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The Captive Woman: Hellenization, Greco-Roman Erotic Narrative, and Rabbinic Literature

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Abstract This essay explores the impact of Greco-Roman erotic narrative on Rabbinic literature. Two specific cases of influence are explored. The first treats the influence of a specific character type and plot convention derived from the Greco-Roman novel—the beautiful but innocent and sexually chaste protagonist who is sexually tormented—on the construction of martyrological narratives in Rabbinic literature that also use the erotic ordeal as their central focus. The second analyzes a Rabbinic midrash of Deuteronomy 21:10–14 (the laws dealing with the beautiful woman taken captive in war) that is based on a kind of implied narrative derived as well—so this article argues—from Greco-Roman erotic narratives of the kind found in Parthenius' *Peri Erotikon Pathematon*. Indeed, not only is the midrash based on the conventions of this erotic narrative; the Rabbis may also have used the erotic narrative as a kind of foundational myth upon which they represented their own relationship to the pagan world in which they lived.

Among the many instances of Hellenistic influence on classical Judaism that scholars have studied over the last century, the impact of Greco-Roman narrative on Rabbinic literature has attracted little attention. The reasons for this might seem obvious. First, no prominent signs exist that

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the Rabbis were ever influenced significantly by Greco-Roman narrative. The familiar genres of Greco-Roman narrative are all but absent from Rabbinic texts. The Rabbis wrote no epics or lyric poems, no tragedies or comedies or other dramatic works, and no lengthier prose forms like the “philosophical” dialogue or the novel. Despite the Rabbis’ predilection for using stories in their biblical interpretations and to corroborate legal rulings, they show little overt interest in the art of narrative, let alone any conscious awareness of poetics or rhetoric that would connect them to their Greek or Roman contemporaries. There does not even exist in Rabbinic thought a clear sense of fiction as a modality of literary art.

Even so, there may be reason to reconsider the question and to look for possible avenues of influence or exchange between Greco-Roman culture and Rabbinic Judaism in the realm of narrative art. Almost fifty years ago Saul Lieberman pointed out that some Rabbis almost certainly read and knew Greco-Roman literature even if they never actually quoted from it (1950: 105–13). In the midst of a discussion about heretical books, Rabbi Akiba was said to remark, “He who reads the books of Homer (*sifrei hameiras*) . . . is considered like one who reads a secular document (*igeret*, i.e., a permissible book)” (J. Sanhedrin 10.1, 28a; see Lieberman 1950: 109)—suggesting at least a passing familiarity with such texts. Indeed, the phrase, “the books of Homer” may very well be a generic name for pagan literature, not solely or specifically the works of Homer.¹

Over the last half century Lieberman’s claim has been confirmed by a series of studies that have demonstrated the subtle but decisive impact of Greco-Roman literary art on the products of the Rabbinic narrative imagination. This is most apparent in various genres of the short narrative, like the fable, parable, and *chreia* or anecdote (Schwartzbaum 1965; Flusser 1979: 204–9; Fischel 1969; D. Stern 1991: 4–13), but it is also evident in parallels between Greco-Roman myths and various *aggadot* or legends of the Rabbis (Halevi 1972; Lachs 1974), and in analogous attitudes toward the ancient past in both classical myth in late antiquity and in Rabbinic aggadah, which point to a different aspect of the process of cultural exchange and influence (D. Stern 1996: 91–93).

In this essay, I extend this line of investigation by considering the influence of another type of Greco-Roman narrative, the erotic tale. The erotic narrative is found in Greco-Roman literature in several overlapping sub-

1. All references to the Talmud are either to the Babli, the Babylonian Talmud (henceforth cited as B.) in the Romm (Wilna, 1880–86) edition, cited by tractate and folio; or to the Yerushalmi, the Talmud of Jerusalem, also known as the Palestinian Talmud (henceforth cited as J.) in the Krotoshin 1866 edition (reprinted, Jerusalem 1969), cited by tractate, halakhah, and folio. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

genres, whose boundaries are at once fluid and porous; as I hope to point out, at least two of these related genres exercised a significant impact on Rabbinic Judaism, not only in the realm of narrative but also in some of the deep structures of Rabbinic Judaism, namely, the very categories and conceptualizations that shaped its formation as a culture.

The first of these narrative genres is that of the Greco-Roman novel, the form commonly known as the Greek romance. The topic of the ancient novel has recently become a kind of academic phenomenon, inspiring a mass of new scholarship (for recent bibliographies, see Bowie and Harrison 1993; Stephens and Winkler 1995). As its name suggests, the ancient romance is a love story, actually a kind of love-and-adventure story, written mainly in prose, which seems to have flourished in the first five centuries in the common era, at least from the evidence of the remaining complete novels, Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirohoe*, Heliodorus' *Ethiopica*, Xenophon's *Ephesica or Ephesian Tale*, and Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*; exactly how far back the novel as a genre can be traced remains a matter of considerable debate.² Although the genre has several variants, the basic plot of the "ideal" novel (see Hägg 1983: 5–80) can be summed up as follows: A pair of characters, generally an exceptionally handsome youth and an equally beautiful maiden, meet, fall in love at first sight, often marry each other, and then are separated and forced to undergo a series of harrowing "adventures"—shipwreck, kidnapping, slavery and persecutions by ruthless pirates, cruel soldiers, brothelkeepers, and avaricious merchants, all of whose unwanted sexual attention they repeatedly attract—until, at the novel's end, they are finally reunited, often by a coincidence that turns out to be an instance of divine providence, and they live happily ever after (Konstan 1994: 14). There are no full-length or complete novels of this kind in Jewish literature of any period. The closest thing to such a romance may be *Joseph and Asenath* but here the romance plot has clearly been transformed and combined with other genres like the "conversion-narrative" (Burchard 1982: 182–84 especially; West 1974: 70–81; Wills 1995: 170–84). Still, elements of the romance and motifs associated with it, which previously cannot be found in Jewish literature, can be seen in a number of early post-biblical literary works, i.e., the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife as retold and "novelized" in The Testament of Joseph, wherein the

2. For English translations of the texts, see Reardon 1989 and Stephens and Winkler 1995; for a convenient summary of the dating of the different works, see Reardon's introduction, 5–6. Note that I do not include in my discussion in this essay the entire tradition of "historical" or "nationalist" romances, works that include the Ninus Romance, the Cyropaedia, the Alexander Romance (in both its pagan and Jewish versions) and the so-called Moses Romance; see Braun 1938: 1–43; Wills 1995: 185–211.

biblical tale was conflated with the classical story of Hippolytus and Phaedra in order to represent the erotic confrontation between the chaste youth and the lascivious older woman (Braun 1938: 44–104); the Book of Judith, which recasts its Yael-like protagonist as an erotic figure who exploits her sexual powers to save her nation (Hadas 1972 [1959]: 153–59, 165–69); the story of Susanna, which focuses on a beautiful and innocent heroine who is made to undergo an erotic test (Pervo 1991); and other works such as the Genesis Apocryphon’s “hellenization” of the story of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Cohen 1981). Indeed, one scholar has recently sought to identify an entire genre of “the Jewish novel” in antiquity, which he perceives as closely related, in both its origins and poetics, to the Greco-Roman novel (Wills 1995: 16–28).

All this attests to the fact that the genre of the romance may well have penetrated the Jewish world in late antiquity. The extent and actual manifestations of this penetration remain unclear; it may have happened through direct familiarity with specific works of romance, or from some oral/aural or more popular exposure, or through even less specifiable modes of cultural diffusion. It would be easier to answer these questions of reception if we knew more about the history of the Greco-Roman genre or how widely read the novels themselves were (Stephens 1994; Bowie 1994). For our purposes, in any case, the novel in its full-blown shape is less significant than its distinctive motifs, narrative conventions, and character types—for example, the motif of love at first sight; the plot convention of the young man seduced or tempted by an older woman; and various other versions of triangular love-situations in which fidelity becomes the central test of virtue, no matter if the type of fidelity (and the motive for the young man’s rejection of the temptress) is loyalty to a wife or to a lover or to a religious principle.

Of all these elements, the most important is the specific character type represented by the romance protagonist. This character type, almost invariably, is characterized in the following three ways: first, as being extraordinarily physically attractive (he or she is regularly described as “the most beautiful” maiden or “the most handsome” youth in the world); second, as possessing an equivalent “inner beauty,” or goodness, which typically takes the form of an innocence bordering on naivete; and third, as a result of the first two features, these characters show a proclivity for becoming entangled in undesired sexually charged dilemmas (Pervo 1991). The logic behind this combination is simple. Because these characters are so physically attractive, everyone who sets eyes on them (male or female) wants to sleep with them; but the characters, because of their fidelity to their true love or their high-minded religious principles, have no interest

in sex. Hence their “adventures,” namely, the sexual ordeals these characters must suffer through.

What typifies these characters, then, is a conflict between innate piety or fidelity (either to a lover or a nation or a religious belief) and physical beauty that tends to entrap them in erotic tests they must pass to survive. As many scholars have noted (Delehayé 1961 [1907]: 3–4; Perry 1967: 285–93; Hägg 1983: 154–65; Pervo 1987: 121–36; Cameron 1991: 89–119), this character type along with many novelistic motifs makes its way into early Christian literature, particularly works of early Christian hagiography and martyrology like the Acts of Paul and Thecla and the Martyrdoms of Felicity and Perpetua, where the Greek novel’s erotic ordeal is invested with overt religious connotations (Brown 1988: 154–59).

The same process of development can be witnessed in Rabbinic hagiography and martyrological narratives. For example, the Babylonian Talmud (Gittin 58a) recounts the story of one Tsafnat bat Peniel, a name whose punning meaning, as the Talmud itself explains, points to both the woman’s extraordinary beauty (*shehakol tsofim beyofyah*, “for all admire her beauty”) and her pious genealogy (as the daughter of the High Priest who served *lifnei velifnim*, in the Holy of Holies and in God’s own presence). Both features—her beauty and her piety—typify the romance protagonist, and it is no less in character for this Tsafnat, as we are told happened, to have been taken captive and raped by a battalion (*gedud*) of Roman soldiers, then sold as a slave to an “extraordinarily ugly” man (another convention of the novel), although even before he can strip off her clothes, she falls to the ground, covers herself in dust, and prays to God for salvation. The Talmud never tells us if her prayers are answered, but such prayers are, again, conventions of the genre.

Another example of the same character type—with its uneasy combination of sexual magnetism and devout piety—can be found in the legend of the martyrdom of Rabbi Ishmael in the late text Midrash Eleh Ezkerah, also known as the Legend of the Ten Martyrs. This sage, “one of the seven most handsome men who ever lived” and “as handsome in appearance as the angel Gabriel” (who, according to the legend, may also have been the sage’s real father!), is condemned to death as a martyr. As he goes to his execution, we are told, the Roman emperor’s daughter looks out of the window, sees the sage, and is so instantly smitten with love that she begs her father, the emperor, to spare the sage’s life. When the emperor refuses, she asks that the skin be stripped off the sage’s face and given to her to use as a mirror [sic] (the idea apparently being that his appearance was so literally luminous, she could actually see her reflection in it!) (Reeg 1985: 48–52; translated in Stern and Mirsky 1990: 151–52). This episode is remi-

niscent of the story of Salome (Mark 6:21–28), but in that tale, Salome’s request for John’s head is motivated by desire for revenge. In our passage, it is erotic, albeit sadistic, desire for the holy man, who maintains his sexual charge even as he goes to his death.

The most fascinating instance of the genre’s transformation on Rabbinic narrative, however, is the story of the two children of Rabbi Tsadok the priest:

An anecdote about the two children of Tsadok the priest who were taken captive, one a male, the other a female. This one fell to one soldier, this one to another soldier. The first soldier went to a prostitute and gave her the male; the second went to a storekeeper and gave him the female in exchange for some wine, in order to fulfill the verse, as it is written, “And they bartered a boy for a whore and sold a girl for wine, which they drank” (Joel 4:3).

After some days, the prostitute brought the lad to the storekeeper and said to him: Since I have a youth who resembles that girl, do you not wish to mate them with each other, and whatever comes from [their union], we will share. He said to her: Yes. Immediately they took and placed them together in a house. The girl began to cry. The youth said to her: Why are you weeping? She replied: Shall I not cry—that the daughter of the High Priest is going to be married to a slave? He asked her: Whose daughter are you? She answered: The daughter of Tsadok the priest. He said to her: And where do you live? She answered: In the upper market place. He said to her: And what sign was there on your house? She answered: A certain sign. He asked her: Did you have a brother or sister? She replied: A brother, and he had a mole on his shoulder; and when he came home from school, I would uncover it and kiss him. He asked her: And if you saw the mole now, would you recognize (*hakamt*) him? She answered: Yes. He revealed himself (*galei garmeth*), and they recognized (*hakim*) each other, and they embraced and kissed until their souls departed.³

Elsewhere, I have pointed out the similarities between this story and the typical romance narrative (D. Stern 1985; 1991: 244–45). The differences, however, are equally noteworthy: By the end of the typical romance plot, as the reader will recall, the two protagonists who have fallen in love at first sight are, after their unhappy separation and their countless ordeals, happily reunited in marriage. In our story, however, the protagonists are siblings, not lovers, and their threatened incestuous union is the transgressive opposite to happy marriage; indeed, these characters happily die, not marry, at their tale’s conclusion.

3. The text is found in Eikhah Rabbah, the classical midrashic collection on the book of Lamentations as part of a minicollection of martyrological narratives, *ad* Lamentations 1:16 (Buber 1899: 83–84). My translation is based on the text published in Hasan-Rokem 1983: 126–27.

Still, whether or not this story directly reflects the romance plot, its narrative is suffused with the conventions of the Greco-Roman genre. The sale of the protagonists into slavery and/or prostitution is an ordeal ubiquitous in romance, as is the daughter's lament over her fate and its inevitable effect, the arousing of her companion's pity for her. The recognition scene recalls other romance narratives as well as such famous literary moments as the scar episode in the *Odyssey* (bk. 19: 361–502) and the recognition scene in Euripides' *Electra*, in which the protagonist discovers her brother Orestes through his scar; in Sophocles' tragedy of the same name, Electra recognizes her brother by his signet ring. Aside from the youth's mole, our text does not mention the physical appearance of the two characters, but it is worth noting that in the parallel version in the Babylonian Talmud (Gittin 58a), both characters are described as the "most beautiful" and "most handsome" in the world.

The presence of this last convention leads to the most characteristically romancelike feature in the narrative, namely, its erotic tension. As Galit Hasan-Roken has noted, the recognition scene is full of double entendres playing on the ambiguous sense of the words for knowledge and recognition; one certainly cannot fail to recognize the sexual side of the lad's uncovering of his mole or to see the sexual ambiguities of the final moment in which the two siblings embrace each other and kiss as they die (1996: 40–45). What is most romancelike about this, however, is the fact that the sexual innuendo is in the narrative primarily to arouse the reader's curiosity, if not prurient interest. Will the two recognize each other as brother and sister before they do the awful deed? However horrifying the reader may find this eventuality—and this must have been the author's intent—it is clear that for the siblings themselves, there is not a hint in the text that they are ever tempted sexually by each other. The final scene is one of sibling love—agape, not eros—in death. For them, sex is nothing more than the tragic culmination of their doom—the shameful calamity of a priest's child being compelled to marry a slave, as the poor girl laments over herself.

In both its midrashic and Talmudic versions, this story reads more like a plot summary than a fully developed narrative. It is certainly nothing like the elaborate and highly rhetorical works of prose found in Greco-Roman literature.⁴ But its character types, the motifs it uses, the uneasy juxtaposi-

4. The classical texts that most resemble in their form the Rabbinic narratives are the plot summaries found in Parthenius' *Peri Erotikon Pathematon*, which I write about later in this article. The possibility that many narratives found in Rabbinic literature are similar plot summaries—that is, texts intended not for the general reader to be read as "finished" stories, but "skeletons" of stories meant for a preacher who would be expected to "work up" the sum-

tion of sex and piety in the narrative—all these point to the intermingling of conventions associated with Greco-Roman literature, particularly erotic narrative, into Rabbinic culture. As we have also seen, these features have a considerable impact on shaping the construction of the Rabbinic martyr as a literary character; precisely because of its origins, the Rabbinic figure also shares many features with its early Christian counterpart, particularly in regard to its combination of sexual magnetism with pious chastity. Thus, even though it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that Rabbinic texts of the sort I have discussed are “representative” or that they are anything but exceptional texts, their larger cultural significance in ancient Judaism was considerable, far beyond their number.⁵

In the remainder of this essay, I consider a second type of Greco-Roman erotic narrative whose significance for the formation of Rabbinic Judaism was still greater, as I hope to show. This type of narrative, which could be seen as a “sister” narrative to the romance narrative described earlier, is even more difficult to define generically than the romance. It is found in a wide array of Greco-Roman literary works, ranging from the story of Odysseus and Nausicaa in the *Odyssey* (bks. 7–8); the tale of Dido and Aeneas (*Aeneid*, bk. 4); the legend of Tarpeia and Tatius, as related by Propertius (*Elegies*, bk. 4.4); Ovid’s retelling of the story of Nisus and Scylla (*Metamorphoses*, bk. 8); and perhaps most significant of all, in Parthenius’ *Peri Erotikon Pathematon*, a title best translated not as *The Love Romances* (as it appears in the Loeb Classical Library) but as *Disastrous Love Affairs* or

mary in presenting it as part of a sermon or lesson—is a question too large to treat in the context of this article. But works like Parthenius’ may prove in the future to be valuable sources for research into the “formats” of Rabbinic literature—that is, the overall shapes of the literary documents in which the individual traditions are preserved, not just their romancelike generic features. For another text comparable to Parthenius’ collection, see Rusten 1982.

5. For other narratives in Rabbinic literature that contain features of the romance or reflect the influence of its motifs or character types, see: (1) Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan version A, chap. 16 (Schechter 1967 [1887]: 32a) for the stories of Rabbi Zadok and Rabbi Eliezer, as well as the story of Rabbi Akiba discussed later in this essay; (2) B. Kiddushin 39b–40a, for a series of stories about prostitutes who try to seduce various sages, including Rabbi Zadok; (3) the Story of Rabbi Meir and the Innkeeper’s Wife, in *Ma’aseh Berebi Meir* (Jellinek 1967 [1853–57]: 1, 81–83 = Wertheimer 1968, 1: 184–86); (4) the story of Rabbi Meir and his wife Beruriah, preserved only in Rashi *ad* B. Avodah Zarah 18b, which recalls the story of Gyges and Candaules’ wife in Herodotus, *Wars*, bk. 1); (5) the bizarre story of Rabbi Akiba’s pupil and the prostitute, almost a romance in reverse, preserved in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer chap. 4 (Friedmann 1969; supplements, 39–40). Boyarin discusses the story of Rabbi Akiba and his wife as a “historical romance” (1993: 136–38, 150–56), but he is using the term in a more general sense than the one I employ. Note that I am *not* considering every Rabbinic text about sex within the category of the erotic romance narrative: For example, I do not include the tale of Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordia and the courtesan (B. Avodah Zarah 17a) or the famous story about the man wearing *tsitsit* and the courtesan (B. Menahot 44a and Sifre Bamidbar 115).

Fatal Attractions.⁶ A collection of plot summaries of grotesque and otherwise outré legends that Parthenius composed for his patron, Cornelius Gallus, a distinguished general and poet in his own right, who was to use the summaries in his own poems (Gaselee 1962: 251–54; Reardon 1991: 137; on Gallus, see Ross 1975), this work is a neglected but extremely important source for ancient erotic narrative (Gaselee 1962: 408–10). Parthenius' tales (as well as the others I have mentioned) invariably involve a character who is irresistibly attractive, not necessarily to everyone in the world but inevitably so to the one person who should *not* be attracted to him or her; and for that person, the attraction is always disastrous. This type of character, and the kinds of plot situations in which he or she becomes involved are both like and unlike their counterparts in the romance. Thus, in contrast to the typical characters of the romance-narrative—beautiful/innocent figures who are typically persecuted by ugly/traacherous/lust-driven characters—the protagonists in Parthenius' "love disasters" are innocent/love-driven types ruined by beautiful/traacherous (to them) characters. Where the "adventures" in romance tend to take place in the "bourgeois" realm of the private individual, the "parthenian" erotic dilemma frequently has a public, national dimension; the erotic ordeal, for example, frequently involves an act of national treason or betrayal. What all these narratives share, however, is a common obsession with the erotic ordeal as the primary mode of contact through which their leading characters engage the larger world, a world that is explicitly represented as both sexually charged and dangerous. There are no precedents in biblical tradition for this use of the erotic ordeal or test as a focus of narrative, nor any representations of the world as such through an image so inherently and explicitly erotic.

It is precisely these elements of the erotic narrative that became for the Rabbis the essential building blocks of a cultural narrative, a kind of myth or foundational story that helped them explain to themselves their place in the pagan world and their uneasy relationship to that world; indeed, in its transformed shape, this narrative became for the Rabbis one through which they represented their understanding of cultural influence itself. To argue this case, I focus on a text that is not formally a narrative but an example of Rabbinic halakhic (legal) midrash or biblical exegesis.

6. See in particular the following stories in Parthenius: I (Lyrcus); IV (Oenone and Alexander); VII (Hipparinus); VIII (Herippe); IX (Polycrite); X (Leucone); XIV (Antheus); XVII (Periander and His Mother); XXI (Pisidice); and XXII (Chilonis).

For the translations of Parthenius' title, for helping me to identify this second type of erotic narrative and its differences from the romance narrative, and for turning me to several of the texts cited above, I wish to thank my colleague and close friend Joseph Farrell of the Department of Classics at the University of Pennsylvania, whose help in formulating this article has been invaluable.

This midrash is a commentary on the law of the *yefat to'ar*, the “beautiful woman” who is taken captive, as spelled out in Deuteronomy 21: 10–14:

(10) When you take the field against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your power and you take some of them captive, (11) and you see among the captives a beautiful woman (*eshet yefat to'ar*, literally, a woman of beautiful appearance) and you desire her and would take her to wife for yourself, (12) you shall bring her into your house, and she shall trim her head [literally, shave her head, pare (*ve'astah*, literally, do) her nails (13) and discard her captive's garb. She shall spend a month's time in your house lamenting her father and mother; after that you may come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife. (14) Then, should you no longer want her, you must release her outright. You must not sell her for money: you must not enslave her, since you had your will of her. (JPS, revised)

Within its biblical context, this passage appears as one of several laws in a seemingly miscellaneous collection of laws. Initially, at least, the passage as a whole does not present any obvious difficulties or cruxes save one or two obscure expressions like *ve'astah et tsiporneiha* (“do her nails,” verse 12). Nonetheless, the passage was the subject of extensive commentary in late antiquity. In an appendix to this article, I have translated the Tannaitic or early Rabbinic (70 C.E.–250 C.E.) midrashim, or biblical interpretations, to the passage. Most of these interpretations are drawn from Sifre Devarim, a midrashic collection that was probably compiled in the mid- or late-third century; for the basic text, I have used Louis Finkelstein's edition (1969 [1939]), which I have checked against the better text represented in mss. Vatican 32. I have also added some, but *not* all, relevant opinions from Midrash Tannaim, a collection of Tannaitic midrashim parallel to Sifre Devarim compiled by David Zvi Hoffmann at the beginning of the century (1984 [1908–9]). In the translation, these additions are marked as MT.

Two different approaches to the meaning of the passage emerge in the course of the commentary. One approach reads the passage as an injunction designed to protect the hapless captive woman and prevent her abuse and exploitation by her captor, the conquering Israelite. The other interpretation sees it as a law designed to protect the *Israelite* from being seduced by the beautiful captive woman and thereby abused by *her*. The difference between the two approaches is most dramatically displayed in their opposed interpretations of the phrase *ve'astah et tsiporneiha*; the first approach translates the verse as “she shall cut”—this being the conventional act of mourning—while the other interprets it as meaning that “she shall grow her fingernails” to inordinate length, so as to make herself ugly and unattractive to the Israelite.

Now in the course of the passage, each of these approaches is at different

points identified with one of two sages, either Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos or Rabbi Akiba, both of them famous second-generation Tannaim (100–135 C.E.); but as we shall see, the vast majority of comments in the midrash are stated without the name of an author or authority, even though, in most cases, their logic accords with that of either Akiba's or Eliezer's approach. Where this is so, I have placed the name of the sage in parentheses. I should say at the outset, however, that my interest in this study lies with the logic *behind* the exegetical approach, not with the man or sage exercising it. Although I offer several possible explanations for the underlying logic, the one method I will *not* utilize is the biographical; let me emphasize that my use of the sages' names is purely a matter of convenience.⁷

The two exegetical approaches to the passage's meaning and significance are diametrically opposed. Let me begin with Eliezer's line of interpretation. According to this approach, it is clear that the laws in the passage are intended to give the captive woman the basic rights and privileges that any person deserves. She must be allowed to mourn her parents and to recuperate after the ordeal she has undergone; as for the Israelite, he is forbidden to keep her unless he takes her to be his wife and treats her accordingly. Now this reading also happens to be very close to what modern Bible scholars like Moshe Weinfeld see as the original significance of these laws, which are typical of the "humanistic vein" of Deuteronomistic legislation; one can see this best by comparing the Deuteronomist's laws to the comparable but less "humane" laws in Exodus 21: 8 or Numbers 31: 17–18, the latter of which commands that every (Moabite) woman who "has known a man carnally" must be slain (Weinfeld 1972: 239, 290–91; Tigay 1996: 194).

Even so, there is a significant difference between the Deuteronomist's "original" intention behind these verses and the second-century Rabbi's interpretation of their meaning. For the Deuteronomist, the humanistic dimension of his legislation was doubtless so important because the law was there to be practiced. Or at least it was within the realm of the practiceable. Whenever the Deuteronomist lived—sometime in the eighth or seventh century B.C.E., as the most recent scholarly view maintains (Tigay 1996: xxi)—the possibility of Israelites taking gentiles captive in battle was not entirely removed from historical reality.

For the Rabbis, however, this was not the case, particularly after the Destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and even more so after the Bar Kokhba Rebellion in 135 C.E., when Jews were no longer in any position to take

7. On the problem of biography in relationship to Rabbinic Judaism and its literature, see the good discussion in Strack and Stemberger 1991 [1982]: 62–110; and for Akiba in particular, Goldin 1988: 299–324.

gentile women captive in war.⁸ Indeed, in the Rabbis' time, the women most likely to be taken captive were *Jewish* women, a reality that was unhappily all too familiar to the Rabbis (as attested in such passages in the Mishnah as Ketubot 2:9 (Neusner 1988: 381–82)). Further, the captive woman was not only a historical reality insofar as Jewish women were concerned; she was also an allegorical icon used by the Romans to represent the defeated Jewish nation. The famous coins minted by Vespasian and Titus to commemorate the capture of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and bearing the Latin inscription *Judaea Capta* (or *Devicta*) or, somewhat less frequently, the Greek $\text{IΟΥΔΑΙΑΣ ΕΑΛΩΚΥΙΑΣ}$, depict Judaea as a captive — sometimes as a male but usually as a helpless, bereaved female, either with her hands tied behind her back or crouched in mourning.⁹ There can be little doubt that the Rabbis must have been familiar with these coins and the image.

Both instances, the Mishnah and the *Judaea Capta* coins, suggest how distant the reality described in the Deuteronomy passage would have been from the everyday world of the Rabbis. So it is not quite accurate to say that Rabbi Eliezer's interpretation is the *same* as the Deuteronomist's, even if the two readings concur in many details. For the Deuteronomist, the laws in the passage were of practical, or practiceable, import. For Rabbi Eliezer, in contrast, the laws were more likely to have been of theoretical interest, as objects of study rather than subjects of practice.

Now exactly what the *purpose* of such study would have been is not clear; Rabbi Eliezer himself never says. What is clear is that his approach to the verse is anticipated by nearly all earlier traditions of interpretation, beginning with the Septuagint and including both Philo (*On the Virtues* 110–15; Colson 1968: 231–33) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 4.8.23). All these sources understand the phrase *ve'astah et tsiporneiha* as meaning “paring the nails” (and both the Septuagint and Philo, interestingly enough, understand the injunction as one to be performed by the Israelite upon the woman, not by the woman herself, as the verse states). Further, both Philo and Josephus

8. It would be tempting to believe that the midrashic passage preserves some kind of historical memory of the early Hasmonean campaigns, which were probably the last time in history that Jews were in a position to convert gentiles by force; see 1 Maccabees 13 and for discussion, Rajak 1990: 271–76. But there is no indication that either Eliezer or Akiba has this event from the past in mind.

9. The symbolic image of the captive woman with its accompanying caption was used by Roman emperors to commemorate their victories over other especially rebellious and recalcitrant peoples in addition to the Jews, and in the case of the Jewish coins they mainly circulated in imperial rather than provincial coinages; nor is it clear how long these particular coinages remained in circulation (Stahl 1986: 51–72; Reifenberg 1988 [1940]: 33). Still, it is difficult to imagine that the image on these coins would not have been familiar to the Rabbis. And if so, the image, qua icon, must have left an impression, a kind of psychological imprint, on their minds.

explicitly understand these laws as being essentially pedagogical in purpose. These laws are “admirable,” Philo writes, because they teach universal principles of behavior, not only protecting the woman but also serving “to improve the man’s ways.” And this lesson can obviously be absorbed by studying the laws as much as by practicing them. So, too, Josephus explains that the Bible commands the captor to wait and allow the woman to mourn her relatives “for it is honorable and just that, in taking her to bear him children, he should respect her wishes, and that he should not, intent solely on his own pleasure, neglect what may be agreeable to her” (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 258, translated in Thackeray 1967 [1930]: 599–601). This, again, is a lesson of universal import that can be imparted through study as well as through practice.

The readings supplied by the Septuagint, Philo, and Josephus all point to the existence of a continuous line of interpretation from the passage’s earliest signification down to the time of Rabbi Eliezer. The existence of such a traditional approach to the verse’s meaning is confirmed by another extant ancient interpretation of the passage, namely, the paraphrastic commentary recorded in the famous sectarian document, the Temple Scroll, which was found among the Qumran writings and was dated by its editor to the second century B.C.E. (Yadin 1983, 1: 295–98; for the text see Column 63, translated in Yadin 1983, 2: 285–86). This Palestinian document follows the same reading as the Hellenistic commentators, although as Schiffman notes, the Temple Scroll presents the meaning of the Deuteronomy passage very much as if it were a rite of initiation or conversion to be performed on the captive woman by the male Israelite captor to whom all the passage’s injunctions are addressed, including the requirements to cut the woman’s hair and to pare her nails (1992: 218–20). Whether or not a comparable conversion narrative also lies behind the interpretations of Philo and Josephus is unclear, but the Temple Scroll’s reading surely supports the contention that Rabbi Eliezer’s reading derives from an earlier tradition that was dominant in Palestine as well as in the Hellenistic diaspora. The only major difference between the Temple Scroll’s understanding and those of our other exegetes was that, for the author of the Temple Scroll, this passage was truly of practical, not theoretical or pedagogical, significance. But that was only because he expected the apocalyptic moment of fruition—when the righteous will again find themselves in the enviable position of being able to take captives from among the unrighteous gentiles—to arrive in the very near future. For our other exegetes, including Rabbi Eliezer, all of whom addressed themselves to the world in which they lived, the passage’s significance could only be theoretical.

So much for Rabbi Eliezer. Let us now turn to Rabbi Akiba. As we have

seen, he views the Torah's laws as having been designed to protect the Israelite from the scheming, seductive gentile woman; hence the legislation to make her as unattractive as possible, on the one hand, and to compel her to give up her idolatry and to embrace Judaism, on the other. For Akiba, the captive woman is less a person than a poison. The repeated term he uses to describe her treatment is the word *nivul*, "disfigurement" (see his comments on verse 12 *ad*, "And she shall shave her head," and verse 13 *ad*, "She shall sit in your house," and *ad* "In a month's time"). She is to be literally disfigured.

Akiba's interpretation has no precedent in earlier tradition, nor can the passage be read this way in any literal sense. Quite the contrary: The immediate question raised by Akiba's reading is, What has elicited it? It seems absolutely gratuitous. In the Rabbi's own language, his interpretation cries out *darshaini*, "Interpret me!"

Essentially, Akiba reads the passage as an allegory, as one chapter in the unending, relentless war between the Jews and the heathens. The key to this allegorical interpretation is the unattributed exclamation recorded on verse 13: "For these accursed nations make their daughters adorn themselves in time of war in order to cause their foes to go awhoring (*lehaznot*) after them." "Awhoring" of course is the conventional figure in the Bible for worshiping idolatry (or for making illicit foreign alliances) (Halbertal and Margalit 1992: 11–20). Note, however, that here the object of "awhoring" is not an idol but the gentile daughter herself, the beautiful young woman who has been sent by her parents, "the accursed nations," to seduce the Israelites.

The identity of these "accursed nations" is never specified. They are obviously gentiles: But from the vehemence of his attack, from the emotional charge behind his exclamation, it would seem that Akiba has in mind someone more specific than gentiles in general—most probably, the gentiles of his day and place, namely, the Romans. But it is less the Roman nation itself that Akiba attacks than what we would call their culture, the world these people represent to Akiba and his fellow sages, and the threat their culture and their world poses to his own—a threat that, in the figurative terms of Akiba's exegesis, is that of an alluring, seductive presence masking an evil, nefarious plan.

To be sure, one must be careful not to reify or oversimplify the Rabbinic view of Greco-Roman culture. The attitude of Rabbinic Judaism toward Greco-Roman culture was many-sided, and the full significance of its complexity is still debated by scholars (Lieberman 1963; Feldman 1986; Goldstein 1990). The fact that the Rabbis hated the Romans for destroying the Temple and for their blatant cruelty and corruption did not mean that they consciously rejected every aspect of Hellenism or of Greco-Roman

culture; their unmitigated opposition to idolatry certainly did not make them immune to unconscious influence by many aspects of pagan culture, as scholarship has proven repeatedly over the last century (Fischel 1977). Still, if “the word Hellenism (*Hellenismos*) takes on a new meaning in late antiquity . . . [and] comes to mean paganism,” as G. W. Bowersock has argued (1990: 9), then it is fair to say that Akiba is attacking what would then have been understood as Hellenism. And, as we shall see, it is both revealing and significant that he should portray the threat of the alien threatening culture through the figure of the seductive, attractive woman dressed up by her parents to trap innocent Jews.

I will return shortly to the subject of Akiba’s attack on Hellenism. Before doing so, however, we must answer a more pressing question: What leads Akiba to interpret the passage as he does?

We can begin to answer this question by noting that Akiba’s reading of the Deuteronomy passage implicitly presumes a narrative that can be reconstructed in three acts: (1) The Israelites/Jews go to war against the idolatrous gentiles and defeat them in battle. However, just when the Jews think they have won . . . (2) the wily, cunning gentiles dress up their beautiful daughters and send them out to trap the brave but innocent and naive Jews. (3) And just as the gentiles plan, the naive, innocent Jew sees the beautiful girl, instantly falls in love with her, and takes her home. Once there, she begins to work her wiles on the Jew, eventually leading him to become an idolator. So the Jews win the battle, but the goyim win the war.

Hence, according to Akiba, the rationale behind the Torah’s injunctions, which are essentially there to forestall and prevent this scenario from taking place. So the Torah (according to Akiba) tells us: Make the woman as ugly and unattractive as possible, submit her to a lengthy period of testing, and do everything possible to extinguish the Jew’s desire for her. Only after she has converted and repudiated her idolatry—and thus proven that she plans no evil against him—is it permissible for the Israelite to treat her with respect and dignity.

The full scope of Akiba’s allegorical approach can be seen in another comment attributed to him in *Midrash Tannaim* (Hoffmann 1984 [1908–9]: 131–32, *ad* Deuteronomy 21:22–23). This latter comment ties together our passage in Deuteronomy with the three biblical passages that immediately follow it: Deuteronomy 21:15–17, a passage detailing the laws of a man who has two wives, one of whom he loves but the other not, and how he must respect the firstborn son even if he is the unloved wife’s child; Deuteronomy 21:18–21, which concerns the “wayward and defiant son” (*ben sorer umoreh*) who is stoned to death for his delinquency; and Deuteronomy 21:22–23, which relates the law of the man guilty of a capital

offense who is executed and then hung from a tree. About the logic behind this sequence of laws, Midrash Tannaim records the following comment:

When Rabbi Akiba used to interpret the meaning of this section [Deuteronomy 21:22–23] he would say: “Ah, those who haul sin with cords of falsehood and iniquity as with cart ropes!” (Isaiah 5:18). [This means that] the beginning of sin is like a spider’s web, and its end is [like] the cables that draw a chariot. How does this entire passage begin? “When you take the field . . . and you see among the captives a beautiful woman.” Then what does it say? “If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved.” This man brought Satan into his house, and from her he bore “a wayward and defiant son,” and what is the fate of the wayward and defiant son? To be “a man guilty of a capital offense.”

The woman from Hellenism gives birth to the kid from hell.

Now precisely because Akiba reads the story as an allegory of this kind, it can be argued that Akiba, too, is reading the Deuteronomy passage from a “theoretical” perspective, as a subject for pedagogy rather than practice. But Akiba’s pedagogical approach teaches a very different lesson than did Eliezer’s. It uses the verses as an occasion to prove *not* how admirable and benevolent are the laws of the Torah but to express an extreme misanthropy of the sort of which Jews were sometimes accused by pagan authors. The most famous example of such an accusation is to be found in Tacitus’ remarks in the *Histories*: “Again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity. They sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful” (Tacitus *Histories* 5.1–2, translated in M. Stern 1980, 2: 26). Scholars believe that Tacitus’ antipathy toward the Jews very likely was absorbed secondhand from earlier literary sources, not from actual familiarity with Jews (Whittaker 1984: 16–17); there is, in any case, a documented literary tradition of such views attesting to pagan belief in the Jews’ unsociability and hostility to foreigners that goes back to Hecataeus (circa 300 B.C.E.) (*apud* Diodorus of Sicily 40.3.4. = M. Stern 1980, 1:28–29, cited and discussed in Cohen 1990: 220). That is to say, Tacitus’ image of the Jew is a stereotype and a caricature; it attests less to any reality than to its author’s feelings and fears of the “menace” and the “danger inherent in Judaism” posed “to the structure of Roman society” (M. Stern 1980, 2:5).

As an analogy, one might describe Akiba’s portrait of the captive woman as the mirror image of Tacitus’ Jew—that is, as the representation of the threat that Akiba fears the captive woman/Hellenism poses to the structure of Jewish society. Akiba’s hatred of the gentiles here may also reflect a tradition going back to Deuteronomy itself—in particular the laws of the

herem, or total extermination, related in Deuteronomy 20:15–18—in which some modern scholars have recognized a comparable xenophobia, “a radicalism of the writing-desk” (Walzer 1992: 224, basing himself on Weinfeld 1972: 167). The earmark of this intellectual’s “armchair” xenophobia is its lack of responsibility and accountability. Since, as Akiba surely understood, there was little chance of putting his interpretation of the law into practice, he could express his xenophobic fantasy as venomously as he wished without having to fear that he would ever be held responsible for its effects. The exegetical occasion thus provided him with a safe, virtually expense-free occasion to vent his hatred of paganism and pagan culture.

Having identified this xenophobic strain, we can now return to our earlier question: Where does Akiba get the narrative underlying that exegesis? As the reader can guess, I plan eventually to propose that the primary source was the Greco-Roman erotic narrative. But before we reach that answer, it is important to consider the alternative: Is there a passage or source in Scripture that might have suggested the same narrative to Akiba?

The answer: Possibly. In fact, there are several episodes that may have been in Akiba’s mind. The first of these is the incident that occurs at the end of the story of Balak and Balaam, after God has confounded the gentile prophet Balaam’s curses against Israel: “While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to commit harlotry (*liznot*) with the Moabite women, who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshipped that god. Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor” (Numbers 25:1–3). On this passage, Sifre Bamidbar, the Tannaitic midrash on Numbers, relates the following explanatory narrative:

They came and stayed at Shittim—in the place of shtupidity [*shtut*, literally folly, madness (i.e., idolatry)]. At that time the Ammonites and Moabites arose and built huts, from Beit Hayeshimot to Har Hasheleg, and they placed in them women selling all sorts of delicacies. The Israelites ate and drank. At that time a person would go out to stroll through the market, and he would wish to buy something for himself from an old woman, and she would sell it to him for its price. A young girl would then call out to him, speaking from within [the hut]: Come here and buy it for less. And he would buy from the young girl one day, and then a second day. On the third day, she would say to him: Come inside and choose for yourself—aren’t you already like a member of the family [*ben bayi*]? And he would enter her cubicle. Next to her the cooler was full of Ammonite wine—the law prohibiting Jews from drinking the wine of gentiles had not yet been promulgated—and she would say to him: Would you like to drink some wine? He would drink, and the wine would inflame him, and he would say to her: Give yourself to me [*hisham’i li*]. She would then take from under her breast-band an image of Peor, and say to him: My master, do you wish me to obey you? Then bow to this! And he would respond: How can I bow to an

idol? And she would answer: What difference does it make to you? All you have to do is expose yourself to the idol! And he would expose himself to the idol. (From this case they said: a person who exposes himself to Baal Peor worships Baal Peor; a person who casts a stone at a *merculus* worships Mercury.) Then the wine would inflame him, and he would say to her: Give yourself to me. And she would say to him: Do you wish me to obey you? Then renounce the law [*torato*] of Moses. And he would renounce it, as it is said, “When they came to Baal Peor, they renounced [Him] for Shamefulness (i.e., idolatry); then they became detested as what they loved” (Hosea 9:10). And in the end, the [Ammonites and Moabites] made banquets for the [Israelites] and invited them to eat, as it is said, “they invited the people to the sacrifices for their god” (Numbers 25:2). (Sifre Bamidbar 131, Horovitz 1966 [1917]: 170–71)

This passage offers a vivid description of the process of seduction by which the daughters of Moab enticed the Israelite men; indeed, it is probably just this kind of seduction scene that lies behind Akiba’s worst fears. But this narrative elaborating on the Numbers verses doesn’t so much answer the question as to where Akiba derived his narrative as it simply forces us to reask the question, Where did the anonymous author of this passage from Sifre Bamidbar derive his narrative of seduction? Although in hindsight it may look like a reasonable extrapolation from the verses in Numbers 25, it is certainly not explicit in the Bible; further, as Martin Braun first noted, it seems itself to be a narrative composed under the influence of the romance novel (1938: 102–4).¹⁰

In fact, there is nothing in the Bible quite like either Sifre Bamidbar’s or Akiba’s narratives, at least none that contains all three elements of a cunning and seductive female, idolatry, and the seduction of the innocent Jewish male. Biblical narratives that possess one or two of these elements invariably lack the others. Delilah (Judges 14–16) may be the most famous example of a cunning and seductive (non-Israelite) female to betray an (Israelite) male, but she does so less through seduction than through outright deception, and she does not lead Samson into idolatry. (Besides, the wrong person gets his hair cut in that story.) Jezebel, surely a cunning and dangerous female, introduces idolatry into Israel (I Kings 16:29–34), but her narrative has nothing to do with seduction. As for a seductress, the most famous gentile female of this sort in the Bible is Ruth (Ruth 3:1–18), but she is hardly Rabbi Akiba’s alluring *yefat to’ar* and idolatry obviously has nothing to do with her story.

10. Compare the even more romancelike versions in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.126–30; and Philo, *Life of Moses (De Vita Mosis)* 1.294–302 and *On the Virtues (De Virtutibus)* 34–43. I want to thank Dr. Gideon Barak for calling my attention to these passages.

There is, however, one passage in the Bible that may have anticipated Akiba's interpretation. That passage is the famous allegory in Proverbs 7:5–22 of “the strange woman,” the *ishah zarah*, also called the “alien” woman, *hanokhriyah*, “whose talk is smooth” and who entices the “simple lad . . . devoid of understanding” as he is crossing the street near her house in the dusk before evening in order to seduce him, “to drink our fill of love till morning to delight in amorous embrace, for the man of the house is away.” (Proverbs 7:18–19). As the sage author of Proverbs warns his reader: Shun such a woman!

The resemblance between this passage and Akiba's “narrative of seduction” is striking: This is clearly a parallel seduction story. But there are equally striking differences. First, even though the term *hanokhriyah* may refer to the fact that she is gentile, the woman in Proverbs is forbidden not because she is not an Israelite but primarily because she is married. Second, the plots of the two narratives, similar as they may be, are different in a crucial respect. The tale of the *ishah zarah* is a story of seduction in which the older woman both initiates the act and carries it to its consummation; throughout the narrative, she remains the active, aggressive character. In our story, it is the male who initiates the narrative (by taking the woman captive and falling in love with her), but by its conclusion the woman has turned the tables and assumed the role of the aggressive, active character. In other words, in contrast to the Proverbs narrative, our tale is a narrative of reversal in which the conqueror becomes the conquered and the victim, the victimizer. For this reason, it is possible to take the story of the *ishah zarah* as a cautionary tale, told in order to warn innocent young men against the dangers of accepting unsolicited invitations from lonely older women standing at their windows. In contrast, it is impossible to extrapolate a lesson of this sort from the story of the *yefat to'ar* because its outcome is as unpredictable as human nature is weak—which is precisely the reason for Akiba's insistence on legislation preventing the scenario from ever beginning.

This critical difference between the two narratives, along with the fact that Akiba never mentions the Proverbs passage, makes me less than certain that Akiba was thinking of the *ishah zarah* passage when he was interpreting the *yefat to'ar* section in Deuteronomy. In fact, the *ishah zarah* passage is infrequently cited in any Rabbinic texts (although part of the reason for this may be the fact that the section treating this passage in the midrash on Proverbs, Midrash Mishlei, happens to have been lost from all manuscript traditions [Visotsky 1990: 56, n. 1]). There is, however, one well-known midrashic passage that does comment on the Proverbs verses,

and it is a very significant one for our subject. On Genesis 19:7, “After these things, his master’s wife [Potiphar’s wife] cast her eyes upon Joseph,” Bereishit Rabbah 87:1, records the following comment:

“I noticed among the youths a lad devoid of sense” (Proverbs 7:6)—this refers to Joseph. And he was “devoid of sense” because he bore tales about his brothers. Could anyone be more devoid of sense?

“A woman comes towards him” (Proverbs 6:10)—This is the wife of Potiphar.

“Dressed like a harlot” (ibid.)—for Joseph’s sake.

“With secret plans” (ibid.)—[kept hidden] from her husband.

“She is bustling and restive” (ibid.)—she was weeping and wandering.

“She is never at home” (ibid.), but “Now she’s in the square, now she’s in the streets (ibid.)—asking, “Have you seen Joseph?”

“She lays hold of him and kisses him” (Proverbs 7:13)—this refers to “She caught hold of him by his garment” (Genesis 39:12).

“Brazenly she says to him” (Proverbs 7:13)—“And she said, Lie with me!” (Genesis 39:12). [This is the meaning of:] “And it was after these things . . .” (Genesis 39:7)

The anonymous author of this passage identifies the *ishah zarah* with Potiphar’s wife, and the “simple lad” with Joseph; he then parses the verses in Proverbs 7, interpreting each one as a gloss on the story of Potiphar’s wife’s abortive attempt to seduce Joseph. This line of interpretation is of course typical of much late-antique exegesis of the Joseph cycle, which, as James Kugel notes, comes increasingly, indeed almost exclusively, to focus on Potiphar’s wife’s failed attempt at seducing Joseph (1990: 22). Yet why all this attention to a brief episode in the entire Joseph cycle, some fourteen verses out of nearly fourteen chapters in Genesis? Part of the reason lies certainly in the increased eroticizing of the passage’s narrative, a process that coincided, as I have already noted, with the influence of the Greco-Roman novel—as though, in effect, the Rabbis read the biblical episode like a chapter from a romance (Braun 1938: 91–94). Joseph the righteous became the handsome, naive, sexually charged innocent young hero, and Potiphar’s wife, the hostile, sexual tempter, and molester—all in one.

The Greek novel’s impact on the exegesis of the Joseph story brings us, finally, to the solution to our riddle: Where did Akiba get the narrative underlying his interpretation of the *yefat to’ar* passage? The answer is, plainly, that all these narratives—Akiba’s, the narrative of seduction in Sifre Bamidbar, the identification of “the strange woman” in Proverbs with Potiphar’s wife, and so on—are, like the late-antique interpretations of the Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife story, different permutations of elements from the erotic Greco-Roman narrative and from its character types, and typical plot situations, which, in some way, the Rabbis assimilated within

their imaginative world. Moreover, these narrative elements not only were used self-consciously in retold tales but also became a kind of lens through which the Rabbis viewed the world. Indeed, the various texts we have considered suggest that the Rabbis seem to have begun to view the world as though it *were* a romance, a Greco-Roman erotic narrative. The plot of that narrative became a kind of cultural myth through which the Rabbis represented their view of reality. A contemporary analogue for such a process can be seen in the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination. His life began to be recalled as though it had been the apotheosis of Camelot: The White House became King Arthur's roundtable; Kennedy, the tragic Arthur; and the entire brief era of the Kennedy Presidency, a medieval Romance.¹¹

In a somewhat similar way, I am suggesting that, through a diffuse process of cultural influence, the Rabbis absorbed the erotic narrative underlying Akiba's exegesis from Greco-Roman literature and made it their own. Let me emphasize once more that I am not claiming that Rabbi Akiba read a specific text that he then "borrowed" and transplanted into his interpretation. There is no evidence for this. But to allay any doubts that a narrative of this sort existed, let me summarize the story of Polycrite as told in Parthenius' *Peri Erotikon Pathematon* (Gaselee 1962: 285–89). The story begins by relating how, after the men of Miletus went to war against the Naxians and blockaded their city, a beautiful young Naxian maiden named Polycrite was left in the city's temple "by the providence of some god." As soon as one ally of the Milesians, a general named Diognetus, took Polycrite captive, he fell in love with her, "captured by her beauty"; utterly captivated by the strength of his own desire for her, Diognetus, we are told, "kept sending messages [of love] to her (for it would have been impiety to ravish her by force in the very shrine)," but she would not listen to him or consent to his demands until, at last, she consented to yield to him on the condition that he would agree to swear "to accomplish whatever wish she might express." Diognetus, of course, had no idea as to what she would request, and he "eagerly swore by Artemis that he would perform her every behest." As soon as he had taken the oath, however, Polycrite seized his hand and demanded that "he betray the blockade,

11. Another example of such a literary phenomenon that has sunk into our cultural imaginary lexicon is the term *Kafkaesque*, which has become the name in our language for such nightmarish situations as when a person is pursued as though condemned for reasons neither the victim nor anyone else can fathom; the term is famously invoked even, perhaps especially by persons who have never read a page of Kafka. For some discussion of the crossover between literary romance and popular culture and their mutual impact on each other, see the various essays collected in Radford 1986, especially her introduction, 1–20.

beseeking him vehemently to take pity on her and the sorrows of her country.” Then, we are told, Diognetus “became quite beside himself, and drawing his sword, was near putting an end to her. But when, however, he came to ponder upon her patriotism, being at the same time mastered by his passion—for it was appointed, it seems, that the Naxians should be relieved of the troubles that beset them—for the moment he returned no answer, taking time to consider his course of action, and on the morrow consented to the betrayal.” In short order, Diognetus betrays the city; as the Milesians celebrate their festival of the Thargelia, he opens the city gates to the enemy who inflicts a “terrible slaughter upon the Milesians.”

The end of the story is, predictably, disastrous: Diognetus himself is killed in battle, while Polycrite, in the course of being honored by her countrymen for having saved them, is literally suffocated beneath the weight of bountiful gifts. Despite the tale’s conclusion, though, the similarities with Akiba’s implied narrative are obvious. If nothing else, they show how this particular plot (clearly attested as well in Propertius’ *Tarpeia* and in Ovid’s *Nisus and Scylla*) was doubtless part of a larger pattern of tales and conventional motifs that circulated in the ancient world and informed both Greco-Roman and Rabbinic narratives. Not incidentally, all these texts seem to share a common obsession with the themes of endogamy, miscegenation, and xenophobia.

Nonetheless, Akiba’s use of the conventional plot and its motifs bears the distinct marks of Judaization. Foremost among these is the exegetical framing of the Sifre Devarim passage that points to the midrashic function the narrative is made to serve in Rabbinic literature; similarly noteworthy are the assimilation into the story of such Rabbinic details as the equating of the captive woman with the “evil inclination” (*hayetzer hara’*) or the analogizing of aspects of the story with other biblical episodes, like that of David and Mephiboshet or Nebuchadnezzar’s madness. But of all its Judaized features, none is more revealing than the role that halakhah plays within the narrative and its construction of reality. In Akiba’s narrative, the halakhah serves as a kind of *deus ex machina*. It appears in the biblical text in order to stop the narrative, to prevent the novelistic scenario from transpiring, or, at least, from reaching its denouement. Or to put the same point in somewhat different terms: According to Rabbi Akiba, if you do not follow the Torah—that is, the laws of Deuteronomy as he interprets them—then you are doomed to fall into the clutches of the *yefat to’ar*, the captive woman; you are fated to live the life of a disastrous Greek erotic romance. Rabbi Akiba promises the Jew that his fate will be catastrophic. Left to its own devices, the Rabbinic plot ends with the Jew failing the

ordeal of sexual temptation, transgressing the law, falling victim to the captive woman's wiles; if he does marry, as we saw, he will come to hate his wife, and the child born from their union will be a *ben sorer umoreh*.

This is, to be sure, a deeply pessimistic and cynical view of cultural interchange as seen from a Jewish perspective, but it seems to be one that Jewish tradition found highly compelling. As we have noted, Akiba's midrash is not anticipated in any tradition of interpretation *before* him; but *after* him, his approach to the passage is adopted by many of the most important medieval Jewish exegetes.¹² Something about Akiba's interpretation struck a very deep chord in the Jewish soul. Students of the Greco-Roman novel have frequently proposed that its ancient popularity may have derived from the genre's success at expressing "the individual's sense of isolation" (Hägg 1983: 89) and feelings of "powerlessness" in an impersonal and alienating world (Reardon 1991: 172). This may be so. For the Rabbis, however, what seemed to have proved so compelling about the erotic narrative was the way it gave voice to the fears they held about all the world's blandishments and seductive allurements, how it could simultaneously hold out before them the promises of both love *and* disaster.

In the world of late antiquity, Akiba was not the only exegete to read the Deuteronomy passage allegorically. In 397 C.E., in a letter to a certain Magnus, Jerome, the great Church father and translator of the Bible into Latin, found himself defending his habitual use of examples and quotations drawn from secular, Greco-Roman literature. To defend himself, Jerome cited various distinguished predecessors who had acted in the same way; among these was the apostle Paul who, Jerome argued, had

read in Deuteronomy the command given by the voice of the Lord that when a captive woman had had her head shaved, her eyebrows and all her hair cut off, and her nails pared, she might then be taken to wife. Is it surprising that I, too, admiring the fairness of her form and the grace of her eloquence, desire to make that secular wisdom which is my captive and my handmaid, a matron of the true Israel? Or that shaving off and cutting away all in her that is dead, whether this be idolatry, pleasure, error, or lust, I take her to myself clean and pure and beget by her servants for the Lord of Sabaoth? . . . (Letter 70; translated in Schaff and Wace 1983: 149)

12. Among medieval Jewish exegetes, Rashi, Abравanel, Ibn Ezra (all *ad locum*), and Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kingship 8:1–8) follow Akiba's line of interpretation. Nahmanides follows an overall approach closer to Eliezer's, as do Bekhor Shor and Hazzekuni. Targum Onkelos agrees with Akiba's interpretation of *ve'astah et tsiporneha* as making her grow her fingernails, rather than cut them; in contrast, Targum PseudoJonathan follows Eliezer's interpretation of the phrase, though he also tries to incorporate several other interpretations from the line associated with Akiba.

Like Akiba, Jerome found in the Deuteronomy passage the basis for an allegory of cultural influence. For Jerome, however, this allegory provided not a set of guidelines for behavior but a mandate for the appropriation of classical pagan culture by the young but burgeoning Christian church. The captive woman is pagan culture in all “the fairness of her form and the grace of her eloquence.” The conquering hero, the captor, is the triumphant Church. And no doubt, when Jerome wrote his letter, some sixty years after Constantine had converted and less than ten years since Theodosius had made Christianity the official religion of the empire, the Church did believe that it had begun to subdue the Roman empire, that it had taken paganism captive and shorn its locks and pared its nails—even if that belief, as modern scholars have pointed out, was itself born of an anxiety that the opposite was closer to the truth.¹³

Jerome’s allegorical interpretation is so revealing precisely because it suggests that Eliezer’s interpretation of the Deuteronomy passage was not necessarily the only alternative to Akiba’s. Indeed, once Akiba is read from the perspective of Jerome’s triumphalist allegory, several additional aspects of the Rabbi’s antipagan allegorical exegesis become apparent. First, it embodies a paradox, namely, the paradox of being influenced unawares by the very thing whose influence one explicitly condemns. The very language, the language of narrative, through which Akiba expresses his animus toward pagan culture is phrased in the form of a literary genre that Rabbi Akiba seems to have absorbed from pagan culture. This paradox exemplifies the complexity of the question of the relationship between Hellenization/Greco-Roman culture and Rabbinic Judaism, and their putative influence on each other. What we see here is self-conscious opposition and simultaneous absorption and assimilation of the other culture.

Now, as a fact of cultural history, this is not truly surprising; to paraphrase the popular saying, You become what you hate. What is more revealing is how deeply this double movement of influence and exchange is imbedded in Rabbinic Judaism. Consider, for example, the following narrative from Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan version A, chap. 16. The story appears in a list of exemplary “righteous” (sexually chaste) figures who overcame sexual temptation and thus preserved their righteousness. The

13. For the context for Jerome’s interpretation, see Laistner 1966 [1931]: 47–49; for the use of the allegorical interpretation as a *topos* in such later writers as the ninth century exegete Hrabanus Maurus, see Laistner 1966 [1931]: 306–7. Jerome’s reading of this passage is also not the only Christian allegorical interpretation of a Biblical passage that seeks to justify the Christian appropriation of pagan culture; for another example, see St. Augustine *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk. 2.60–61 (translated in Robertson 1958: 75–76) and Laistner 1966 [1931]: 49–53.

first of these figures is Joseph, who overcame the advances of Potiphar's wife; the second, Rabbi Zadok, who, after being taken captive to Rome, withstood the temptation of a beautiful maidservant with whom he was supposed to mate; and the third, Rabbi Akiba, for the following reason:

When he went to Rome, someone informed against him before a certain general (*hegmon*). The general dispatched to [Rabbi Akiba] two beautiful women whom he [the general] bathed, anointed, and adorned with brides' ankle-bracelets. All night they fell over Rabbi Akiba, this one saying to him, Turn to me, and the other one saying, Turn to me. But Rabbi Akiba sat between them, spitting, and did not turn towards either one.

In the morning, the two women went to offer their salutations to the general, and said to him: We would rather die than have you give us to that man.

The general summoned Rabbi Akiba, and said to him: Why didn't you act towards these women the way men are supposed to act with women? Are they not beautiful? Are they not human like you? Did not the God who created you create them?

Rabbi Akiba replied: What could I do? Their smell came upon me—the smell of carcasses, of unclean animals, and crawling things. (In Schechter 1967 [1887]: 32a)

Akiba's retort is strongly reminiscent of Tacitus' accusations of the Jews' misanthropy (M. Stern 1980, 2: 40), but the more important fact is that, in this story, Rabbi Akiba is himself portrayed as a sage who responds to the gentile women in precisely the way he wishes the Israelite in Deuteronomy to respond to the captive woman. Seen from the perspective of this story, the Israelite character in Deuteronomy turns out to be, in fact, a protosage figure endangered and threatened just as Akiba might have seen himself.

It is revealing that the influence of Greco-Roman narrative is most evident in such texts that deal with the confrontation between the Rabbis and the representatives of Greco-Roman power at the moments when the stakes of that confrontation were most high. The crisis-filled tension of such moments inevitably discloses the existence of what might be called "deep Hellenization"—instances of the influence of Greco-Roman culture on the most profound, fundamental constructs of Rabbinic Judaism, including the very way the Rabbis conceived of the world and themselves within it. The case of the Greco-Roman erotic narrative is not the only example in ancient Judaism of such a "deep Hellenization." An analogue would be the assimilation of Greco-Roman attitudes toward philosophy in the absolute value that the Rabbis placed on the study of Torah as the central religious act of Judaism (Bickerman 1988: 172–73)—a value that also becomes manifest in Rabbinic literature most dramatically in martyrological accounts, like the story of Rabbi Akiba's execution as punishment for

his devotion to the study and teaching of Torah (J. Berakhot 9:5). Such instances of influence, almost *because* they have to do with the very construction of the Rabbinic “mind,” seem inevitably to be highly speculative, almost impossible to document with tangible, demonstrable evidence; yet it is almost impossible to conceive of the emergence of ancient Judaism without taking them into account.

Such a “deep Hellenization” can be seen most powerfully in perhaps the most intriguing feature of nearly all the passages we have considered: their shared representation of the pagan threat through the figure of the threatening, seductive gentile female. Let me return to the sexual metaphor of “awhoring,” the conventional figure of language in the Bible for pursuing and worshipping idols and thus for being disloyal to God. Now as this figure appears in the Bible, and particularly in the prophets beginning with Hosea and continuing through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Israelites always play the role of the female, whether an unfaithful wife, as in Hosea, or a nymphomaniac, as in Ezekiel. And she (the Israelite) inevitably lusts after the idols, the *be'alim* that, as their names suggest, are by definition male figures, the paradigmatic “other men”—that is, other than Israel’s single true husband, God. This is the case even in Numbers 25 where the Moabite women “seduce” the Israelites in order that they, the Israelites, play the whore with the Moabite gods, as the verse explicitly says. In contrast, in Akiba’s narrative it is the female daughters of the idolators who seduce the male Israelites into going awhoring (*lehaznot*) after *themselves*. The Israelite is the innocent, seduceable male; the cunning, seductive, gentile woman is herself the idol after whom the Jew lusts. (This is, one might say, the dawn of the Age of the Shiksa; in the distance Portnoy winks.)

Here, then, is the beginning of a significant change in the representation of Jewish-gentile relations. Those relations are beginning to be sexualized, cast into the form of a narrative of seduction and temptation; with this, the entire model of illicit behavior for Jews also shifts from the biblical paradigm of adultery and betrayal to the more dominant medieval model with its focus on seduction by the Other and ultimate assimilation and surrender. In the course of this shift, the Jew’s role, as it becomes increasingly masculinized, also becomes more passive, while the idol is at once identified with the gentile *and* feminized, and thereby eroticized, and perhaps aestheticized as well. *Velo tehonem*. “You should not give [the Canaanite nations] any quarter,” Deuteronomy 7:2 enjoins us; *lotitein lahem hen*, “Do not find them attractive,” the Rabbis comment (B. Avodah Zarah 20a).¹⁴

14. One might add the further distinction that while in the Bible idolatry is synonymous with illicit sexual relations (i.e., adultery), in Rabbinic Judaism the idolatrous impulse is in-

There is, however, one biblical passage that stands as an exception to this rule concerning the gender roles of idolatry in the Bible: “You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will whore after their gods and will cause your sons to whore (*vehiznu*) after their gods” (Exodus 34:15–16). Although the end of the second verse distinguishes between the Canaanite daughters and their gods, these verses anticipate the later model of seduction wherein the daughters themselves are the objects of idolatry as in either Akiba’s midrash or the narrative about the daughters of Moab in Sifre Bamidbar. As such, they may be the closest thing to a “source” for Akiba’s narrative of seduction, and particularly so if they are read along with an awareness of the romance plot, which then serves as a perfect example of midrashic overdetermination, where several disparate causes can be understood as having overlapped in the imagination of a sage in order to produce a specific interpretation. Indeed, the concatenation of the two sources—of the Hebraic (as in the biblical verse) and the Hellenic (through the romance plot)—in the Rabbi’s mind produced not only the midrash but also a nearly perfect model for the process of cultural influence in all its complexity.

This brings me to my final point, a methodological reflection on cultural influence itself. The implied questions raised by all the interpretations of the captive woman passage that we have looked at, from Akiba’s allegory of Israel’s seduction by the gentiles to Jerome’s allegory of Christianity’s appropriation of pagan culture, is, Who is the real captor? Who is really taking whom captive? Or, to phrase it in a deeper sense, Who is influencing whom? Who is the source of influence, and who is its recipient? The interpretations offered by the different exegetes are all, in a sense, responses to the anxiety underlying that question, that is to say, attempts to dispel the fear that it is one’s own self really being taken captive or

creasingly identified with the libido, sexual desire itself, the *yetzer hara* or evil impulse. See, for example, the stories about Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Akiba in B. Avodah Zarah 20a, and the fascinating story in Avodah Zarah 17a–b in which idolatry and harlotry are posited as two equivalent alternatives like two forks in a road. See also B. Sanhedrin 63b: “Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: The Israelites knew that there was no substance to idolatry, and they only worshipped idols so as to permit themselves to practice forbidden sexual acts publicly.” On this passage and the idea, see Halbertal and Margalit 1992: 23–25. In connection with the gender shift in the representation of idolatrous relations, Halbertal and Margalit (34) cite in passing the famous passage about Rachel pleading with God to have mercy on Israel: There, as they correctly note, God and the idols are portrayed as Israel’s “co-wives,” in Eikhah Rabbah, Petihta 24 (Buber 1967: 28; for a translation, see Stern and Mirsky 1990: 56–57).

being influenced. Yet, however influence is viewed under the metaphor of captivity—as a malignant force, an act of domination, enslavement, colonization, and the like; or as a more benign, even beneficent gesture, as a means of enlightenment, of extending civilization to the barbarously uncivilized, or even of mere domestication—it is necessary to remember that the sign of captivity is just a metaphor, a constructed representation, for the process of cultural influence: an ancient metaphor as much as a modern one, but nonetheless, solely a metaphor.

What we see from the analysis of the Deuteronomy passage, however, is that the process of cultural influence exceeds in its complexity anything that can be expressed by the metaphorical language of captivity in any of its senses. If our analysis teaches any lesson, it is that the language of captivity is less than entirely adequate for conceptualizing or representing the process of culture influence. What actually takes place is a multifaceted phenomenon of adoption, adaptation, assimilation, transformation, *all in addition to influence*, and this is true of Judaization as much as Hellenization. In other words, the language of captivity, despite its rhetorical power, may not be the best metaphor to describe what happens when we either exercise influence or fall under its spell. We would do well to remember this lesson, lest, in forgetting it, we find ourselves in the beleaguered position of our hapless captive woman, taken captive ourselves by the language of cultural influence.

Appendix: Tannaitic Midrashim on Deuteronomy 21:10–14

(10) WHEN YOU TAKE THE FIELD: Scripture speaks of nonobligatory wars [of expansion as opposed to obligatory wars of self-defense and those against the Canaanites in which all male and female captives are to be slain; for the distinction see Deuteronomy 20:10–18].

AGAINST (*'al*, literally upon) YOUR ENEMIES: [this means] against your enemies. [The midrash here is explaining the unusual use of the preposition.]

AND THE LORD YOUR GOD DELIVERS THEM INTO YOUR POWER (*beyadekha*): If you do all that is indicated in this matter, the result will be that the Lord your God will deliver them into your hands. [That is to say, victory is conditional on obedience to the law.]

AND YOU TAKE SOME OF THEM CAPTIVE: Including any Canaanites who are there. [Even though, in an obligatory war, all Canaanites must be slain, they can be taken captive in this case because the war is a nonobligatory one, not directly aimed at removing them from the land.]

(11) **AND YOU SEE AMONG THE CAPTIVES:** (Eliezer) At the time of her capture. [Inasmuch as this interpretation restricts the time when the Israelite is permitted to take a woman captive—only in the heat of battle, not in its aftermath—it serves to protect the woman.]

A WOMAN (*eishet*): Even if she is a married woman (*eishet ish*). [The midrash here is exploiting the fact that the more typical word for a maiden is *na'arah*; the word *ishah*, especially as in the construct case *eishet ish*, typically refers to a married woman—hence the interpretation. It is unclear precisely why even a married gentile woman can be taken as wife by an Israelite. The question as to whether or not alien familial ties are recognized by Judaism is debated in the Talmud (J. Yebamot 2.6, 4a), although later Jewish legal tradition tends to follow the view that recognizes their legitimacy (Novak: 206–8). It may also be that the midrash assumes that by the time the Israelite decides to marry the captive woman her husband will have been killed in battle.]

OF BEAUTIFUL FORM: I conclude that this refers only to a beautiful woman; whence do we learn that this includes also an unattractive one? From the following: **AND YOU DESIRE HER** (even though she is not beautiful). [The midrash here is exploiting what seems to be a redundancy or a superfluous phrase to argue that the key is the captor's desire, not the attractiveness of the captive alone.]

[MT: **OF BEAUTIFUL FORM:** (Akiba) Scripture spoke only as a concession to the evil impulse (*keneged yetzer harah*). It is better that a Jew should eat meat that has been slaughtered than that he should eat meat from a carcass. There is a parable about this. What is the matter like? It is like a prince who desired a forbidden thing. His father used to plead with him and say, My son! If you eat it, it will injure you. But once he saw that his son paid no attention to him, he told him: Do this and that, and you won't be injured. Therefore Scripture says, **AND DISCARD HER CAPTIVE'S GARB**. [According to Akiba, the entire biblical injunction is a concession to the Israelite's sexual desire.]

AND YOU DESIRE HER: Her, and not her friend.

AND WOULD TAKE HER TO WIFE FOR YOURSELF: So that you may not say, "This one is for my father," or "This one is for my brother."

[MT: . . . that one may not take two women, one for himself, and one for his father or his son.] [All three of the preceding interpretations severely limit the Israelite's freedom in taking captives. The rule is, One captor, one captive. Collecting captive women is prohibited. The intent of this rule may be either to prevent the abuse of women captives (Eliezer) or to protect Israelites from indulging in their desires excessively (Akiba).]

(12) YOU SHALL BRING HER INTO YOUR HOUSE: And not to any other house. (Eliezer) [That is to say, the Israelite must treat her as his lawful wife, not put her away in a maid's or concubine's quarters.]

[MT: (Akiba) That you cannot force her (*yalhitsena*) in battle.] [The interpretation of this statement is disputed; see B. Kiddushin 22a, where Rashi and the Tosafists disagree about its meaning; according to Rashi, "force" means sexual intercourse; according to Rabbeinu Tam, the Israelite is permitted to have intercourse with the woman once (*biah rishonah*), in order to satisfy his lust (that is, the evil impulse), but he cannot begin to "compel" her to convert until he brings her "into his house." Compare J. Makkot 2:6 (31d, marked 2.7), which records a dispute between the Amoraim Rav and Rabbi Yohanan as to whether *biah rishonah* is permitted or not.]

AND SHE SHALL SHAVE HER HEAD (*vegilhah et roshah*) AND DO HER NAILS (*ve'astah et tziporneha*): Rabbi Eliezer says: Cut them. Rabbi Akiba says: Grow them. [The phrase *ve'astah et tziporneha* is problematic, since it does not stipulate *what* she is to do to her nails; the logic behind the two differing interpretations is given in the analogical arguments presented in the next passage but, essentially, Eliezer understands the meaning of the biblical injunction as intending to permit the woman to mourn her parents without interference or distraction (with the cutting of hair and paring of nails being signs of mourning), while Akiba understands the Bible as requiring the woman to undergo an ordeal of testing which includes her disfiguration; by "growing them," Akiba means to extreme, grotesque lengths.]

Said Rabbi Eliezer: "Doing" (*'asiyah*) is stated in regard to her head, and "doing" is stated in regard to her nails; just as the "doing" in regard to her head means trimming [of hair], so must the "doing" in regard to her nails mean trimming. Said Rabbi Akiba: "Doing" is stated in regard to her head, and "doing" is stated in regard to her nails; just as the "doing" in regard to her head means disfigurement (*nivul*), so the "doing" in regard to her nails means disfigurement. Support (*raayah*) for Rabbi Eliezer's interpretation may be found in the verse: "And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king; and he had neither dressed (*'asah*) his feet, nor trimmed (*'asah*) his beard" (2 Samuel 19:25).

[MT: And for Rabbi Akiba, even though there is no clear proof in Scripture for his opinion, there is an allusion to the matter (*zeikher ledavar*), as it is said, "his hair grew like eagle's [feathers] and his nails like [the talons of] birds" (Daniel 4:30).] [Akiba's scriptural "allusion" is obviously much weaker than Eliezer's; the fact that Akiba's verse is taken from the account of Nebuchadnezzar's madness, when he imagines himself a wild beast of the fields, provides its own commentary for Akiba's interpretation.]

[MT: AND SHE SHALL SHAVE HER HEAD: (Akiba) Perhaps he saw comeliness and desirability in her hair. Therefore Scripture says, AND SHE SHALL SHAVE HER HEAD.] [This comment clarifies the motivation behind Akiba's exegetical approach.]

(13) AND DISCARD HER CAPTIVE'S GARB: (Akiba) This indicates that the captor must divest her of her attractive raiment and clothe her in widow's weeds, for these accursed nations make their daughters adorn themselves in time of war in order to cause their foes to go awhoring (*lehaznot*) after them. [This comment is doubtless the most revealing commentary on the reasoning behind Akiba's line of interpretation; it runs virtually counter to the plain sense of the biblical verse, which suggests that her clothing was of inferior, poor quality ("captive's garb"), hardly alluring and seductive dress.]

SHE SHALL SIT IN YOUR HOUSE: (Akiba) In a house that the captor habitually uses, so that he will chance upon her when he goes in and when he goes out; she looks like a pumpkin-shell, and he sees her in all her unattractiveness (*nivulah*, literally, disfigurement).

LAMENTING HER FATHER AND HER MOTHER A MONTH'S TIME: Her actual father and mother; so taught Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiba says: HER FATHER AND HER MOTHER refers to none other than her idols, as it is said, "They say to wood, You are my father, [to stone, You gave birth to me] (Jeremiah 2:27). [The two interpretations of this phrase almost perfectly exemplify the differences between Eliezer's "humane" understanding of the Bible's intent and Akiba's allegorizing exegesis. The difference in approach continues in the next group of interpretations.]

A MONTH'S TIME (*yerah yamim*): thirty days. [Another interpretation: *yerah* is one month; *yamim* is two months—totaling three months, in order that her beautiful and precious garments [might wear out], and in order that it may be established whether the child that she may subsequently be delivered of is the seed of her previous [heathen] husband or the second [Jewish] husband. So taught Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Eliezer said: A MONTH'S TIME: literally. [The phrase *yerah yamim* is the less common and lengthier term for a month than the more usual *hodesh*. Akiba's interpretation exploits this irregularity for its own ideological purposes. According to Rabbinic belief, a premature child is not viable if it is born before six months following conception; Akiba uses this fact to argue that the Israelite must wait three months after taking the woman captive and before marrying her in order to avoid any questions of paternity in the case of a child who might have been conceived immediately prior to the time the woman was captured. The concern underlying Akiba's interpre-

tation is a telling index to his deeper anxieties; see B. Yebamot 48b, where Akiba's interpretation is attributed to Shimeon ben Eleazar.)

(Akiba) And what is the reason for all this? So that a daughter of Israel would rejoice while the captive one is in tears; the daughter of Israel would wear her adornments while this one is disfigured (*mitnavelet*). [This comment is independent of the preceding: "This" refers to the entire string of injunctions in the biblical passage.]

AFTER THAT YOU MAY COME TO HER AND POSSESS HER, AND SHE SHALL BE YOUR WIFE: (Eliezer) This indicates that if he does not do for her all the aforementioned things and possesses her, it is an act of illicit intercourse. [That is to say: the Israelite is culpable if he does not extend to the captive woman the human consideration she deserves.]

[MT: (Akiba) When does this law apply (i.e., that you must wait all this time?) When she does not agree to convert. But if she agrees to convert, he immerses her and she is permitted to him immediately. [For Akiba, the sole question is whether the woman is prepared to abandon her idolatrous ways and convert to Judaism; if she is, the Israelite can marry her on the spot.]

AFTER THAT YOU MAY COME TO HER AND POSSESS HER: (Eliezer) The only way you can become her husband is through the commandment of intercourse. [Even though marriage can usually be effected through either payment of money or a marriage contract, as well as through sexual intercourse, only the latter is permitted in this case because Eliezer wishes to ensure that the Israelite extends to the captive woman all the natural rights of an Israelite wife, which include conjugal relations; this injunction also ensures that the man will not marry the woman simply in name and use her as a slave or concubine.]

AND SHE SHALL BE YOUR WIFE: (Eliezer) She shall be entitled to "her food, her clothing, her conjugal rights he shall not diminish" (Exodus 21:10) [Again, this interpretation entitles her to the full rights and privileges of any Israelite wife.]

(14) THEN, SHOULD YOU NO LONGER WANT HER: Scripture is informing you that you will come to hate her. [This proleptic comment would seem to accord with Akiba's view that the marriage is ill-fated.]

YOU MUST LET HER GO AS SHE WISHES (*lenafshah*): (Akiba) But not to the house of her idols. [The comment builds on the final word, *lenafshah*, which the Rabbis might have understood more literally as "to" or "according to" her soul, that is, her natural desire or bent, which, because she is pagan by birth, is idolatrous. According to Akiba, the Torah prohibits the Israelite from allowing her to follow her natural bent.]

[YOU MUST LET HER GO: with a bill of divorcement, as Rabbi

Jonathan taught; if she is ill, he shall wait until she recovers; all the more is this the case concerning Israelite women who are holy and pure.] [This interpretation clearly accords with Eliezer's understanding of the passage.] YOU MUST NOT SELL HER AT ALL FOR MONEY: (Eliezer) I conclude from this only that he may not sell her for money; whence do we learn that he may not give her away as a gift or as a favor? From the following: YOU MUST NOT SELL HER AT ALL (*umakhor lo timkerenah*) FOR MONEY, YOU MUST NOT DEAL WITH HER AS A SLAVE—meaning that you must not make [any] use of her.

[Another interpretation: YOU MUST NOT DEAL WITH HER AS A SLAVE: as Rabbi Jonathan taught. Another interpretation: This is a warning for the court.] [That is to say, the Israelite can be legally prevented from treating the woman this way.]

[MT: YOU MUST NOT DEAL WITH HER AS A SLAVE: (Eliezer) You can't use her [as a servant].

BECAUSE YOU HAVE HUMBLLED HER: (Eliezer) Even if only one act of intercourse has been performed. [In this case, she is legally the man's wife.]

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