.), Hyrcanus' nocturnal vision (*JA* 12:300).

<sup>29</sup> The oneirocritical nature of this attitude to the biblical text is especially obvious in comparison to the *Genesis Apocryphon*, another Qumranic Midrash on Scripture. In contrast to *PHab*, the biblical text is not directly quoted here and the work of the interpreter consists in re-writing the story along the lines of the *Vorlage*. The interpreter thus takes the biblical text as a plain narrative about events in the far distant past. Since the intention of this text is taken to be clear, his function is restricted to embellishing it.

<sup>30</sup> See also: E. L. Ehrlich, op. cit. 58–64; B. Stemberger, op. cit. 3–5; A. Resch, *Der Traum im Heilsplan Gottes: Deutung und Bedeutung des Traumes im Alten Testament* (Freiburg, Herder, 1964), 81–6.

Leben. Against the background of Joseph's character, it is not too difficult to recognize his little-concealed aspirations.<sup>31</sup> Yet even from this case of very simple dream interpretation it clearly emerges that the oneirocritical solution reverses the process of the dream report: whereas the latter transforms a vision into an imaginary narrative, the former translates this text back into a series of 'real' events. The resulting narrative of the interpretation may consequently be said to explicate the original content which had, for the purposes of communication, been temporarily cast into the poetic form of a dream-text.

The exegetical methods applied to the second pair of dreams in the Joseph story immediately strike us as being of a distinctly more professional nature. Pharaoh's ministers thus know themselves that they require a פתור in order to understand their dreams' prognosis (Gen. 40:8).<sup>32</sup> Joseph in turn introduces his interpretation with the formula וזה פתרוני, and he first provides an overall hermeneutic key to the dream by identifying the three branches of the vine as three days (Gen. 40:12). On the basis of this decoded allegory he proceeds to uncover the events which are implied for the butler in the dream. Joseph's prognosis appears to derive from the butler's performance in his dream: he serves Pharaoh and places a cup of grape juice into his hands (Gen. 40:11). This is not only a positive activity, thus signalling a favourable destiny, but also represents *pars pro toto* the butler's profession from which he has just been expelled. Without knowledge of these circumstances, Joseph is able to read the dream and thus to divine the butler's return to his former position.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Joseph begins to decipher the chief baker's dream by providing its hermeneutic key which consists of identifying the three baskets as three days (Gen. 40:18). In his subsequent prediction he again uses the outcome of the dreamer's activity as a clue to his fate and concludes from its failure that the baker will not be exonerated (Gen. 40:16–19). It is presumably on the basis of his familiarity with local customs that Joseph further expands his narrative and relates how the baker will in fact be hanged (*ibid.*).

It is of great significance that the truth of Joseph's interpretations is not only subsequently proven by reality (Gen. 40:20–22), but instantly accepted by the two ministers themselves. As the authors of the dream-texts, they are said to have also been provided with a latent knowledge of their פתרון.<sup>34</sup> This implicit understanding does not enable them to decipher the dream by themselves but it does allow them to judge the correctness of Joseph's

<sup>31</sup> Note that this is the earliest evidence for a particular assumption about the nature and function of dreams, later formulated in the famous rabbinic dictum: אין מראין לו לאדם אלא: ממהרהורי לבו (*bBer* 55b).

<sup>32</sup> I. Rabinowitz, *op. cit.* 221; concerning Gen. 40:5 he further comments: פתרון is a 'strictly limited, non-expository kind of "interpretation" that consists of a determination and disclosure of a dream's presage or prognosis'.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. A. Resch, *op. cit.* 87–96.

<sup>34</sup> Gen. 40:5: ויחלמו חלום שניהם איש חלמו בלילה אחד איש כפתרון חלמו.

interpretation.<sup>35</sup> In modern parlance this hermeneutic principle might be classified as the assumption of validity in interpretation.<sup>36</sup>

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams reaches an even higher level of sophistication. His disclosure of the foreshadowed events is composed of several parts. He provides again the general hermeneutic key by initially establishing the identity of the two visions (Gen. 41:26), by decoding the items of nature (sheaves and cows) as symbols for the years of Pharaoh's administration (Gen. 41:26), and then by deriving from their constitution the general state of affairs (Gen. 41:27). The act of substituting dream items by 'real events' is formulated more explicitly than before, as Joseph repeats each item and then establishes the respective correlation using the term הנה. Based on these facts, Joseph relates in the second part of his dream interpretation a more expanded account of the future (Gen. 41:29–31). The resulting overall narrative thus reflects, like a mirror image, both the future reality and the original dream-text. In the last part of his 'interpretation' Joseph makes certain concrete and rather independent proposals about how to anticipate the imminent situation (Gen. 41:33–36). It emerges particularly from his pieces of advice that this interpretation is not only more developed than any of the previous ones, but also that it assumes considerably greater autonomy and importance in relation to the dream-report itself.

Unlike his earlier interpretations, Joseph's solution here does not spell out some obvious allusions in the dream. He discloses instead a more concealed allegory and creates his own, rather independent narrative which is distinctly structured by technical terms. It is moreover significant that it contains material which seems to be the produce of Joseph's own thinking and is only very indirectly connected to the original dream. Responding to the remarkable self-confidence of the interpreter, the dreamer refrains in this case from examining the verisimilitude of the interpretation. He rather invests Joseph himself with prophetic powers and enthusiastically accepts both his solution and his practical advice.<sup>37</sup> This attitude suggests the priority of the interpreter over the author of the text and may be compared to some modern notions, although contemporary critics would hardly dare to attribute supernatural powers to the reader. It thus becomes clear that the Joseph story already exemplifies the essential categories of dream interpretation which constitute the basis for later oneirocriticism. The story moreover attests a tendency towards the formalization and structuralization

<sup>35</sup> Gen. 40:16 and esp. Gen. 41:12, where the butler says of Joseph that he יפתר לנו את חלמתינו איש כחלמו סתר. See also I. Rabinowitz, op. cit. 221–2. Cf. E. L. Ehrlich, op. cit. 70, who takes Gen. 40:16 to indicate that the baker felt encouraged by the positive nature of the prediction rather than by its truthfulness. See also R. Eleazar's interpretation of this verse in *bBer* 55b.

<sup>36</sup> See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (Yale University Press, 1967); idem, *The Aims of Interpretation* (University of Chicago Press, 1976); for critical and other views see W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *The Politics of Interpretation* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 41:38–41, esp. ויאמר פרעה אל עבדיו הנמצא כזה איש אשר רוח אלהים בו (Gen. 41:38).

of the solutions, on the one hand, and an increasing independence and importance of their interpreters, on the other.

With regard to these developments the book of Daniel constitutes a further significant step. It is thus here for the first time, and consistently, that the noun **פְּשָׁרָה**, the Aramaic equivalent of **פְּתָרָן**, is used as a technical term for such oneirocritical decipherments.<sup>38</sup> The interpretations themselves, whose prophetic nature is repeatedly accentuated,<sup>39</sup> are equated with exegetical activities and compared in one case to the uncovering of a mystery,<sup>40</sup> and in the other to a 'solution of riddles'.<sup>41</sup> The interpretations of the first two dreams in Daniel are based on similar methods as in the Joseph story, namely on decoding the implied symbolism of the dream and establishing analogies of each item to 'real' events. This process of substitution is, however, formalized to a significantly greater degree by the use of several technical terms: **כָּל קָבַל** establishes an analogy (Dan. 2:45); the comparative particle 'as'<sup>42</sup> and plain equations, such as 'the tree ... that is you',<sup>43</sup> further highlight the respective correlation. The initial decipherment is also in these cases followed by a narrative which transforms the original dream-text into its mirror image, thus reflecting more clearly the future.<sup>44</sup>

The third interpretation in the book of Daniel, on the other hand, is of a different and new kind. In contrast to the preceding decodings of visual imagery, the mysterious inscription is taken seriously as a written text and linguistic methods are used to uncover the presaged events. Applying paronomasia Daniel thus takes each of the seemingly meaningless expressions as forms of verbs, which are assumed to indicate the future.<sup>45</sup> Regarding the last expression (**פָּרַס**), Daniel even suggests two homonyms<sup>46</sup> and constructs his interpretation on the double meaning of this word. It is moreover important to note that the oneirocritical term **פְּשָׁרָה** is used for this interpretation, although it relates to a text which is not identified as a dream. The book of Daniel can therefore be regarded as the earliest instant where oneirocritical terminology and concepts are applied in the interpretation of a written text. It is presumably on this basis that a similar exegesis of Scripture was later able to flourish.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Dan. 2:26, 2:36, 4:6, 5:12, 5:26, etc. Regarding the linguistic background, see esp. B. Nitzan, op. cit. 43–51.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Dan. 2:47, 4:6, 4:15, etc.

<sup>40</sup> Dan. 2:47: **רָזָה דְּנָה**.

<sup>41</sup> Dan. 5:12: **מִפְּשָׁרֵי חֵלְמִין וְאֲחֵרִית אֲחִידִין וּמִשְׁרָא קִטְרִין**, and 5:16: **מִשְׁרִין לְמִפְּשָׁרֵי קִטְרִין**. Note that in the latter case the term **פְּשָׁרִין** is actually used for the concealed text itself and in some manuscripts is replaced by **חֵלְמִין**.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Dan. 4:17–19, 4:22–23, etc.

<sup>43</sup> Dan. 4:17–19. See also Dan. 2:38: 'you are the head of gold'.

<sup>44</sup> Dan. 2: 39–45, 4:22–23. Note that in the latter case the narrative is followed by a piece of advice which Daniel gives (like Joseph) to the king.

<sup>45</sup> Dan. 5:26: **מִנָּה מִנָּה אֱלֹהֵא**, and 5:27: **תְּקִילְתָּהּ בְּמֵאוֹנֵיא**.

<sup>46</sup> Dan. 5:27 **פָּרַס** is taken both as the verb 'to divide' and as the noun 'Persia'.

Due to the above-outlined nature of its *Vorlage*, the interpretation of the text in *PHab* no longer takes the form of a direct prognosis to its author. In the absence of a dreamer, the interpreter gains even more importance and autonomy than hitherto. It is thus emphasized that the Teacher of Righteousness is divinely endowed with 'the secrets of the words of His servants the prophets' with regard to the end of days (*PHab* 7:1–5). It becomes clear that if an 'authorial intention' of the biblical text existed, it is in *PHab* completely subordinated to the interpreter's own ideological and political agenda.

Despite the incomparably greater variety of the exegetical methods used in *PHab*,<sup>47</sup> certain familiar features recur also in this interpretation and qualify it as a type of oneirocritical exegesis. As has been previously pointed out, we may primarily identify the technical term פֶּשֶׁר as a continuation of its usage in Daniel and as pertaining to the field of dream solutions.<sup>48</sup> It is moreover significant that the interpretation here is structured in the same way as that of the above-mentioned biblical dreams. The interpreter thus proceeds by initially decoding individual items of the biblical text and then 'translating' each of them into its corresponding event. Parallel to the oneirocritic, *PHab* derives from these building blocks a new and coherent meaning. The resulting story is characteristically said to reflect authentically the events originally predicted by God. It is in addition important to note that the narrative construction takes into account the whole of the biblical text. It may therefore be classified as 'atomistic' only with reference to the initial decomposition of the text into its exegetically relevant items. Otherwise, however, this interpretation is distinct among other Qumranic works precisely because it creates, like oneirocriticism, an overall meaning for a prolonged passage of text. We may finally note that the concealed events, which are here identified in the text of *Hab*, are no longer exclusively dated to the as yet unfulfilled future, but are partly presented as having already happened.<sup>49</sup> From the point of view of the interpreter, the oracle assumed to be embedded in Scripture is thus to a certain extent used retrospectively and becomes a *vaticinatio ex eventu*. This feature clearly indicates the increasingly poetic use of oneirocritical methods of interpretation and foreshadows their application to scriptural exegesis in the Midrash.

The above-outlined development from dream interpretation to oneirocritical exegesis of Scripture is also echoed in early Midrash, and we may observe a variety of ways in which interpretations of dreams and texts are

<sup>47</sup> B. Nitzan, *op. cit.* 43–51.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> E.g. the events regarding 'the house of Abshalom' (*PHab* 5:9–11), though in the future from the point of view of the biblical text, are clearly accomplished in the opinion of the interpreter. Similarly, the change of the 'Wicked Priest' from acceptable behaviour to outrageous sin is said to have already taken place (*PHab* 8:8–12).

here interwoven. Whereas the Babylonian preoccupation with dreams tends to focus on the visions of contemporary individuals,<sup>50</sup> early Palestinian Midrash is in this respect more complex. It not only relates certain experiences in the dream interpretation of its own time, but also interprets biblical visions and applies distinctly oneirocritical assumptions to other biblical texts. In the following I shall examine examples of these different categories and investigate to what extent exegesis and oneirocriticism complement each other or even converge. I shall consider these issues from both directions and ask in what sense oneirocriticism approaches exegesis, and conversely how exegesis relies on oneirocriticism. In the words of our initial rabbinic dictum, we may also phrase the question thus: to what extent does the dream resemble the letter and, vice versa, the letter the dream?

In *GR* 1095–6<sup>51</sup> the biblical emphasis on the prompt fulfilment of Joseph's dream interpretations to Pharaoh's ministers<sup>52</sup> is used for a vivid illustration of an incident which happened to R. Eliezer. The latter is said to have been consulted twice by a woman who had dreamt of a broken roof in her house. Twice he interprets this vision to mean that she will give birth to a male child and his predictions are said to have come true. When she is visited by the same dream for a third time and again enquires about its significance, she finds only the rabbi's students, who offer a solution in their master's absence. Their prediction turns out to be highly infelicitous, both because they foresee her husband's death and because their solution has, irrespective of its inaccuracy, fatal consequences. This is believed to be so in accordance with the biblical emphasis in the phrase **וְיִהְיֶה בְּאִשֶּׁר פִּתַּח כֵּן הָיָה**. R. Johanan subsequently expressed this conviction in the well-known saying, **וְיִהְיֶה בְּאִשֶּׁר פִּתַּח כֵּן הָיָה** (GR 1097).<sup>53</sup> It is obvious that in the case of *GR*

<sup>50</sup> It is noteworthy that Jewish oneirocriticism, although it shared many international symbols, also developed its own, Scripture-based code of decipherment. (Cf. in contrast Artemidorus' explanation that the changing oneirocritical significance of the bath is directly dependent on the latter's changing reputation among the general public, in *La Clef des Songes*, traduit et annoté par A. J. Festugière (Paris, 1975), 69–70.) Regarding the general Near Eastern background of Babylonian oneirocriticism, see esp.: A. L. Oppenheim, 'The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East', *Transactions of the American Philological Society*, N.S. 46, 3 (1956), 184–255; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1951), 102–34; G. Contenau, *La Divination chez les Assyriens et les Babyloniens* (Paris, 1940), 139–71; A. Guillaume, *Prophétie et Divination chez les Sémites* (Paris, 1950), 224–79.

<sup>51</sup> *GR=Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Ch. Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar* (Jerusalem, 1965). The numbers indicate the pages of that edition.

<sup>52</sup> Gen. 41:13: **וְיִהְיֶה בְּאִשֶּׁר פִּתַּח לֵוֹ כֵּן הָיָה**.

<sup>53</sup> A parallel version of this interpretation is to be found in *yMa'aser Shenit* IV, 6. The Babylonian Talmud preserves numerous stories based on the same conviction. They usually reflect the more merchandized form of dream interpretation which seems to have often converged with charlatanism. See for example the case of Bar Hedyā in *bBer* 56a, where he interprets (among others) Rabba's dream of the outer door having fallen out as an indication of his wife's death. Rabba later travels with Bar Hedyā in a boat and, on disembarking, discovers a book which fell out of the interpreter's pocket. 'Rabba found it, and saw written in it: "all the dreams follow the mouth". He exclaimed: "Wretch! It all depended on you and you gave me all this pain! I forgive you everything except what you said about the daughter of

1095–6 the connection between scriptural exegesis and dream interpretation is rather tenuous. It actually consists of the fact that the biblical verse provides a proof-text for principles of rabbinic oneirocriticism and widely circulating assumptions about the potency of dream interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

A more complicated situation emerges when we consider some rabbinic interpretations of biblical dream reports. *GR* 1093, for example, deals with Pharaoh's search for an appropriate dream interpreter and significantly treats this passage both oneirocritically and exegetically. It is moreover noteworthy that this midrashic tradition is preserved in the name of two Amoraic teachers, R. Jehoshua of Siknin and R. Levi, who are among the most prominent expounders of the Petira.<sup>55</sup> According to these two, Gen. 41:8, וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם ... וְאֵין פֹּתֵר, has to be understood in the sense that Pharaoh did actually locate some Egyptian oneirocritics, but he rejected their solutions and was unable to find a trustworthy interpreter of his dreams. The Midrash then illustrates this point by presenting the alleged solutions of the Egyptians: the seven fat cows are said to be mistaken as a symbol for seven daughters to which Pharaoh will give birth, and the seven thin cattle are thought to hint at seven daughters whom he will bury. Similarly, the seven good ears are taken to indicate seven kingdoms which Pharaoh will conquer, whereas the seven thin ones are, according to Egyptian wisdom, a sure sign that he will lose seven administrative regions.

The interpreter obviously regards the biblical passage as a dream-text, because he presents the Egyptian wise men as predicting, like Joseph in the biblical story, Pharaoh's future. Also, the method of decipherment conforms to oneirocritical standards, as the Egyptians are said to substitute each item in the dream by a corresponding concealed event. It moreover seems that the elaboration of the biblical contest between Joseph and foreign wise men reflects contemporaneous rabbinic notions of Israelite oneirocriticism within the international arena. Characteristically, it reminds the reader instantly of similar live stories in other early Midrash.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the above interpretation may be regarded as exegetical in the sense that it illustrates a scriptural scene and is extraordinarily well adapted to the biblical context. The rabbinic tradition indeed fits in so well that the biblical writer himself could have added it.

In the case of Joseph's own dreams, it is noticeable that the rabbinic interpreters interweave oneirocriticism and scriptural exegesis in a particularly complex fashion. The following traditions are preserved in *GR* 1012:

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Rabbi Hisda [his wife].” Another well-known story treats the case of the twenty-four dream interpreters who were active in Jerusalem (*bBer* 55a). Their different interpretations are said not to conflict with each other, because ‘all the dreams follow the mouth’.

<sup>54</sup> Regarding the Near Eastern background of these assumptions, see esp. L. Oppenheimer, *op. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> For further details, see below.

<sup>56</sup> See esp.: *yMa'aser Sheni* IV, 6; *Eikha Rabbah*, part 1 (ed. Buber, pp. 52–3); and also *bBer* 56a (top).

*We were binding sheaves* (אֱלִמִּים, Gen. 37:7).

You are gathering produce and I am gathering produce; yours is rotten while mine are upright: *lo, my sheaf arose and stood upright* (ibid.).

R. Levi said: you will make dumb idols (אֱלִילִים אֱלִמִּים) before the calves of Jeroboam, as it says: 'these are your gods, Israel' (Ex. 32:4).

R. Acha said: you will conceal (לְהַעֲלִים) things concerning me before our father, saying: 'a wild beast devoured him' (Gen. 37:33).

In the above passage the biblical verse is treated on two entirely different levels. Initially, an anonymous interpreter provides a somewhat commonsensical explanation, in which he attributes to Joseph a more expanded version of his dream report. In this interpretation the present tense of the biblical dream description is maintained and the midrashic addition naturally culminates in the quotation of the end of the verse in question.<sup>57</sup> The rabbinic embellishment is adapted to the biblical dream report to such an extent that it becomes an integral part of it. It is thus clear that this interpreter relates to Joseph's dream exclusively on the level of Scripture, and it is obviously irrelevant for him that the scene is originally inserted in a dream report. This exegesis therefore differs little from illustrative expansions of numerous other passages.

By contrast, the subsequent interpretations of the two Amoraic teachers, who are also prominent expounders of the Petira,<sup>58</sup> transpose the biblical verse onto an altogether different level. Both of them regard this text as a dream-text and invest it with concealed predictions of the future. Obviating the solution of Joseph's dream by his family, each of them deciphers its symbols and attributes to Joseph a plain prognosis (עֲתִידִים אֲתָם). Both of them rely for the decoding of the dream on the known methods of paronomasia and substitution of letters: while R. Levi derives from the root אֱלִם the two additional meanings 'idols' (אֱלִיל) and 'dumb' (אֱלִם), R. Acha replaces the א by ע and construes the *hiphil* form הַעֲלִים, 'to hide'. It thus emerges that in both the basic concept of the text and the method of deciphering its symbolism, these two interpretations correspond to the known standards of dream solution.

Yet the two interpreters also violate basic assumptions of oneirocriticism, such as the principle that dreams are always about the future of the dreamer himself. The fact that they apply Joseph's dream to the future of his brothers therefore removes these interpretations from the field of strict oneirocriticism. This digression may be explained on the grounds of the interpreters' particular sensitivity to the exegetical context of the biblical dream. Parallel to rabbinic illustrations of Joseph's defamations of his brothers (GR 1009), the interpretations are meant to highlight a more

<sup>57</sup> Cf. also הַמְדַרְשׁ הַמְבוּאֵר (Jerusalem, 1988), ad loc., who understands this interpretation as a prophecy predicting Joseph's success in Egypt and his responsibilities during the years of drought.

<sup>58</sup> For more details, see below.

general moral. In addition, the above interpretations approach scriptural exegesis because they represent two alternative and equally authentic solutions to Joseph's dream. In consequence, each loses the authority and potency normally attributed to oneirocriticism. In this respect, too, they rather conform to the well-known methods of scriptural exegesis in the Midrash.

The final aspect of the above interpretations indicating a *rapprochement* between oneirocriticism and exegesis is the fact that the decoding of the symbols is here, as on countless other occasions in the Midrash, substantiated by biblical proof-texts. In both cases, they illustrate the contents of the rabbinic interpretations. Whereas the first proof-text alludes to the instance of the Golden Calf as an example of idol-worship, the second is a quotation of the brothers' predicted lies. It will be noted that these proof-texts draw their validity from the contents. They neither rely on sophisticated exegetical procedures nor on complicated linguistic deductions. It thus emerges from the overall analysis that the two interpretations of R. Levi and R. Acha represent complex amalgamations of dream interpretation and exegesis. Whereas the first interpretation in the above passage is a clear example of scriptural exegesis which accidentally deals with the contents of a dream, these regard them as a dream-text, while also applying classical exegetical methods. They invest the biblical text with predictions of the future, but also offer alternative interpretations and use proof-texts in decoding the dream items.

We may further observe the intricate relationship between oneirocriticism and exegesis when considering one extended example in which different types of interpretation are preserved side by side. In *GR* 785–6 we find the following interpretations of Jacob's dream of the ladder:

*And he dreamt* (Gen. 28:12).

R. Abahu said: dreams have no influence whatsoever (דברי חלומות לא מעלין ולא מורידין).

Someone came to R. Jose b. Halafta and said to him: I was told<sup>59</sup> in a dream: go and gather the inheritance of your father from Cappadocia. He replied to him: did your father ever go to Cappadocia? He said: no. He replied: count ten blocks in the wall of your house and you will find it. He said: there are no ten blocks there. He replied: if there are no ten blocks, count from the first to the last and then from the last to the first and when you reach ten, you will find it. He went, did so and found it. And whence did R. Jose b. Halafta know? From the word 'Cappadocia'.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Literally: 'it was told to this man'.

<sup>60</sup> As explained in the parallel version in *bBer* 56b, the word 'Cappadocia' is to be analysed as follows: if it is split into two, the first part קסא can be explained by reference to the Greek numerical ten, and the second part דקיא is to be understood as the Greek word for 'stone, block'. Note that the version of the story in *yMa'aser Shenii* IV, 6 ends with a simple reference to the word 'Cappadocia' which is left unexplained.

Bar Kappara taught: no dream is without its interpretation (אין חלום שאין בו פתרון).

*And behold a ladder* (Gen. 28:12) refers to (זה) the stairway;

*Set up on the earth* (ibid.) refers to (זה) the altar, as it says 'an altar of earth you shall make for Me' (Ex. 20:24);

*And the top of it reached the heaven* (Gen. 28:12) refers to (אלו) the sacrifices the odour of which ascended to heaven;

*And behold the angels of God* (ibid.) refers to (אלו) the High Priests;

*Ascending and descending on it* (ibid.) ascending and descending on the stairway;

*And behold the Lord stood beside him* (Gen. 28:13) 'I saw the Lord standing beside the altar' (Amos 9:1);

The rabbis solved it by reference to Sinai (פתרון ליה בסניי).

*And he dreamt and behold a ladder* (Gen. 28:12) refers to (זה) Sinai;

*Set up on the earth* (ibid.), as it says 'and they stood at the nether part of the mount' (Ex. 19:17);

*And the top of it reached the heaven* (Gen. 28:12), as it says 'and the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven' (Deut. 4:11);

*And behold the angels of God* (Gen. 28:12) refers to (זה) Moses and Aaron;

*Ascending* (ibid.), as it says 'and Moses went up' (Ex. 19:3);

*Descending* (Gen. 28:12), as it says 'and Moses went down from the mountain' (Ex. 19:14);

*And behold the Lord stood beside him* (Gen. 28:13), as it says 'and the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai' (Ex. 19:20).

It is immediately obvious that the various interpretations of Gen. 28:12–13 relate to the dream on entirely different levels. Whereas the first two deal with the very action of Jacob's dreaming (ויחלם) and are rather free associations reflecting contemporaneous convictions and practices in the field of oneirocriticism, the subsequent versions relate to the dream-text itself and constitute complex examples of oneirocritical-scriptural exegesis. Since the latter topic is the specific concern of this essay, I shall limit myself to an analysis of passages relevant to it, hoping that the other interpretations quoted above will serve as self-explanatory illustrations, highlighting by their contrast the nature of the exegesis in question.

Bar Kappara explicitly presents his interpretation of Gen. 28:12–13 as a dream solution (פתרון). He then proceeds in classical oneirocritical manner to provide the overall hermeneutic key of the interpretation by identifying the ladder as a symbol for the stairway of the altar in the Temple. This decipherment seems to be based on a factual analogy and the ladder is identified as the stairway because of the similarity of their shape and their common orientation towards heaven.<sup>61</sup> The decoding of the subsequent items in the biblical dream is built upon this initial solution and provides further details of the picture of the service at the altar. To introduce most of these decipherments, Bar Kappara uses the demonstrative pronouns זה and

<sup>61</sup> The interpreter presumably relied on the mishnaic description of the stairway in the Temple, *Middot* III, 3–4.

אלו, which are clearly reminiscent of similar expressions in earlier oneirocriticism.<sup>62</sup> In view of the symbolical interpretation of the ladder, it is particularly obvious that the following decipherment of items in Jacob's dream are established by different means. Some rely on a certain factual correlation between the respective items, such as the analogy of the phrases, 'reached the heaven', and the odours of the sacrifices 'ascending to heaven'. On the same grounds, the 'angels ascending and descending on it' are identified with the priests, as the ladders' busy traffic on the stairway of the altar resembles the movement of the angels in Jacob's dream.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, more textual correlations constitute the basis of other decipherment. The justification for identifying the expression, 'set up on the earth', as a reference to the altar thus derives from the contiguity of the terms 'earth' and 'altar' in the biblical proof-text. Moreover, God's alleged presence beside the altar is demonstrated by reading this verse as a parallel to Am. 9:1. The latter mentions the identical noun and verb; and assuming a complete *parallelismus membrorum*, one can replace the somewhat vague עליו (Gen. 28:13) by the specific על המזבח (Am. 9:1).

Relating all of these decoded items in Jacob's dream to one topic, Bar Kappara transposes the biblical dream into a coherent new context. While this procedure obviously conforms to classical oneirocriticism, it is striking that he does not invest this dream-text with a prediction of the future for an individual. His interpretation definitely lacks any tendency towards the contemporization of the text and its application to a topical situation. In Bar Kappara's hands, dream interpretation has lost all its former potency and has become a certain type of exegesis, characterized not only by the use of typical oneirocritical terminology and methods, but also by the assumption that Scripture conceals references to a particular sequence of historical facts.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See esp. Gen. 41:26: שבע שנים הנה ושבע השבלים הטבת שבע שנים הנה חלום אחד הוא, and *PHab* 12:3-4: הלבנון הוא עצת היחיד.

<sup>63</sup> See esp. *mIoma* II, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Note that the closest parallel in *bTalmud* (*bBer* 56a), where a passage from Deut. is interpreted in oneirocritical fashion, still actualizes the verses and applies them to the future of the relevant individuals: 'Bar Hedyā was an interpreter of dreams. To one who paid him he used to give a favourable interpretation and to one who did not pay him he gave an unfavourable interpretation. Abaye and Raba each had a dream. Abaye gave a *zuz*, and Raba did not give him anything. They said to him: in our dream we had to read the verse "Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes" (Deut. 28:31). To Raba he said: your business will be a failure and you will be so grieved that you will have no appetite to eat. To Abaye he said: your business will prosper, and you will not be able to eat from sheer joy. They then said to him: we had to read in our dream the verse "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters" (Deut. 28:41). To Raba he interpreted it in its unfavourable sense (כבישותיה). To Abaye he said: you have numerous sons and daughters, and your daughters will be married and go away, and it will seem to you as if they have gone into captivity. We were made to read the verse "Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given to another people" (Deut. 28:32). To Abaye he said: you have numerous sons and daughters, you will want them to marry your relatives, and your wife will want them to marry her relatives, and she will force you to marry them to her relatives, which

*GR* preserves also a second interpretation of Jacob's dream. This time the tradition is transmitted in the name of 'the rabbis' and is introduced as a dream solution by the concise expression פתרון ליה. Here, the central topic, and the hermeneutic key for the decoding, is explicitly stated at the beginning. As in classical dream interpretation, the reader may thus easily grasp the central message from the abstract introduction rather than by way of a step-by-step inference. The solution of the dream's main symbol seems also in this case to be derived from the factual correlation of the respective items. The ladder is taken to symbolize Mt Sinai because the latter also signifies a gradual ascent to heaven.<sup>65</sup> The subsequent decipherments are all justified by the contiguity of the respective terms in the biblical proof-texts. Parallel to Bar Kappara's interpretation of Jacob's dream, the rabbis proceed here from an identification of inanimate objects supplementing the main image to the introduction of the personnel officiating in the previously outlined environment. It is obvious that this rabbinic 'solution', also, is devoid of divinatory powers. The technical terminology of dream interpretation employed here indicates therefore its largely poetic use. The remaining oneirocritical characteristic consists most notably in the notion of exegesis as a transposition of the original text to a new coherent and 'real' contest.

*GR* preserves further interpretations of Jacob's dream. These constitute another important step in the amalgamation of oneirocriticism with scriptural exegesis. Thus we read in *GR* 789–90:

*(and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it, Gen. 28:12)*

R. Levi said in the name of R. Samuel b. Nahman: because the Ministering

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will be like giving them to another people. To Raba he said: your wife will die, and her sons and daughters will come under the sway of another wife; for Raba said in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Abba, reporting Rab: what is the meaning of the verse "thy sons and thy daughters shall be given to another people"? This refers to a step-mother. We were made to read in our dream the verse "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy" (Eccl. 9:7). To Abaye he said: your business will prosper, and you will eat and drink, and recite this verse out of the joy of your heart. To Raba he said: your business will fail, you will slaughter (cattle) and not eat or drink and you will read Scripture to allay your anxiety. We were made to read the verse "Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field (and shalt gather little in, for the locusts consume it)" (Deut. 28:38). To Abaye he interpreted from the first half of the verse, to Raba from the second. We were made to read the verse "Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy borders (but thou shalt not anoint thyself)" (Deut. 28:40). To Abaye he interpreted from the first half of the verse, to Raba from the second half. We were made to read the verse "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon thee" (Deut. 28:10). To Abaye he said: your name will be famous as head of the college, and you will be generally feared. To Raba he said: the king's treasury will be broken into, and you will be arrested as a thief, and everybody will draw an inference from you. The next day the king's treasury was broken into and they came to arrest him.' See also I. Afik's treatment of this passage, *op. cit.* 334–424.

<sup>65</sup> Note that some alternative versions of the Midrash preserve another explanation of the identification of the ladder with Mt Sinai. According to these traditions, it is the identical numerical value of סני and סלים which establishes their similarity. See *GR* 786.

Angels revealed the secrets of the Holy One Blessed Be He, they were banished from their precincts for 138 years.

R. Tanhuma interpreted it (מסיק) with regard to (their sin of) lightheartedness. R. Hama b. Hanina (said): because they boasted and said 'we will destroy this place' (Gen. 19:13). When did they return? On this occasion: 'ascending and descending', ascending first and afterwards descending.

R. Joshua b. Levi interpreted Scripture with reference to the exiles (פתר קריא בגליות):

*And Jacob went out* (ויצא, Gen. 28:10), is meant as in the verse 'cast them out of my sight and let them go forth' (ויצאו, Jer. 15:1):

*And he went to Haran* (חרנה, Gen. 28:10), is meant as in the verse 'which the Lord inflicted on the day of His fierce anger' (חרתן, Lam. 1:12);

*And he reached the place* (מקום, Gen. 28:11), is meant as in the verse 'until there is no more space (מקום, Is. 5:8);

*And he stayed there that night because the sun had set* (Gen. 28:11), is meant as in the verse 'She who bore seven has languished, she has swooned away, her sun went down' (Jer. 15:9);

*And he took from the stones of the place* (Gen. 28:11), is meant as in the verse 'The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street' (Lam. 4:1);

*And he put it under his head* (Gen. 28:11), is meant as in the verse 'because (the crown) has come down from your head' (Jer. 13:18);

*And he lay down in that place to sleep* (Gen. 28:11), is meant as in the verse 'let us lie down in our shame and let our dishonour cover us' (Jer. 3:25);

*And he dreamt* (Gen. 28:12) refers to (זה) Nebuchadnezzar's image (צלם, Dan. 3:1), for 'image' (סמל) is identical with 'ladder' (סלם);

*Set up on the earth* (ibid.), is meant as in the verse 'He set it up on the plain of Dora (Dan. 3:1);

*And the top of it reached to heaven* (Gen. 28:12), is meant as in the verse 'its height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits' (Dan. 3:1);

*And behold the angles of God* (Gen. 28:12), refers to (זה) Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah;

*Ascending and descending* (עלים וירדים, Gen. 28:12), they were exalting and humbling him (נו ומורידים בו), they were dancing and leaping and scoffing, as it says 'Be it known to you, o king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up' (Dan. 3:19);

*And behold, the Lord stood above it* (Gen. 28:13), he said to Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah: 'servants of the Most High come forth and come here' (Dan. 3:26).

When considering the first group of interpreters, from R. Levi to R. Hama b. Hanina, it becomes clear that they regard the contents of Jacob's dream purely as a piece of Scripture. They select the item 'angels' for closer commentary and associate their ideas regarding the fate of the heavenly entourage. It is obvious that they could have presented the same interpretations had the angels been mentioned outside the context of a dream in a regular narrative. Also R. Jehoshua b. Levi's subsequent interpretation is introduced as exegesis of Scripture (קריא) and it indeed involves also the exegesis of biblical narrative before the report of Jacob's dream. Yet he is also said to have 'solved' (פתר) the whole passage in question 'with

reference to the exiles'. This introduction is phrased in terminology so typical of dream interpretation that one immediately wonders whether R. Joshua b. Levi will in fact apply oneirocritical methods and regard the whole text as a dream-text. This would be all the more remarkable in view of the above-mentioned fact that only the second part of the biblical passage commented on contains Jacob's dream, while the first part is a normal narrative.

The most obvious and significant oneirocritical feature of R. Joshua b. Levi's interpretation appears at its opening. The fact that he is said to have 'solved Scripture with reference to the exiles' provides the hermeneutic key for the whole subsequent interpretation. It establishes that all the biblical items, whether or not they are part of the dream, will be shown to relate to this historical phenomenon. Unlike the two previous solutions of Jacob's dream, this initial decipherment is not derived from the symbolical meaning of the item 'ladder'. It might partly be based on the frequent rabbinic identification of the person of Jacob with the whole people of Israel, but it mostly appears to constitute the abstract conclusion of the following interpretations. A variety of exegetical methods are subsequently used in order to explicate the references to the various exiles concealed in the biblical passage.

The start of the biblical passage—'and Jacob went out'—is deciphered as an allusion to the Babylonian exile. This reading is substantiated by reference to Jeremiah's confessions in which the verb יָצָא recurs. In the prophetic context, this expression is not only mentioned in the framework of God's punishment of exile looming over the sinful nation, but also in connection with שָׁלוֹחַ, and thus in a distinctly negative tone. In comparison to the previous solutions of Jacob's dream, it emerges that the present interpreter goes beyond establishing an analogy between the respective expressions. Rather than limiting himself to identifying the original item in the same sense, yet in a context more congenial to his exegetical intentions, he takes a more atomistic approach. He focuses on the actual letters of the relevant word and disregards both its grammatical form (singular) and its overall meaning (voluntary departure) more than in the solutions discussed above. The relatively greater exegetical freedom of this interpretation may rest on the fact that the verse in question is a plain narrative passage and not part of Jacob's dream. The interpreter has nevertheless integrated it into his overall oneirocritical interpretation and invests it with characteristics of a dream-text. It is only in the substantiation of the text's 'concealed message' that he shows greater independence from oneirocritical standards and thus reveals perhaps a residual awareness of the text's original nature.

Similar exegetical tendencies are observable in the subsequent decipherment of the biblical passage. Thus the expression, 'and he went to Haran', is by way of paronomasia understood as an indication of the divine anger

through which Israel's sins are punished with the Babylonian exile.<sup>66</sup> The sense of the following, 'and he reached the place', is even inverted in the interpretation and associated with the Isaian phrase, 'until there is no more space'. In this case, the value of the proof-text emerges only from its context, since it appears in the framework of a series of woes on the corrupt upper classes whose sin will cause exile for the whole nation (Is. 5:25–30). The remaining identification of biblical items with exile scenes rests on the contiguity of the respective expressions in the proof-texts. These procedures clearly correspond to other oneirocritical interpretations of biblical dreams which we encountered above. This is, however, the first time we meet the phenomenon of a piece of plain narrative being incorporated into an oneirocritical interpretation and thus being itself treated as a dream-text.

The last seven decipherments in the above passage do pertain to the contents of Jacob's dream and all concern Daniel and his companions. The first two correlations between the respective biblical items and the Babylonian exile are established by a straight proposition of their identity (זה). They are unsupported by biblical proof-texts,<sup>67</sup> but in the second case a linguistic explanation is provided. Thus it is pointed out that the term צלם (Dan. 3:1) is to be substituted by its synonym סמל, which should be read anagrammatically as סלם (Gen. 28:11). The other decipherments all rest more or less well on biblical proof-texts.<sup>68</sup> The interpreter moreover provides a narrative whose fullness and coherence is beyond previous oneirocritical interpretations so far encountered. He thus depicts the martyrs in a highly engaging way and creates something of a moral to the story.

It is thus in this interpretation of R. Joshua b. Levi that oneirocritical and scriptural exegesis are interwoven to an unprecedented degree. We come for the first time across the term 'solution of Scripture', which indicates an oneirocritical exegesis of any biblical text. It is in this context of the interpretation of Jacob's dream that the contiguity of the Petira and oneirocriticism becomes particularly clear. In the following, I shall proceed to examine the Petira more generally and when applied to biblical texts without any connection to dream reports.

One of the reasons for the relative neglect of the Petira in modern scholarship may be the fact that it occurs less frequently and is less consistently formalized than other exegetical methods, such as the Mashal. In later midrashic works the Petira moreover converges sometimes with the

<sup>66</sup> This is done on the assumption that the book of Lamentation was also composed by the prophet Jeremiah. This rabbinic tradition is based on II Chron. 35:25.

<sup>67</sup> Note that the analogous reading of Pharaoh's and Nebuchadnezzar's dreams is quite common in the Midrash; see e.g. GR 1091–2.

<sup>68</sup> Note that the proof-texts are not always so well suited that they use exactly the same biblical expression. Thus, for example, the expression 'set up on the earth' is explained by reference to the phrase 'on the plain of Dura'.

far more simple exegetical technique of ... הכתוב מדבר<sup>69</sup> and might even border on the Mashal.<sup>70</sup> It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the nature of the Petira eluded even those scholars who did pay some attention to it. P. Bloch thus defines the phenomenon misleadingly as a 'concretization of abstract terms'.<sup>71</sup> I. Heinemann, criticizing P. Bloch's conclusions,<sup>72</sup> emphasizes instead that the Petira often provides an allegorical meaning of the text.<sup>73</sup> He moreover alludes to the similarity between the allegorical interpretation in the Petira and the deciphering of symbols in oneirocriticism.<sup>74</sup> More recently, L. H. Silberman examined the features of the Petira in the light of *PHab* and pointed to the likeness of their exegetical methods: 'It is immediately apparent that in structure this midrash (the Petira) is parallel to *Hab. Peshar*<sup>75</sup> ... The term (פתר) introduces the specific point of reference from which the entire verse is to be understood. This specification seems to be entirely arbitrary, or rather it is not necessarily connected with any word in the text. But once this specification is made, all the rest falls into line.'<sup>76</sup> At the same time he indicates what he considers to be the most significant difference between this genre of Midrash and the Peshar, namely the absence in the former of 'contemporizing content'.<sup>77</sup>

When investigating the nature and the exegetical function of the Petira in aggadic Midrash, we may first note that the various forms of the term פתר פתריא or פתריא קריה occur 116 times in these works. The expounders of this method are usually Palestinian Amoraic teachers, and especially R. Johanan (A1), R. Joshua b. Levi (A1), R. Judah b. Simon (A4), R. Abahu (A3) and R. Isaac (A3). The most outstanding feature of these Petirot is the fact that the interpretation of the biblical text is introduced by first providing a general hermeneutic key and then decomposing the text into individual items, which are each transposed into a coherent sequence of historical

<sup>69</sup> E.g. *LevR* IV, 1.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. *LevR* XXIII, 4-5.

<sup>71</sup> P. Bloch, 'Studien zur Aggadah', *MGWJ* 34 (1885), 264-9 and 385-92. See esp. p. 267: 'Die homiletische Auslegung selbst, die mit der פתריא-Formel eingeführt wird, ist durchwegs nichts anderes als Individualisierung, anschauliche Präzisierung oder Besinnlichung, d.h. sie führt den allgemeinen, unbestimmten, begrifflichen Inhalt des Textverses auf ein individuell bestimmtes, klar anschauliches Motiv zurück, so daß dem abstrakten Textgedanken ein konkreter Fall unterlegt wird, dessen hervorstechende Merkmale aus dem homiletisch behandelten Worten wie aus einem Spiegel widerscheinen ...'

<sup>72</sup> I. Heinemann, 'Altjüdische Allegoristik', in *Bericht des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars* (1935), 18.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* 19.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* 19: 'Vielmehr ergibt sich die abgeleitete Bedeutung des Wortes [Petira] ... aus seiner Grundbedeutung "einen Traum deuten". Und der Sprachgebrauch zeigt, wie deutlich die hebräische Sprache den Zusammenhang zwischen Traumdeutung und Allegoristik empfindet ...'

<sup>75</sup> Italics are his. Bracketed insertions, however, are mine.

<sup>76</sup> *op. cit.* 328.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.* 329.

facts. Particularly popular identifications in the Petira are the figures of Abraham<sup>78</sup> and Moses,<sup>79</sup> the tribes<sup>80</sup> and Israel as a whole.<sup>81</sup> The items of the biblical text are thus hardly ever identified with other fictional or contemporary items.<sup>82</sup> The Petira is moreover one-directional in its exegesis, because it leads away from the *Vorlage* to a concealed sequence of facts. Unlike the Mashal and the Peticha it does not lead back to the biblical text and thus it does not function in the usual sense of the word as an illustration of the original context.

The second Parasha of *GR* is all devoted to the biblical phrase והארץ היתה תהו ובהו (Gen. 1:2). Several non-literal interpretations are provided here for this sentence, among them also two Petirot. The reason why this phrase was considered so problematical and thus evoked laborious solutions may be reflected in some of the polemical references to it on other occasions. We hear for example in *GR* 8 that a certain philosopher relied on this phrase when he provoked Rabban Gamliel with the assertion that even according to Scripture God created the world from pre-existent stuff. He was thus able to point out that the תהו ובהו is in fact not among those objects which are explicitly said to have been created in the beginning. Although this thesis is immediately repudiated by the rabbi, it must have exercised a certain spell over the minds of many contemporaries, and it was obviously not easy to eradicate everybody's doubts. Thus in *GR* 3, for example, this discussion is again echoed when R. Jose bar Chanina illustrates the sin of insulting the deity in the following way: 'According to the custom of the world the king of flesh and blood builds his palace on gutter and on dunghill and on garbage. Anyone who comes along and says "this palace is built on gutter and on dunghill and on garbage" does certainly cause injury. So anyone who comes along and says "this world is created from תהו ובהו, does he not cause injury?!" We may gather how problematical this biblical phrase remained when we consider R. Huna's concluding remarks in this context. He says in the name of Bar Kappara: 'Had this not been written down in Scripture it would be impossible to say it: "in the beginning God created", whence? "and the world was תהו ובהו".'

Against this background it is understandable that special efforts are devoted to the interpretation of Gen. 1:2. In the following I shall examine the two Petirot more closely and pay special attention to the difference between these solutions and other non-literal expositions of the verse.

<sup>78</sup> E.g.: *LevR* X, 1; idem XI, 5; *Song of Songs RI*, 22; idem VIII, 10; *PsR* XVIII, 22.

<sup>79</sup> E.g.: *RuthR* Peticha; idem II, 18; *QohR* X, 15; *PsR* XVIII, 22.

<sup>80</sup> E.g.: *LevR* IV, 1; *QohR* IV, 5.

<sup>81</sup> E.g.: *RuthR* Peticha; idem VII, 11; *QohR* III, 11; idem IV, 3; *Tanh* V, 1; *PsR* XVI, 12; idem XXIII, 7; *PRC* II, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Exceptions to this rule are, e.g.: *LevR* IX, 3 פתר קרא בתלמידי חכמים; *LevR* XXIII, 7 פתר קריא בלשון הרע; *QohR* V, 3 פתר קריא באדם שיש לו שתי בנות.

## GR 15–16:

*Now the earth was unformed* (תהו ובהו, Gen. 1:2) R. Judah b. R. Simon interpreted the text as referring to the generations (פּתַר קַרְיִיָּה בְדוֹרוֹת).

*Now the earth was unformed* (ibid.) this refers (זוה) to Adam, who was reduced to naught and nothing (לִלְמָה וּבְלִיּוֹם).

*And void* (ibid.) refers (זוה) to Cain, who desired to return the world back to formlessness and void (תהו ובהו).

*And darkness* (ibid.) refers to (זוה) the generation of Enosh: 'and their works are in the dark' (Is. 26:15).

*Upon the face of the deep* (Gen. 1:2) refers to (זוה) the generation of the flood: 'on the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up (Gen. 7:11);

*And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:2) corresponds to 'and God made a wind to pass over the earth' (Gen. 8:1).

Said the Holy One Blessed Be He: how long shall the universe go in darkness, let the light come on!

*And God said: let there be light!* (Gen. 1:3), this refers to (זוה) Abraham, as it is written: 'who has raised up one from the east?' (Is. 41:2).

*And God called the light day* (Gen. 1:5) refers to (זוה) Jacob;

*And the darkness He called night* (ibid.) refers to (זוה) Esau;

*And there was evening* (ibid.) refers to (זוה) Esau;

*And there was morning* (ibid.) refers to (זוה) Jacob.

*One day* (ibid.) as the Holy One Blessed Be He gave him one day: and which is that? The Day of Atonement.

By now well familiar with oneirocriticism, we are easily able to identify the technical terminology used here: the introductory formula ... פּתַר קַרְיִיָּה בְ... and the almost consistent use of the demonstrative pronoun זוה clearly mark this interpretation as oneirocritical. Conforming to the known standards, R. Judah b. R. Simon thus interprets the biblical passage in light of a coherent historical framework. In comparison to the preceding Petirot it is noteworthy that he constructs his interpretation according to a clear chronological order: beginning with Adam, proceeding to Cain and leading up to Jacob. This sequence not only represents a temporal progression from earlier generations to later ones, but also a moral development from sinful to righteous existence.<sup>83</sup> R. Judah b. Simon is in fact so concerned with the metaphysical dimension of this historical framework that he interrupts the usual structure of the Petira and inserts a divine exclamation. This sentence—'how long shall the universe go in darkness, let the light come on!'—divides the Petira into two distinct parts<sup>84</sup> and provides an additional *Leitmotif* for the whole interpretation.

<sup>83</sup> Compare this Petira to other interpretations which exhibit a clear consciousness of progress in history, such as GR 101–5. See also G. Scholem, *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970), 121–67.

<sup>84</sup> Note also that the first part of the Petira interprets Gen. 1:2 whereas the second relates to Gen. 1:3 and 1:5.

The decipherment of the individual items in the biblical passage is based on various exegetical methods, ranging from linguistic explanations to symbolical interpretation. In the first case, regarding Adam, the interpreter uses the targumic renderings of *תהו* and *בהו* in Gen. 1:2 and Is. 50:23 etc.<sup>85</sup> His statement that 'Adam was reduced to naught and nothing' doubtlessly refers to his debasement after the fall in the Garden of Eden. It moreover reflects other Midrashim which maintain that because 'man cannot abide in his pomp' (Ps. 49:13), Adam was deprived of his radiance (*נטל זיוו*) and banished from Eden already on the first day (*GR* 88). It echoes also other Midrashim which suggest that Adam's sin was punished with six defects:<sup>86</sup> (lack of) his radiance, his immortality, his infinite dimensions, the produce of the land, the fruits of the tree and the luminaries (*GR* 102–5).

R. Judah b. Simon indicates also Cain's sin with reference to the biblical expression *תהו ובהו*, thus establishing a certain parallel between their cases.<sup>87</sup> Cain's fratricide is presumably said to 'bring the world back to formlessness and void' because his murder corrupts the whole of humanity and sets an example from which others might learn (*GR* 218). The subsequent interpretation of 'darkness' as a reference to the generation of Enosh is substantiated by a prophetic proof-text, which asserts that 'their works were in the dark'. It thus provides the context for understanding darkness as a symbol for vice. Yet it does not specifically link the generation of Enosh with this wickedness. Judah b. Simon's decipherment thus appears to rest implicitly on the rabbinic assumption that 'when the Holy One Blessed Be He saw that the deeds of the generation of Enosh and the deeds of the generation of the Flood and the deeds of the generation of the Separation were corrupt, He rose and removed the light from them, as it is said "from the wicked their light is withheld" (Job 38:15)'.<sup>88</sup>

The two following biblical phrases, 'upon the face of the deep' and 'the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1:2), are identified here as references to the generation of the Flood. In both cases the correlation is justified by proof-texts, in which the central term, *תהום* in the former and *רוח* in the latter, occur in the context of the Flood. According to R. Judah b. Simon, the Dark Ages of Israelite history come to an end with this sinful generation, and from then on more enlightened times were witnessed. These later generations are pointed out as worthier because outstanding individuals, such as Abraham and Jacob, were dominant over the sinners, such as Esau. Regarding the identification of the twin brothers,

<sup>85</sup> See Ch. Albeck, *GR* 16.

<sup>86</sup> *ששה דברים שנטלו מאדם הראשון*.

<sup>87</sup> Note that on other occasions also such a comparison between father and son is made and naturally decided in clear favour of Adam. See e.g. *GR* 218.

<sup>88</sup> This tradition is preserved in Ms Oxford 2335 and Ms Munich 97 to *GR* 103. On the background of the highly critical attitude towards Enoch's generation in the Midrash, see also St. D. Fraade, *Enosh and his Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (Scholars Press, 1984), 109–227 and esp. 148.

the interpreter relies also here on the symbolical significance of the light, taking 'light' and 'morning' as references to Jacob and 'darkness' and 'evening' as references to Esau. In the case of Abraham, on the other hand, he applies an anagrammatical reading of Jes. 41:2, **מי העיר ממזרה צדק**, and substitutes **העיר** by **האיר**.<sup>89</sup>

It thus emerges from the above analysis that R. Judah b. Simon 'solved' the problematic phrase in Gen. 1:2 by applying it to the generations from Adam to Jacob. Obviating mistaken speculations concerning the **תהו ובהו**, he thus affirms that the phrase is not relevant to the discussion about the creation of the world. He argues that it was nevertheless included in the biblical account because it conceals important insights into Israelite history. Echoing some rabbinic statements<sup>90</sup> and early oneirocriticism in general, he might in fact have implied that the outlined sequence of the generations was already foreshadowed in Gen. 1:2.

The second Petira of Gen. 1:2 is preserved in *GR* 16–17 and reads as follows:

R. Simon b. Lakish interpreted the text as referring to the powers (**פטר** **קרייה במלכויות**).

*Now the earth was unformed* (Gen. 1:2) refers to (זו) Babylonia: 'I beheld the earth, and lo, it was unformed' (**תהו ובהו**), Jer. 4:23).

*And void* (**בהו**, Gen. 1:2) refers to (זה) Media: 'they hastened (**ויבהילו**) to bring Haman' (Est. 6:14).

*And darkness* (Gen. 1:2) refers to (זו) Greece, which darkened the eyes of Israel with its decrees, ordering Israel 'write on the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the God of Israel'.

*Upon the face of the deep* (Gen. 1:2) refers to (זו) the Wicked kingdom: just as the great deep cannot be plumbed, so one cannot plumb (the depths of iniquity) of this wicked kingdom.

*And the spirit of God hovered* (Gen. 1:2) refers to (זה) the spirit of the Messiah, as it is written: 'and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him' (Is. 11:2). In the merit of what will the spirit eventually come? For the sake of that which hovered over the face of the waters, i.e. in the merit of repentance which is likened to water, as it is written: 'pour out your heart like water' (Lam. 11:19).

R. Simon b. Lakish builds his Petira of Gen. 1:2 on the well known motive of the four kingdoms which ruled over and oppressed Israel.<sup>91</sup> This motive is indeed so popular that it is used already in the interpretation of Gen. 15:12 in the *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*. Also in that interpretation, concealed references to the four kingdoms are identified in the biblical text. The exegesis there resembles the above Petira so much that it deserves our closer attention:<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> reading **האיר** for **העיר**, as suggested by Ms London 16406 on *GR* 16.

<sup>90</sup> E.g.: *GR* 101–5; *bSan* 38b, etc.

<sup>91</sup> See also e.g. *GR* 439 etc.

<sup>92</sup> Ed. H. S. Horovitz.

He (God) also showed him (הַרְאָהוּ) the four kingdoms which will oppress his children, as it is written 'and it came to pass that when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham, and lo, a dread, even a great darkness was falling upon him' (Gen. 15:12).

*A Dread* refers to (וַי) the Babylonian Empire; *Great* refers to (וַי) the empire of Media; *Darkness* refers to (וַי) the Greek Empire; *Was falling* refers to (וַי) the fourth empire, wicked Rome.

There are some who reverse the order by saying: *Was falling* refers to (וַי) the Babylonian Empire, as it is said: 'fallen, fallen is Babylon' (Is. 21:9); *Great* refers to (וַי) the empire of Media, as it is said 'king Ahasuerus made great' (Est. 3:1); *Darkness* refers to (וַי) the Greek Empire which caused the eyes of Israel to become dark from fasting; *A Dread* refers to (וַי) the fourth kingdom, as it is said 'dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly' (Dan. 7:7).

It is quite obvious that the 'anonymous interpreters' attitude to the *Vorlage* is typical of oneirocriticism: they explicitly present the biblical text as a cryptogram which foreshadows future events, and they also decode it by isolating individual items and establishing the symbolic meaning of each. The passage is in both interpretations understood with reference to the overall framework of the four kingdoms. Whereas the first consists of straight propositions of analogy, the second also supplied proof-texts. It is clear that the above Petira has a sophisticated structure similar to the latter. It is also obvious that its explanations become increasingly more free. The first identification of תהו ובהו with Babylon is thus justified by a proof-text in which the identical expression occurs in the context of the Babylonian exile. The second is based on a paronomasial reading of the applied proof-text and the last two justifications consist of general remarks, one which is also preserved on other occasions.<sup>93</sup> It is moreover important to note that on the basis of the phrase 'the spirit of God hovered', the Petira further provides the interpretation with a clear linear orientation and a moral framework.

We will best be able to appreciate the nature of the above Petira when we compare this solution of Gen. 1:2 to two metaphorical interpretations of the same verse.<sup>94</sup> In contrast to the Petira, they construct a fictive reality around the biblical passage which is then reapplied as an illustration to the expression תהו ובהו.

It thus says in GR 15:

*Now the earth was tohu* (Gen. 1:2)

R. Abbahu and R. Judah b. R. Simon.

R. Abbahu said: this may be compared to the case of a king who bought two slaves on the same bill of sale and at the same price. One he ordered to be supported at the public expense, while the other he ordered to toil for his

<sup>93</sup> GR 439, for example, preserves the same tradition.

<sup>94</sup> On the Mashal, see esp.: O. Eissfeldt, *Der Maschal im Alten Testament* (Giessen, 1913); D. Stern, 'Rhetoric and Midrash: The Case of the Mashal', *Prooftexts* 1 (1981), 261-91; T. Guttman, המשל בתקופת התנאים, (Jerusalem, 1949).

bread. The latter sat bewildered and astonished (תוהא ובהא). Both of us were bought at the same price, exclaimed he, yet he is supported from the treasury whilst I have to gain my bread by my toil. Thus the earth sat bewildered and astonished (תוהא ובהא), saying: the celestial beings are fed by the radiance of the Shechina, whereas the terrestrial beings, if they do not toil, they do not eat. Strange it is indeed!

This may be compared to a royal infant sleeping in his cot while his nurse sat by anxious and troubled (תוהא ובהא). Why? Because she knew that she was fated to receive punishment at his hand. Thus, the earth foresaw that she was destined to meet her doom at the hand of man, as it is written 'Cursed is the ground for your sake' (Gen. 3:17). Therefore the earth was *tohu* and *bohu*.

This metaphorical interpretation of Gen. 1:28 clearly exemplifies the important differences between the *Mashal* and the *Petira* and, more generally, between *oneirocritical* and other textual exegesis. It emerges that in the above exposition R. Abbahu creates a fictional narrative which he juxtaposes to the biblical passage in question. Relying on a keyword shared by both, he then suggests that the meaning of the metaphor is to be applied to the *Vorlage* and Gen. 1:2 to be understood in this new, fictive sense. In contrast to this procedure, the *Petira* initially decomposes the biblical text into individual items which are according to a hermeneutic key 'translated' into a coherent series of historical facts. As we saw earlier, this type of exegesis is one-directional in the sense that it establishes a simple correlation between a text and a factual reality. It thus proceeds, like a letter, from one *locus* to the other.