

Rabbinic Historiography as Response to Christian Triumphalism: The Temple's Destruction in Aramaic, Syriac and Greek Discourse

Chicago, October 4, 2012

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החכמה תעוז לחכם מעשרה שליטים אשר היו בעיר
קהלת ט:יט

The talk I plan to present is based on the following article that will be published (with minor revisions) in the forthcoming Festschrift for Peter Schäfer (ed. R. Boustan, K. Herrmann, R. Leicht, and A. Reed, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck). Please do not cite or circulate it without safeguarding furtiveness!

As a tribute to Peter Schäfer, this article builds on his work on two aspects of Rabbinic Judaism: the study of the Rabbis' Roman context, which has marked his research for a long time, and the study of the Rabbis' response to the ascendency of Christianity, which has occupied my teacher—and myself—for the past fifteen years. In particular, in his article on "Die Flucht Yohanan b. Zakkais aus Jerusalem," published around the time my parents taught me how to speak, Schäfer has shown that the rabbinic narratives about the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple cannot be used to reconstruct any aspect of the events of the first century and should instead be read as literary constructs.¹ In his recent book, *Jesus in the Talmud*, published around the time my Doktorvater taught me how to write, Schäfer, in his own words, confronts "the fake (self-)sufficiency and scholarly sterility" of "a model of Judaism and Christianity in antiquity

* My sincere gratitude to Fergus Millar and Jeffrey Rubenstein for their invaluable detailed comments on many aspects of this paper, and to Paul (Pinhas) Mandel for his helpful suggestions and assistance with manuscripts. I am also indebted to my colleagues in Nottingham and to the participants of the Oxford Seminar on Jewish History and Literature in the Graeco-Roman Period, organized by Martin Goodman, for their helpful feedback.

¹ Peter Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan b. Zakkais aus Jerusalem und die Gründung des 'Lehrhauses' in Jabne" (ANRW II, 19.2, Walter de Gruyter: 1979), 43-101.

as two parallel religious phenomena without much interaction.”² Combining both of Schäfer’s areas of inquiry, this paper evaluates the Christian context of the oldest rabbinic rendering of the Romans’ destruction of the Jerusalem Temple which we find in *Ekha Rabba*, a Midrash on Lamentations compiled from previous traditions in the early fifth century of the Common Era.

I argue that the Midrash is a product of its time, retelling the events by incorporating a vast amount of Jewish and Christian traditions. In particular, I hold that the materials produced by Josephus, shaping Christian tradition possibly even from its onset in Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles and certainly since the early patristic period, went altogether unnoticed during the early (Tannaitic) rabbinic period. The destruction of the Temple was a common point of reference for the Tannaim, yet the details of history did not receive much attention at all in the tannaitic exegesis or homiletics. The rabbinic silence was broken only after the fourth century, during which the Temple became a focal point of Palestinian politics, architecture, and religious discourse. The onset of the Christianization of Palestine and of Jerusalem in particular, the patristic discourse about Julian’s attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, and the new urgency of Josephus’ testimony in the nascent genre of Christian historiography led the later (amoraic) rabbis to re-appropriate a narrative that closely resembles Josephus. *Ekha Rabba*, or the oral narrative it preserves, seems to repeat and modify narrative elements also known from Josephus’ *War* along with others from the rabbinic tradition of the fall of Betar at the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt in the second century C.E. Combining and transcending the specificity of Jewish catastrophes, the resulting narrative constitutes a tacit rejoinder to early Byzantine Christian triumphalism.

Josephus and the Rabbis

² Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 275 note 17. Schäfer’s *Jesus in the Talmud* was published in 2007 (also with Princeton University Press). The same year, my first proper article and treating a related topic based on a research paper written for Schäfer equally appeared (Holger Zellentin, “Rabbanizing Jesus, Christianizing the Son of David: The Bavli’s Approach to the Secondary Messiah Traditions,” in Rivka Ulmer (ed.), *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism*, University Press of America, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth (UK), 2007, 99-128).

Titus Flavius Josephus witnessed the Judean War against Rome in the first century C.E., first as a Judean general, and then as a Roman captive and protégé of the Flavian emperors. While living in Rome, from around 75 to 99 C.E, Josephus composed three works that are relevant for the current inquiry. He first wrote an Aramaic version of the *Judean War*, now lost, and then translated it, with some help, into Greek. He then authored the *Jewish Antiquities* in Greek, our most important source for the history of second temple Judaism. His final surviving work is his Greek *Life*, often attached to the *Antiquities* in the surviving manuscripts.³ At least the entire *War* was translated from Greek into Syriac in the fourth or fifth century; one book of this translation, and citations of most others, survive.⁴

Throughout Late Antiquity, Josephus' main readership were the Church Fathers who mined him as an invaluable source for the history of the Israelites and for that of the Christian Church.⁵ Josephus is indeed a historical witness to John the Baptist and to Jesus' brother James; at least according to the church fathers, Josephus also bears testimony to Jesus' resurrection and messianic status.⁶ We shall see that Eusebius,

³ Josephus' fourth known work, *Contra Appionem*, does not concern us here. On Josephus' life and career see Tessa Rajak, *Josephus* (London: Duckworth, 2002), the standard work among the immense scholarship on Josephus and on the Jewish war.

⁴ The sixth book of the *War* is preserved in a Peshitta manuscript, see Heimann Kottek, *Das sechste Buch des Bellum Judaicum: nach der von Ceriani photolithographisch editierten Peschitta-Handschrift übersetzt und kritisch bearbeitet* (Berlin: Rosenstein & Hildesheimer, 1886); Hans Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 61f; idem., *Rezeptionsgeschichtliche und Textkritische Untersuchungen zu Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 7f; and Silvia Castelli, "Riferimenti a Flavio Giuseppe nella letteratura siriaca," *Henoch* 23 (2001), 199-226.

⁵ Josephus' readers range from Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 108.3; idem, First Apology 31.5-6) to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 1.13, 2.19-26, 3.5-12, 4.5-6, idem, *Demonstratio Evangelica* 6.13) and Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus XIII*), and from Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.7.7-8, 30.2.7 (Williams, 112-118), idem, *Treatise on Weights and Measures* 15) to the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*, 1.37.1-2. For an extensive summary and discussion of the earlier material see Michael E. Hardwick, *Josephus as an Historical Source in Patristic Literature Through Eusebius* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); see already Hans Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* and idem., *Rezeptionsgeschichtliche und textkritische Untersuchungen zu Flavius Josephus*, 5-49. Gohei Hata discusses some of Eusebius' strategies, see his "The Abuse and Misuse of Josephus in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Books 2 and 3," in Shaye J.D. Cohen and Joshua J. Schwartz, *Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism (Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), 91-103. See also the important volume edited by Louis J. Feldman and Gohei Hata, *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

⁶ On James see e.g. the substantial volume edited by Chilton and Craig A. Evans, *James the Just and Christian Origins* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999). Josephus' spurious testimony about Jesus seems to be the Christian elaboration of a genuine comment Josephus made about Jesus; see e.g. Zvi Baras, "The Testimonium Flavianum and the Martyrdom of James," in Louis J. Feldman and Gohei Hata (eds.), *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, 338-48. Of related interest is also the recent work of Vered Noam, see

especially, already marshaled Josephus as a witness for his view that the atrocities experienced by the Jews, and particularly the destruction of the Temple, are clear proof that God substituted the Christian Church for the Jews as his chosen people. This view shaped patristic discourse ever since, and likely permeated the oral popular culture of Palestine in the fifth century. In the figure of Jerome, who, like Eusebius, resided in Palestine, and who had intense contact with Jewish sages, we even find a person who allows us to speculate how even versions of the scholarly Christian reading may have reached the rabbis.

The rabbis' retelling of elements known from Josephus forms the philological basis of my argument. While the extensive patristic knowledge of Josephus' writings is evident, this is not yet the case for the rabbis' respective familiarity with this author. Scholars have time and again considered the similarities between some rabbinic narratives and Josephus' *War*, his *Antiquities*, and his *Life*. The vague notion of the parallels between Josephus and the rabbis reach as far back as to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, especially to Moritz Güdemann; the topic has gained much momentum in articles by Yitzchak Baer and Peter Schäfer and most recently in the work of Richard Kalmin.⁷ The similarities are too many and too detailed to be coincidental, or to be reducible to some vague notion of oral tradition that the rabbis and Josephus would have shared. At the same time, narrative elements from Josephus are always twisted in some way or another when they appear in rabbinic texts, and they are always transferred to rabbinic characters or to the rabbis' enemies. The ambiguous evidence, made up of astonishing similarities amidst puzzling discrepancies, has precluded scholars from coming to a consensus on what the rabbis knew from Josephus' texts, and how they learned about it.

e.g. "Josephus and Early Halakhah: The Exclusion of Impure Persons from Holy Precincts," in Aren Maeir, Jodi Magness, and Lawrence Schiffman (eds.), '*Go Out and Study the Land*' (*Judges 18:2*): *Archaeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 133-46.

⁷ See Moritz Güdemann, "Josephus und die grosse Pessikta," *Monatesschrift zur Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 39 (1880), 132; Yitzhaq Baer, "Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt," *Zion* 36 (1971), 127-90 [Hebrew]; Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan b. Zakkais", 43-101; Richard Kalmin, "Josephus in Sasanian Babylonia," in *ibid: Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine* (Oxford University Press: 2007), 149-172, and Paul (Pinhas) Mandel, "Tales of the Destruction of the Temple: Between the Land of Israel and Babylonia," in Isaiah Gafni (ed.) *Center and Diaspora: The Land of Israel and the Diaspora in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Periods* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2004), 141-158 [Hebrew].

In order to further the slow emergence of a new comprehensive theory, I suggest that the question about Josephus and the Rabbis needs to be asked in the context of his role in patristic discourse. In order to gain clarity, the discussion must be stratified according to the layers and geography of rabbinic materials. To begin with, Richard Kalmin most recently brought suggestive evidence for the circulation of an actual text of Josephus' *Antiquities*, or a very similar text, among the authors of the Bavli at the end of the classical rabbinic period. Kalmin shows that the Bavli contains many narratives about the Sadducees and the Hasmoneans that have no parallels in earlier, Palestinian rabbinic material, but are attested in striking similarity in Josephus' *Antiquities*. Only an actual Josephus text, or a very similar composition, would explain the resurgence of the narratives, Kalmin argues persuasively.⁸

Secondly, it seems clear that the Tannaitic rabbis of Palestine at the beginning of the classical rabbinic period show little, if any, familiarity with Josephus. In their case, the few “parallels” between Josephus and the Tannaitic rabbinic materials are most likely evidence of shared Palestinian oral traditions; a scenario not unlikely given Josephus’ own Palestinian provenance and the fact that a little over a century had passed since the composition of Josephus’ oeuvre and the onset of that of the Tannaim.⁹ Cultural memories and local oral culture can at the same time be stable and vibrant.

⁸ See Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 149-172.

⁹ For example, there are two Tosefta passages of particular interest that seem very similar to Josephus: Tosefta *Para* 9.2 (see *War* 5.409-10 and Shaye Cohen, “Parallel Historical Traditions in Josephus and Rabbinic Literature,” *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B, Volume I (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 7-14) and Tosefta *Ta'anit* 2.13 (see *Antiquities* 14.19-28 and William Scott Green “Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition, in Wolfgang Hasase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 19/2 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 619-647. Moreover, the name of the meek ר' זכריה בן אבקלוס in Tosefta *Shabbat* 16.7 (Lieberman 77) could be associated with the name of Ζαχαρίας δέ τις νιός Ἀμφικάλλει in Josephus *War* IV.225, but see Baer’s objections (*idem*, “Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt,” 170). Zechariah’s “humbleness,” as David Rokeah has argued, may well be an ironic use of his aggressiveness (*idem*, “Zekhariah ben Avkulias—Humility or Zealotry?” *Zion* 53 (1988) 53-56 [Hebrew], but see Daniel Schwartz’ rejoinder and Rokeah’s answer in *Zion* 53 (1988), 313-6 and 317-22); in both texts indeed the respective Zechariah is not insubstantial in catalyzing the cataclysmic events. While a fuller inquiry into the scattered tannaitic evidence remains a desideratum, one salient example for the Tannaitic rabbis’ ignorance of, or lack of interest in Josephus may be most indicative of the limited relevance of Josephus for the historiography of the earliest rabbis. *Sifre Ha’azinu* 328 (Finkelstein, 378f) portrays Titus’ desecration of the Holy of Holies. Josephus’ Titus (in *War* VI. 409) does enter Jerusalem, but not the Temple, leave alone the Holy of Holies. The unrestraint sexual and sacrilegious violence of the rabbinic Titus stands in crass contrast, but in no discernable literary relationship, to the self-restraint and respectful Roman gentleman of Josephus’ *War*. It is noteworthy that Palestinian and Babylonian Amoraic narratives embellish the negative tannaitic view of Titus, see e.g. the story of Titus battle with God in *Wayiqra Rabbah* 22.3 (Margulies 499-502) and Bavli *Gittin* 57a. For a contextualization of the Amoraic Titus materials in the context of Christian

The concept of cultural memory, which allows for fluidity amidst stability and specificity in the collective memory, is of relevance also for the study of the third period of Josephus' role for the classical rabbis, set in between the vagueness of the Tannaitic period and the textual fixation of the Babylonian period.¹⁰ There has indeed been little focus on the Amoraic Palestinian rabbinic reception-history of Josephus during the middle of the classical rabbinic period. I suggest beginning the discussion by reexamining the one rabbinic text whose cultural memory reflects a very specific sense of Josephus, albeit without any trace of direct "textual" interaction: the rabbinic narrative about the destruction of Jerusalem in *Ekha Rabbah*.¹¹

Ekha Rabbah, as mentioned above, was likely composed in the early fifth century in the culmination of a process that began taking shape decades before.¹² This article

anti-Judaism see Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 31-92); for a contextualization in the context of Roman imperial discourse see Joshua Levinson, "'Tragedies Naturally Performed:' Fatal Charades, Parodia Sacra, and the Death of Titus," in Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 349-384; for an attempt to integrate both discussions see Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 170-2.

¹⁰ On rabbinic orality see most importantly Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). The concept of "cultural memory," built on the work of Maurice Halbwachs, is common in other areas of Jewish studies, but has to the best of my knowledge not been systematically introduced to the study of rabbinic Judaism. (See, however, Seth Schwartz on the cognate culture of memorization in first century Judaism (*idem*, "Memory in Josephus and the Culture of the Jews in the First Century," in O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (eds.), *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2008), 185-94.

¹¹ The complex rabbinic reception of the Judean revolt has been discussed many times. In addition to the works by Baer, Yuval and Schäfer, see e.g. Paul Mandel, "The Loss of Center: Changing Attitudes towards the Temple in Aggadic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 99 (2006): 17-35; Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem Against Rome* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 127-206; Amram Tropper, "Yohanan Ben Zakkai, *Amicus Caesaris*: A Jewish Hero In Rabbinic Eyes" *JSIJ* 4, 2005, 133-149; Lilian Vana, "Histoire et historiographie chez les Pères de l'Eglise et les Sages du Talmud," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 162 (2003), 17-42; Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 146-190; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative, Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore & London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 139-175; Anat Yisraeli-Taran, *The Legends of the Destruction* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1997); Menahem Kister, "Legends of the Destruction of the Second Temple in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan," *Tarbits* 67 (1998), 483-529; Burton Visotzky, "Most Tender and Fairest of Women: A Study in the Transmission of Aggada" *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983), 403-418; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Destruction: from Scripture to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 2 (1982), 18-39; Naomi C. Cohen, "The Theological Stratum of The Martha b. Boethus Tradition: An Explication of the Text in Gittin 56a," *HTR* 69 (1976), 187-195; Anthony J. Saldarini, "Johanan ben Zakkai's Escape from Jerusalem: Origin and Development of a Rabbinic Story," *JSJ* 6:2 (1975), 198-204; A fairly inclusive list and discussion of the most important studies can be found in Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life*, 242-5. Martin Goodman recently offered an insightful new interpretation of the war itself, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

¹² Even if the final redaction of *Ekha Rabbah* as a whole had occurred later, as has been argued, I adduce much evidence for the early fifth-century context of the Jerusalem narrative below. For further discussion

reevaluates the complexity and density of the parallels between material closely reminiscent of Josephus and the rabbinic narrative in *Ekha Rabbah* in terms of inner-rabbinic adaptation, and in terms of the role that Josephus and discourse about the Jerusalem Temple played in Palestinian discourse of the fifth century. To reiterate, the destruction of Jerusalem in *Ekha Rabbah* is in my view modeled on the narrative about the destruction of Betar which *Ekha Rabbah* inherits from rabbinic tradition, on the one hand, and on the other hand, on material found in Josephus' *War*, which it effortlessly, yet unmistakably, wrests from Christian triumphalist historiography, as epitomized by Eusebius, Jerome, and other church fathers. As is to be expected amidst the oral culture of the rabbinic narrative tradition, Palestinian rabbis accessed considerable portions of Josephus' narrative through an oral rendering of his *War*, but likely not the written text directly, and that Josephus may have entered rabbinic discourse even before the redaction of *Ekha Rabbah*. Regardless, I hold that the rabbis' rendering of the Temple's destruction shows clear signs of what I will designate as "textual" memory, in contrast to the rabbinic approaches to Betar, which seems to reflect Jewish cultural memory much more immediately.

From Betar to Jerusalem

The narrative of the destruction of Betar, to begin with, is first attested in the Talmud Yerushalmi, a collection that remains eloquently silent on how Jerusalem was destroyed. *Ekha Rabbah* shares with the Yerushalmi the story about the fall of Betar; in *Ekha Rabbah*, the story of the fall of Jerusalem first appears.¹³ The Betar story in *Ekha Rabbah* describes the final siege of the Bar Kokhba revolt in fantastic terms whose "literary"

on the dating of *Ekha Rabbah* see Günther Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 285-6; and especially Paul Mandel, "Between Byzantium and Islam: The Transmission of a Jewish Book in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods," in: Y. Elman and I. Gershoni (eds.), *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2000), 74-106. The dating of *Ekha Rabbah* vis-à-vis the Bavli (and its own retelling of the destruction on *Gittin* 55b-59a) should be seen in light of the emerging consensus that the Bavli was redacted after the fifth century, and possibly even much later (see for example Jeffrey Rubenstein (ed.), *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

¹³ See Talmud Yerushalmi Taanit, manuscript Leiden, 68d-69b (24a-b), according to Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi II/5-12* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001), 261-267; *Ekha Rabbah* II.4, according to the *editio princeps* in *Midrash Hamesh Megillot* (Pesaro 1519) and Salomon Buber, *Midrasch Echa Rabbi: Sammlung Agadischer Auslegung der Klagelieder, Herausgegeben nach einer Handschrift aus der Bibliothek zu Rom cod. J. I. 4, und einer Handschrift des British Museum cod. 27089, Kritisch bearbeitet, kommentiert und mit einer Einleitung versehen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 50a-55a.

nature, and lack of direct historical relevance, was described long ago by Peter Schäfer.¹⁴ Schäfer, however, equally emphasized that the rabbinic material on Bar Kokhba may accurately echo Jewish consciousness, constituting a prime example of the vagueness and precision of cultural memory.¹⁵ As has become increasingly clear after Schäfer first pointed to this phenomenon, the rabbinic story of the fall of Betar is commensurate with some of the archeological and Roman historiographic evidence, seemingly reflecting a continuous rabbinic cultural memory.¹⁶

Nevertheless, it is precisely the more fanciful notions of the rabbinic Betar narrative, and not so much the historically confirmable ones on which *Ekha Rabbah* models the destruction of Jerusalem. In the Betar narrative, the rabbis challenge Bar Kokhba's brutal military rule. Then, a Samaritan sneaks into the city and tricks Bar Kokhba into killing the saintly Rabbi Elazar haModai, whereupon Hadrian manages to conquer the city and kill Bar Kokhba. The story's point is that not Bar Kokhba's truly superhuman strength, but that the prayer of Elazar haModai had held off divine judgment in the form of the Roman conquest.¹⁷ As the Samaritan traitor put it most colorfully: "My

¹⁴ Peter Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand: Studien zum 2. jüdischen Krieg gegen Rom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

¹⁵ Schäfer writes that "[w]ährend auf der ersten Ebene nur das Echo einer vermutlich grausamen und blutigen Eroberung Bethars zu konstatieren ist, deren Einzelheiten aber nicht mehr rekonstruiert werden können..., zeigt sich auf der zweiten Ebene das Bewußtsein von einem kaum zu überbietenden schrecklichen Ereignis," ibid., *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand*, 192.

¹⁶ The Emperorship of Hadrian, the name of Bar Kozba, the location of Betar, a prolonged siege, and the importance of stone projectiles on both sides of the warring lines are among the facts in the Yeruhalmi, and in *Ekha Rabba*, that seem to have a historical basis. See David Ussishkin, "Archaeological Soundings at Betar, Bar-Kochba's Last Stronghold," in *Tel Aviv. Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 20 (1993) 66ff; Werner Eck, "Hadrian's Hard-Won Victory: Romans Suffer Severe Losses in Jewish War," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 33 (2007), 42-51; Hanan Eshel, *The Bar Kochba Revolt*, 132-135, in: *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, IV (2006) 105-127; Peter Schäfer (ed.), *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Werner Eck, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt: the Roman Point of View," *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999), 76-89; Menachem Mor, *The Bar Kokhba Revolt: Its Extent and Effect* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, The Israeli Exploration Society, 1991) [Hebrew]; Leo Mildenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Aarau, Frankfurt am Main, Salzburg: Sauerländer, 1984); Uriel Rapaport, *Judea and Rome: The Jewish Revolts* (Jerusalem: Alexander Palay, 1982) [Hebrew].

¹⁷ On rabbinic views of Bar Kokhba see Louis Finkelstein, "Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Ishmael, and the Bar Kochba Rebellion," *Approaches to Ancient Judaism, New Series*, I (1990), 3-10; Aharon Oppenheimer, "Talmudic Literature as a Historical Source for the Bar Kokhba Revolt, *Associazione Italiana per lo Studio del Giudaismo: Atti del Congresso*, IV (1987), 139-151; Reuven Hammer, "A Rabbinic Response to the Post Bar Kochba Era: The Sifre to Ha'azinu," in *American Academy for Jewish Research Proceedings* 52 (1985), 37-53; Yehuda Devir, *Bar Kokhba: The Man and the Messiah* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1964) [Hebrew] and Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand*; cf. also Richard G. Marks, *The Image of Bar Kokhba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 13-56. The fact that Bar Kokhba' great strength is presented as catching the

lord, as long as that old hen (Rabbi Elazar) wallows (in prayer), you will not conquer the city.”

The general affinity between the rabbinic narrative of the fall of Betar and that of Jerusalem is not surprising given the shared subject matter of Israelite and Jewish narratives of catastrophe such as Jeremiah, Lamentations, Josephus, and *Ekha Rabbah*.¹⁸ In effect, the Mishna already associates the fall of Jerusalem and of Betar with each other and inscribes them into a long history of harsh divine decrees against the Israelites that occurred on the ninth of Av.¹⁹ *Ekha Rabbah* explicitly insists that Betar was destroyed (among many other reasons) because its inhabitants rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem.²⁰ The implicit message of the two stories’ many shared traits supplements this picture, inviting the rabbinic audience to understand the two events as historical permutations of each other. Scholars have likewise analyzed the two rabbinic narratives of the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Betar in light of each other in order to make sense of both narratives. I discuss the respective contributions of Galit Hasan-Rokem’s synchronic, intertextual and folkloristic reading below.²¹ Most importantly, Peter Schäfer has analyzed the entirety of what he calls the rabbinic “Bethar-Komplex” in its diachronic literary relationship to the rabbinic narratives about the destruction of Jerusalem.²²

Roman catapult stones with his knee and throwing them back bare-handed (*Ekha Rabba* II.4) may reflect what Jerome described as the Palestinian Jewish practice of exercising with “round stones of very great weight,” whom the young man lift “as far as the variations of their strength allow—some as far as the knees... while a few raise the weight above their heads, with their arms straight and brought together, demonstrating the magnitude of their strength.” (Jerome, *Commentary on Zechariah* III.12.3, written in 391/2 C.E., translated by Fergus Millar, “Jerome and Palestine,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 29 (2010), 60).

¹⁸ On the importance of Jeremiah for the rabbinic narrative about the destruction of Jerusalem see Jacob Neusner, “Beyond Historicism, After Structuralism: Story as History in Ancient Judaism,” The 1980 Harry Sindel Memorial Lecture (Bowdoin College, Brunswick Maine, 1980), 5-30 and Amram Tropper, “Yohanan ben Zakkai, Amicus Caesaris: A Jewish Hero in Rabbinic Eyes,” *JSIJ* 4 (2005): 133-149. Josephus himself, of course, also stylizes himself as Jeremiah and his *War* as Lamentations. See the perceptive essay by Shaye Cohen, “Josephus, Jeremiah, and Polybius,” *History and Theory* 21 (1982): 366-381. Obviously, there are also some basic similarities the rabbinic Betar narrative shares with Jeremiah and with Josephus: the siege of a Jewish city by Roman forces, and the emphasis on the spiritual powers of a Jewish dignitary who delays the city’s fall, as well as the accusation of treason (on which more below) come to mind. In my view, it is precisely these broad themes that invited the rabbinic author of the Jerusalem narrative to combine the sources with which he was familiar, Jeremiah, Josephus and the Betar narrative.

¹⁹ Mishna *Ta'anit* 4.8, see also Yerushalmi *Ta'anit* 4.8 (69b) and Bavli *Ta'anit* 29a. Historically, the Bar Kokhba revolt may need to be seen in many ways in political and religious continuity with the first revolt against Rome. See Peter Schäfer (ed.), *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*.

²⁰ *Ekha Rabbah* II.4, carefully analyzed by Paul Mandel in “The Loss of Center,” 17-35, see also Bavli *Gittin* 57a.

²¹ Hasan Rokem, *Web of Life*, 171-88.

²² Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand*, 136-94.

In a rigorous examination of the (non-existing) historical value of the rabbinic traditions, Schäfer shows that much of the material the rabbis relate about the Bar Kokhba revolt belongs originally to the first revolt; that some material is secondary to both rabbinic traditions; and still other material is interwoven so intricately that any attempt to dissolve it is futile. Most importantly for my purposes, Schäfer argues persuasively that the story of Rabbi Elazar HaModai and Bar Kokhba is indeed original to the narrative tradition attached to Bar Kokhba.²³ Schäfer notes several parallels between this narrative and the one about the destruction of the temple (to which will I refer below in detail), but his inquiry does not pertain to the direct literary relationship between these two specific narratives about the fall of the two cities proper. While Betar fell almost seventy years after Jerusalem, I argue that the rabbinic *narrative* about the destruction of Jerusalem may actually be inspired by the rabbinic narrative about the fall of Betar, inverting the historical order of events. This seems plausible (yet of course not necessary) for the following three reasons.

- First, the rabbinic movement gained verifiable momentum only in the second half of the second century.²⁴ Since the nascence of the rabbinic movement stands in much closer temporal proximity to the Bar Kokhba revolt than to the destruction of Jerusalem, it seems more likely that the rabbis would have had a more continuous cultural memory of the fall of Betar during the Bar Kokhba revolt than of the fall of Jerusalem.²⁵

²³ Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand*, 173-6.

²⁴ Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

²⁵ The continuity of the rabbinic memory of Betar's fall is evidenced by the historical accuracy of some of the details of the respective rabbinic tradition that appear to be independent of literary precedent (see above, note 14). Such independent details, I will argue below, are absent in the case of the rabbinic narrative about the fall of Jerusalem. *Ekha Rabbah* itself seems to reflect on the fact that the literary renderings of the destruction of the Temple proliferated only in the Amoraic period. When introducing the narrative of the fall of Betar, *Ekha Rabbah* (2.4) states: "Rabbi Yohanan used to interpret (וְיִשְׁרָאֵל) the verse ‘And God swallowed unspuriously’ (Lam. 2:2) in sixty ways (וְיִשְׁרָאֵל), and Rabbi used to interpret it in twenty-four ways. And [how can it be that] Rabbi Yohanan’s [number of expositions] is greater than that of Rabbi? However, Rabbi, since he was close to the destruction of the Temple remembered and began to interpret and cried and needed consolation." The Midrash explains the seeming paradox—the early Amora exceeds the number of interpretations of the late Tanna—through Rabbis' (minimally) closer proximity to the destruction of the second Temple. *Ekha Rabba* effectively describes the Tannaim, as epitomized by Rabbi, as incapable of dealing with the memory of the Temple's destruction. Only the Amoraim, as epitomized by Yohanan, began the literary struggle of coping with the past. One is tempted to agree with Alan Mintz, who observes on this passage that "one would assume that proximity in time to the events would naturally make it easier to multiply the illustrations. The mi[]drash refutes this commonsense assumption; reading and interpreting are *not* dependent upon experience and memory. In fact, rather than generating interpretations and supplying authenticity, experience and memory can act as impediments" (idem., *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 51). The Midrash, in other

- Second, the Betar narrative was redacted and most likely composed before the Jerusalem narrative. The Yerushalmi, usually thought to precede Ekha Rabbah, only records the destruction of Betar, but not that of Jerusalem, allowing for a tentative argument from silence.²⁶ Ekha Rabbah contains both narratives, and the addition in Ekha Rabbah of such a monumental narrative of growing importance for intellectual environment of the period (on which more below) would seem more likely than its “omission” in the Yerushalmi. While no weight can be placed on such an argument, I am not disinclined to situate the likely oral emergence of the Jerusalem narrative in the few generations between the redaction of the Yerushalmi and that of Ekha Rabbah in the second half of the fourth century.
- Finally, the narrative about the destruction of Jerusalem is far longer than that of the destruction of Betar, which leads to my main contention that the Jerusalem narrative incorporates elements from both the Betar story and from Josephus.

Plausibility, of course, is secondary to my actual argument, which I must admit is, to a degree, strictly modular. The results of my analysis presented below suggest that the elements in the rabbinic “Jerusalem” narrative that are not paralleled by Josephus are paralleled by “Betar.” The rabbinic retelling of “Betar” plus “Josephus,” to put it crudely, equals “Jerusalem;” only set against this simplistic background of literary “absorption” we can reassess the literary agency of the rich rabbinic retelling of the Temple’s destruction. Inversely, if the Betar narrative were a retelling of the Jerusalem narrative—the scenario often assumed in order to explain the known parallels between the two rabbinic accounts—its author would have suppressed precisely all the elements of the story that are paralleled by Josephus, an unlikely event on all accounts.²⁷

Hence, combining a diachronic with a synchronic approach and integrating a modular with an intertextual reading, I will first present and then discuss the evidence.²⁸ I present a table of Ekha Rabbah’s version of the destruction of Jerusalem in the left

words, theorizes on freeing the interpreter from the “experience” of a text’s historical signified, and celebrates interpretative freedom. The likely earlier version of this passage in Yerushalmi *Ta’anit* 4.8 does not state that the numbers differed regarding the rabbis’ “ways” (*אפיקין*) of interpretation, but regarding the numbers of anecdotes (*עובדי* and *מעשיהם*) they could adduce. The adaptation of the passage in Ekha Rabba therefore emphasizes the interpretative freedom of the rabbis even more than the Yerushalmi, a development in rabbinic thought in accordance with the development of the meaning of the term *שׁרֵך* towards greater emphasis on interpretative creativity.

²⁶ On the redaction of the Talmud Yerushalmi see Stemberger, *Introduction*, 170-3.

²⁷ This argument is also pertinent when assessing the relationship between Ekha Rabba and the other rabbinic versions of the destruction of Jerusalem. None of them add a single detail that derives from Josephus, while all other versions delete some of the story’s details we find in Ekha Rabbah that are directly in dialogue with Josephus.

²⁸ Combining various forms of constructing textual relationships is what I pursue throughout my *Rabbinic Parodies*; for a discussion of the methodological background see esp. 1-26.

column,²⁹ selected parallels from the fall of Betar in *Ekha Rabbah* appear in the middle column,³⁰ and relevant passages from Josephus' *War* and his *Life* in the right column.³¹ The composite text of *Ekha Rabbah* is largely based on the *editio princeps* in *Midrash Hamesh Megillot* (Pesaro 1519), with emendations from manuscript Rome. Each of these two texts is representative of one of the two textual families of *Ekha Rabbah*, version Aleph and Version Bet; I make occasional reference to manuscript variants all of which were most kindly provided by Paul Mandel.³² The resulting eclectic text is sufficiently stable for my present purposes; but by no means is it intended to constitute a critical edition.

²⁹ *Ekha Rabbah* I.29-31 according to *editio princeps* and Buber, *Midrasch Echa Rabba*, 31b-35a.

³⁰ *Ekha Rabbah* II.4 according to *editio princeps* and Buber, *Midrasch Echa Rabba*, 50a-55a.

³¹ Cited according to Henry Saint John Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, *Josephus* (Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1927-43), Greek text according to B. Niese, *Flavii Josephi opera* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955 [1895]).

³² While eagerly awaiting the publication of the critical edition of *Ekha Rabba* currently in preparation by Paul Mandel, his preliminary findings provide a sufficient textual base for the present project. In *Midrash Eikha Rabba: mavo u-mahadurat bigorit le-parasha ha-shlishit*, תרשלשׁה ל'פרשה (PhD Thesis: Hebrew University, 1997), Mandel convincingly aligns as “version Aleph” the *editio princeps* with manuscripts Munich 229, Cambridge 495, and Parma 1426, and as “version Bet” Buber’s edition of manuscript Rome with manuscripts Casanatense, Parma 1400, Sienna, Oxford 164, Parma 1408, and London (British Museum Add. 1076). In the published material, the variants within the two textual families are minor in comparison to those between the two textual families.

I Vespasian's Officers

(see also below, VIII)

Three and a half years did Vespasian encircle (שלש שנים ומחצה הקיף) Jerusalem.³³

And he had four (ארבעה) dukes (דוכסין) with him,
The duke of Arabia (דערבייא),
The duke of Africa (דאפריקא),³⁵
The duke of Alexandria,³⁶
The duke of Palestine (דפלטיניא).³⁷

Three and a half years did Hadrian Caesar encircle (שלש שנים ומחצה הקיף) Betar.³⁴

[Antiochus Epiphanus ruled Jerusalem for three years and six months. (War V.394)]

[The duke of Arabia is named “praise” (קילוס) and “Panegyrist” (פנגיר) in version Aleph, and “Abgar” (אברג), in version Bet.³⁹]

Six of [Vespasian's] chief staff-officers (κορυφαιοτάτων) were assembled, namely, ... Tiberius Alexander,³⁸ ... Fronto Haterius, prefect of the two legions from Alexandria, and Marcus Antonius Julianus, procurator of Judea. (War 6.238)

II The Burning of the Food Reserves

And in Jerusalem, there were three/four (ארבעה) councilmen, each one of them being able to sustain nourishment for the city for ten years.⁴⁰

... almost all the corn, which might have sufficed them for many years of siege, was burnt up. (War 5.25)

³³ Manuscript Rome has ג' שנים ומחצה עשה, missing the verb “encircling.”

³⁴ Manuscript Rome has מקייף ... שנים ומחצה עשה.

³⁵ Manuscript Rome substitutes Phoenicia (א Fenikia) for Africa.

³⁶ Manuscript Parma 1426 has אسكنדריא. This reflects the Arabic spelling of Alexandria, and therefore most likely represents an alteration from Islamic times.

³⁷ Manuscript Rome substitutes Sebastia (סיבתיה) for Palestine.

³⁸ On Tiberius Alexander, “the prefect of all the forces,” see *War* 5.45 and 2.220.

³⁹ Following manuscripts Rome, Casanatense, and Parma 1400 of Version Bet. Manuscripts Sienna, Oxford 164, Parma 1408, and London (British Museum Add. 1076) have instead of אברג אברג. On further permutations of the names of the duke see below.

⁴⁰ The names of the four noblemen inside Jerusalem is given as “Ben Tsitsit, Ben Gorion, Ben Nicodemus, and Ben Kalba Savua” in the *editio princeps* (and throughout version Aleph). The middle two names are conflated as “Gorion ben Nicodemus” in manuscript Rome (and throughout version Bet). It is impossible to

And there was (וְהִיָּה שָׁם) Ben Batiach, the son of the sister (בַּת אֲחֹתָו) of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who was in charge of the storehouses

And he burnt (וְאָמַקֵּיד) all the storehouses
Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai heard it,
He said “Vey (ויי)!”

וְהִיָּה שָׁם Rabbi Elazar...
(see below, IX)

And, to whatever part of the city [John of Gischala] turned his steps, his invariable practice was to set light to the buildings stocked with corn and all kinds of provisions, and upon his retreat Simon advanced and did the same, as if they were purposely serving the Romans by destroying what the city had provided against a siege and severing the sinews of their own strength. (War 5.24)

They went and said (אֶזְלִין אָמְרוּ) to Ben Batiach: “Your uncle (חֲבִיכֶךָ) said Vey!”⁴¹
[Ben Battiah] sent and had brought (שָׁלַח וְאָתַיהֲ) [Rabbi Yohanan].

He said to him: “Why did you say Vey”? He said to him: “I didn’t say Vey but Wow (מִי)! [i.e., I did not disapprove, but approve].”

He said to him: “You said ‘Wow’? And why did you say ‘Wow’?”

He said to him: “Because you

They went and said (אֶזְלִין וְאָמְרוּ) to Bar Koziba: “your uncle (חֲבִיכֶךָ) Rabbi Elazar wants to hand over the city to Hadrian.”

[Bar Koziba] sent and brought (שָׁלַח וְאָתַיהֲ) [Rabbi Elazar]

He said to him: “What did this Cuthean say to you?” He said to him: “I do not know

Ben Koziba became angry and gave him a kick with his foot and he killed him.⁴²

The men of rank and wealth... were brought up to the tyrants. Of them some were falsely accused of conspiracy and executed, as were others on the charge of betraying the city to the Romans; but the readiest expedient was to suborn an informer to state they had decided to desert. (War 5.439)⁴³

[Jesus son of Ananias] repeated his lament,

determine the “original” version of the list, yet three seems earlier than four. The *editio princeps* juxtaposes four noblemen inside the city with four dukes outside, an appealing balance that would likewise qualify the reading of three noblemen in manuscript Rome as the *lectio difficilior*. Moreover, in Bereshit Rabbah 42.1, we find a similar list of three noblemen who appear before Yohanan Ben Zakkai. Intriguingly, the first and the last noblemen, Ben Tsitsit and Ben Kalba Savua, appear together in Bereshit Rabbah 98.8, and the middle one, Ben Gorion ben Nicodemus, is paralleled by a man with the same name in Josephus War II.451, a member of (treacherous) delegation of three Judeans to a Roman garrison. I suggest bracketing the issue, but see Schäfer, “Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais,” 68.

⁴¹ Manuscript Rome has חֲבִיכֶךָ.

⁴² Missing in manuscript Rome.

burnt all the storehouses, and I said as long as the storehouses exist the souls will not engage in battle.”
Between a Vey! and a Wow!
Rabbi Yohanan was saved.

III Famine

After three days Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai went up to walk (*לטיל*) in the market, And he saw that they boiled straw and drank its water. He said: “men that cook straw and drink its water, can they stand up to the army (*בחיילותיו*) of Vespasianus?” He said: “the essence of the issue (*אמר כל סמא דAMILTA*) is to get out (*ניפוק*) of here.”

[The two brothers] said: “The essence of the issue (*כל סמא דAMILHA*) is to put the crown of Hadrian and put it on our head.”⁴⁴

“Ay! Ay! (איא, Syriac: wy wy) to Jerusalem!” (War 6.305, see also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.8.9)

IV The Escape

He sent (*שלחו*) to Ben Battiah: “Come to me secretly.”⁴⁶
[Rabbi Yohanan] said to him: “Until when will you do so (*עד אימת עבדיתו ה כי*) and kill the people with famine?”⁴⁷
He said to him: “We decreed that no man should go out (*ניפוק*) except for a deceased”

The sages send (*שלחו*) to [Bar Kozba]: “Until when will you do so (*עד מתי אתה עוזה*) and make cripples in Israel?”

The principal citizens assembled with the chief priests and the most notable Pharisees to deliberate on the position of affairs... (War 2.411)

But flight was difficult,

⁴³ See also War 4.146: “For such a monstrous crime [the brigands] invented as monstrous an excuse declaring that their victims had conferred with the Romans concerning the surrender of Jerusalem and had been slain as traitors to the liberty of the state.”

⁴⁴ This passage is attached, but not directly pertinent to the Bar Kokhba narrative. See Schäfer, *Der Bar-Kokhba Aufstand*, 171-2.

⁴⁵ Famine sets in Josephus 5.342, see also 5.511. “Some in the extremity of hunger devoured grain unground, others baked it as necessity and fear dictated (Josephus: 5:428)

⁴⁶ Manuscript Rome, most likely under the influence of the Bavli version, substitutes “Abu Sirqra” for Ben Battiah, whose name it uses earlier. The *editio princeps* states: He sent to Ben Battiah: Get me out (*אפקוני*) of here

⁴⁷ Following manuscript Rome, missing in the *edition princeps*.

He said: “Bring me out (**אפקוני**) in the likeness of a deceased.”⁴⁸

[Rabbi Yohanan] pretended to be (**עבד גרמיה**)⁴⁹ dead, they placed him in a coffin. They carried him, Rabbi Eliezer in the front, and Rabbi Joshua at the feet, and Ben Battiah walked before them in rent garments.⁵⁰

As they reached [the gate, the

because guards were posted at all the outlets and anyone caught there, on whatever business, was slain, on the assumption that he was going off to the Romans. If, however, he paid the price, he was allowed to go, an only he who offered nothing was a traitor. (*War* 4.378-9, see also 5.30)

[The Samaritan] pretended (**עבד גרמיה**) to whisper in the ear of Rabbi Elazar haModai.

[Alexandra, trying to escape from Jerusalem,] had two coffins made as if for the transporting of dead bodies, and placed herself and her son [Aristobolus] in them, after giving order to those of her servants who knew of the plan to take them away during the night. From there they had a road to the sea and a ship ready for them to sail in to Egypt [to meet Cleopatra VII and Marc Anthony; they get caught by Herod]. (*Antiquities* 15.46)

[The brigands] tried the

⁴⁸ Manuscript Rome, likely under the influence of the Bavli’s פורתה הצלחה, “perhaps there is a little salvation,” adds here **דָהִי אֶזְלָא פּוֹרְתָא**, “perhaps that our lot will pass.” These two additions are not found in the rest of the manuscripts of Version Bet.

⁴⁹ Following manuscript Rome, missing in the *editio princeps*.

⁵⁰ “Following manuscript Rome, “in rent” garments is missing in the *editio princeps*. Note that the appearance of Yohanan’s disciples, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eliezer, also points to the Bar Kokhba revolt, as Hasan-Rokem has pointed out: “They themselves are also the teachers of R. Akiva, who will eventually be Bar Kozbah’s enthusiastic supporter” (eadem, *Web of Life*, 179). As Marina Zilbergerts Bitsan reminds me, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai is the last “recipient” of Torah named as thus in Mishna Avot 2.8, and therefore the ultimate link between Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. In order for Yohanan to pass on the Torah to his disciples, they need first to remove him from Jerusalem!

guards] wanted to pierce him (לדוקרו), and they did not let him.⁵¹

[Ben Batiach] said to them: “Do you want that the enemies say ‘even with their master (רבוּהוֹן) they had no pity?’”

[They bring out (דנפקין) Rabbi Yohanan through a gate (פלי') and place him in a cemetery.⁵²]

V Yohanan before Vespasian

Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai went out (נפק) to walk (לטיל) in the camp (בחיילותיו) of Vespasianus.

He said to them: “Where is the king?”

They went and said to Vespasianus: “A Jew wants to salute you.”

He said to them: “Bring him!”

As [Rabbi Yohanan] came, he said to him: “Biba Mari Eplator” (וביבא מاري אפלטור).⁵³

[Vespasian] said to him: “You addressed me with an address for a king, and I am not king, and if the king hears (it) he will kill me

points of their swords on the corpses... (War 5.516)

...there were carried out through a single gate (πύλης)... 115.880 corpses. (War 5.567)

A certain Samaritan came and found [Hadrian]. He said to him: “My lord, Each day that this hen wallows in ashes you will not conquer the city. But wait for me, because I will do something which will enable you to conquer it.”

[Bar Koziba] sent and had the Cuthean brought to him and asked, “What did you say to [Rabbi Elazar]?”

He replied, “If I tell you, the king will kill me (מלך ליה לההוא גברא); and if I do not tell you, you will kill me. It is better that I

Vespasian, however, ordered [Josephus] to be guarded with every precaution, intending shortly to send him to Nero. On hearing this, Josephus expressed a desire for a private interview with him... the prisoner thus addressed him: ... “I come to you as a messenger of greater destinies. Had I not been sent on this errand by God, I knew the law of the Jews and how it becomes a general to die. To Nero do you

⁵¹ Manuscript Rome adds that they pierced him “with spears, lest they were deceiving,” an addition absent from the other witnesses to version Bet.

⁵² From πύλαι. Ekha Rabba may compose the image of the piercing of the lord, as well as the burial procession itself, in order to evoke images from the Christian passion narrations in the New Testament and in later traditions. Here, Jesus is portrayed as pierced by the soldiers before his death, as the Lord on whom the Jews had no pity, and as buried in the vicinity of Jerusalem. The references here are too vague to allow for a meaningful interpretation. However, my subsequent reading of the entirety of the Jerusalem narrative in the context of the Christian interpretation of the destruction of the Temple as a punishment for the killing of Jesus, if acceptable, strengthens the likelihood that Yohanan’s hoax burial is indeed a parody of Christian narrative.

⁵³ The phrase is often transcribed as “Viva Dominae Imperator,” I would suggest that greeting recorded in Suetonius “Have imperator,” would be closer to what the Midrash transliterates (see SVETONI TRANQVILII VITA DIVI CLAVDI 21). Manuscript Rome translates the Latin into Aramaic: “Live my master the king,” יחי מר依 מלכא.

(מלכא קטיל לההוא גברא!)”
[Rabbi Yohanan] said to him:
“If you are not king now, in
the end you will be king,
since this temple is not
burned by any other than by
the hands of a king, as it is
said *And Lebanon will fall
by a mighty one.*” (Isaiah
10.32)”⁵⁴

should kill myself and the
secrets of the government
be not divulged.”

send me? Why then?
Bind me then yet more
securely in chains and
keep me for yourself; for
you, Caesar, are master
not of me only, but of
land and sea and the
whole human race.”
(*War* 3.399-402)

[Vespasian] recalled the
words of Josephus, who
had ventured, even in
Nero’s lifetime, to
address him as emperor.
(*War* 4.623)

VI The Test

They took him and placed him
behind of seven latticed
gates (קְנָקְלִין),⁵⁵
And they asked him: “What is
the hour of the night”?
And he told them.
“What is the hour of the day”?
And he told them.
Where from did Rabbi
Yochanan Ben Zakai know?
From the strength (חִילִיָּה)⁵⁶ of
his studies.

For myself, I ask to be
punished by stricter
custody, if I have dared
to trifle with the words
of God (*War* 3.402)

[Vespasian tests
Josephus’ prophetic
powers, and learns that
Josephus had predicted
the fall of Jotapata (*War*
III. 406)]

VII The Annunciation

⁵⁴ The biblical context of Isaiah 10:32 is an Assyrian attack on Jerusalem. Here, the “mighty One” is God, and “Lebanon” the Assyrian Empire. What seems to be an outrageous transposition of agency from God to Vespasian at first might indeed be subtle irony. The Midrashic use of the verse implies that Rome, like Assyria, will eventually fall itself, even if God permits it to destroy the Temple first. Ekha Rabbah, as Schäfer points out, seems to make use of the messianic connotation of the verse from Isaiah; Isaiah indeed continues in 11:1 with the famous “shoot of the stump of Jesse,” see Schäfer, “Die Flucht Yohanah ben Zakkais,” 86-7. The verse is read messianically elsewhere in Ekha Rabbah (I.51, see also Bereshit Rabbah 97 and Yerushalmi *Berakhot* 2.4 (5a).

⁵⁵ From κτυκλίς, see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1996 [1903]),

1394. Manuscript Rome has “within seven houses, and they lit candles for him day and night,” seemingly reflecting a further reflection on the scene.

⁵⁶ Missing in the *editio princeps*.

After three days Vespasianus went to bathe in Gofna (גָּפְנָה).

[Eighty pairs of priestly brothers marry eighty pairs of priestly sisters in one night in Gofna (גָּפְנָה).]

Titus advanced through Samaria to Gofna... Resting here one night... (War 5.50).

As [Vespasian] washed and put on one shoe (מַסְנֵי), good news was brought, and they announced to him that Nero had died and the sons of Rome had made him king.

He wanted to put on the other shoe, and it would not go up. He sent for R. Yohanan and said: "Will you not tell me why all these days I wore two shoes and I could put them on, but now I can put on one and one I cannot put on?"

He said to him: "You have been informed of good news, as it is written, 'A good report fattens the bones.'" (Proverbs 15:30)

He said to him: "What must I do to put it on?"

He said to him: "If you have somebody whom you hate (דְּסַנְיָה) or who owes you, let him pass in front of you, and your flesh will shrink, as it is written, 'A broken spirit dries the bones.'" (ibid. 15:22)

[The surrendered priests are settled in Gofna (War 6.116)⁵⁷]

Vespasian had returned to Caesarea and was preparing to march in full strength upon Jerusalem itself, when the news reached him that Nero was slain... [Civil war ensues.] (War 4.491)

Such was the conversation current in military circles, and then banding together and encouraging one another, they proclaimed Vespasian emperor and urged him to save the endangered empire. (War 4.601)

The people [of Rome], freed at length from terrors, acclaimed Vespasian emperor.... On reaching Alexandria, Vespasian was greeted by the good news from Rome. (War 4.655-56)⁵⁸

VIII Vespasian's Council of

⁵⁷ See Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais," 82-4.

⁵⁸ Note that Vespasian's foot is injured in War 3.236.

War (see above, part II)

They started to tell parables [to Rabbi Yohanan].

“A vat (חַבֵּית) in which a snake (נַחַשׁ) nests, what does one do to it?”

He said to them: “One brings a charmer and charms the snake, and leaves the cask (intact).” Panegyrist (פָּנָגֶר)⁵⁹ said: “One kills the snake and brakes the cask.”

“A tower (מִגְלָה) in which a snake nests, what does one do to it?”

He said to them: “One brings a charmer and charms the snake, and leaves the cask (intact)” Panegyrist said: “One kills the snake and burns the tower!”

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai said to Panegyrist: “Do all neighbors (מְגִירִיָּא) who do evil do it to their neighbors (לְמְגִירִיהוּ)? Instead of being a defender (סְנִיגּוֹרִיא) you are an accuser (קְטִיגּוֹרִיא).

[Panegyrist] said to him: “I want your welfare, since as long as this house (בֵּיתָא) is standing, the kingdoms will attack (מְתַגְּרִין) you, if I burn this temple, the kingdoms will not attack (מְתַגְּרִין) you.

Rabbi Yochanan said to him: “The hearer knows if it is woven (לִעְקָל) or crooked (לִעְקָלָלוֹת).”⁶⁰

Bar Koziba was killed and his head taken to Hadrian. He said: “Who killed this one?”

One Goth said: “I killed this one.”

He said to him: “Go and bring him.”

He went and brought him and found a snake (עֲכָנָא) wound around his neck...

Six of [Vespasian's] chief staff-officers were assembled... and the procurators and tribunes being next collected, Titus brought forward for debate the subject of the temple. Some were of opinion that the law of war should be enforced, since the Jews would never cease from rebellion while the temple remained as the focus for concourse from every quarter. Others advised that if the Jews abandoned it and placed no weapons whatever upon it, it should be saved..... Titus, however, declared that, even were the Jews to mount it and fight therefrom, he would not wreak vengeance on inanimate objects instead of man, nor under any circumstances burn down so magnificent a work; for the loss would affect the Romans, inasmuch as it would be an ornament to the empire if it stood. Fortified by this pronouncement, Fronto, Alexander, and Cerealis now came over to his view. (*War* 6.237-242)

⁵⁹ Amgar (אמגר) in manuscript Rome, here and in the sequel, see also note 34.

⁶⁰ See Hasan-Rokem's illuminating explanation of the word play (eadem., *Web of Life*, 185 and 247).

IX Salvation of the Rabbis

Vespasianus said to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai: “Ask me for something and I will do it.” He said to him: “I want that you to abandon (דתירפִי) this city and to go away.”

He said to him: “Did the sons of Rome make me king so that I would abandon (דנברפִי) this city? Ask me something [realistic], and I will do it!”

He said to him: “I want you to leave (דתירפִי) the western gate (לפִילִי מערבאה) which goes to Lod and everyone who goes out (דנפִיק) until the fourth hour (ארבעה שעין) will be spared.”

As he conquered [the city], he said to him: “Do you have any friends (דרכִים) or relative that is close to you? Send and bring him out before the army (אוכלוֹסְיא) will go up (יעלּוּ).”

He send for Rabbi Eliezer and for Rabbi Joshua to bring out (לאפוקִי) Rabbi Tsadoq (צדוק), “the Just”.⁶¹

They went and found him at the city gate (בבָּבָא דמִדִּינָה).⁶²

As he came, Rabbi Yochanan stood up before him. Vespasianus said to him: “Before this emaciated old man you stand?”

He said to him: “By your life, if there had been one more

After some time, [Hadrian] put his mind to returning home.

Again, when at last Jerusalem was on the point of being carried by assault, Titus Caesar repeatedly urged me to take whatever I would from the wreck of my country, stating that I had his permission. And I... made request to Titus for the freedom of some of my countrymen not long after I made petition for my brother and fifty friends..... and liberated all the friends and acquaintances whom I recognized, in number about a hundred and

Cuthean goes up (עליל) through “a tunnel of the city (בבּוּבִיה דמִדִּינָה).”

And there was Rabbi Elazar haModai engaged in his sackcloth and his fasting and each day he prayed and said: “Lord of the World, do not sit in

⁶¹ Manuscript Rome adds: “He send and brought out all the rabbis.”

⁶² Cf. Josephus: When the Roman army entered within the walls, and were sacking the whole city, [Simon ben Giora], accompanied by his most faithful friends,... let himself down with all his party into one of the secret passages.... (*War* 7.26).

like this one and an army twice the size would have been with you, you could not have conquered [the city].”

He said to him: “What is his strength (*חִילָה*)?”

He said to him: “That he would eat one fig and teach on it one hundred *peraqin*.”

He said to him: “Why is he so thin?”

He said to him: “From the intensity (*חִילָה*) of his abstinences and fasts.”

[Vespasian] sent and brought physicians who fed him on small portions of food and doses of liquid until his body returned to him.

judgment today.”

Finally [Hadrian] thought of returning home....

Bar Koziba was filled with anger, gave [Rabbi Elazar] a kick with his foot and killed him.

A Bath Kol came and said: “Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves his flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye.” (Zechariah 11:17)

It said to [Bar Koziba]: “You have paralyzed the arm of Israel and blinded their right eye; therefore the arm of that man shall dry, dry up and his right eye shall grow dim, dim!” At once the sins caused Betar to be captured.

ninety... I ... saw many prisoners who had been crucified, and recognized three of my acquaintances among them... [Titus] gave orders immediately that they should be taken down and receive the most careful treatment. Two of them died in the physicians' hands; the third survived. (*Life* 418-21)

In a word, had Ananus lived, [the Jews] would undoubtedly either have arranged terms... or else, had hostilities continued, they would have greatly retarded the victory of the Romans under such a general. (*War* 4.321)

X The Death of Panegyrist

As he conquered the city he divided the four (*ארבע*) ramparts to the four dukes, and the western gate (פַּלְיָה) went to Panegyrist.

And it was decreed (וּגְרוּ) from heaven that it would not ever be destroyed.

Why? Because the Shekhina is in the west (בְּמַעֲרָב).

They destroyed theirs and [Panegyrist] did not destroy his.

He send and he was brought.

He said to him: “Why did you not destroy yours?”

He said to him: “By your life! For the praise of the

[Jerusalem has four towers: Psephinus, facing Arabia, Hippicus, Phasael, and Mariamme. (*War* 5.156-175, see also 4.577)]

Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground, leaving only the loftiest of the towers, Phasael, Hippicus, and Mariamme, and the portions of the wall enclosing the city on the west: the latter as an encampment of the

kingdom (דְּמָלוֹתָא) have I done it.⁶³ Since if I had destroyed [it], no one would have known what you destroyed. And if creatures see it, they will say: ‘see the might (חִילִיָּה) of Vespasian, what he would destroy.’”

He said to him: “Enough, since you have spoken well, but you have transgressed my orders.⁶⁵ You will climb to the top of the temple mount (לַרְישׁ טוֹרָא) and jump from it. If you will live, you shall live, and if you die, you shall die.”

He climbed and jumped from it and died.

And he was reached by the curse of Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai.

garrison that was to remain, and the towers to indicate to posterity the nature of the city and of the strong defenses which had yet yielded to Roman prowess. (*War 7.1-2*)⁶⁴

⁶³ The term “Praise for the Kingdom” is missing in manuscript Rome.

⁶⁴ “And when... [Titus] demolished the rest of the city and razed the walls, he left these towers as a memorial of his attendant fortune.” (Josephus 6.413).

⁶⁵ כִּדְן דַבְּטָלָא קָלֹוֶסִיס דְמָלוֹתָא, דַעֲבָרָת עַל קָלֹוֶנוּן, from ἐκέλευσον. Manuscript Rome has “because you have disobeyed the king’s command (from κέλευσις).

The Narrative Structure

A few notes on the intratextual structure and meaning of Jerusalem narrative in *Ekha Rabbah* will shape the framework in which I then approach the text's retelling of previous rabbinic and non-rabbinic material. The narrative displays the ornate inner parallelisms typical of Midrashic texts.⁶⁶ Three themes run through the story, the Midrash marks them with the recurrence of the root *npq*, of the root *hyl*, and of the homophonic Hebrew roots 'rb and 'rb. The resulting triple emphasis on "leaving" Jerusalem, rabbinic and Roman "strength," and the spatial juxtaposition of inside and outside the city walls engendered by pairs of "four" and the "west" serves as a guide to the Midrash's intertextual engagement.

The first root, *npq*, "to leave," defines the main theme of the story, the departure from doomed Jerusalem. After Yohanan decides that he needs to get out (וַיַּפְקֹד), he learns that only the deceased can go out (יָפֹק). He promptly instructs the rebel leader accordingly (אֶפְקָדָנוּ), which they do (דָּנְפָקִין). After Yohanan goes out (וַיַּנְפֹּק) to meet Vespasian and secures his favor, he asks him to spare all those who leave through the western gate (דָּנְפִיקָה), and send his disciples to bring out (לְאֶפְקָדָי) Rabbi Tsadoq.

The second root, *hyl*, denotes "strength" or "army;" the story's repetition of the root contrasts Roman to rabbinic strength when illustrating how Yohanan managed to secure the departure of himself, of some rabbis, and of part of the population. According to the rabbinic literary technique of engendering meaning through the repetition of such roots in juxtapositional contexts, Rabbi Yohanan first takes a stroll (לָטֵיל) within Jerusalem, realizing that the Jewish forces will be no match for Vespasian's army (בְּחִילּוֹתֵי). He escapes, and then takes a second stroll (לָטֵיל) in Vespasian's army camp (בְּחִילּוֹתֵי). Already here, the story's precise repetition of two sets of two words depicts Yohanan as a contemplative, wise peripatetic who outsmarts the powers within and without the city walls.⁶⁷ The Midrash makes the rabbinic strengths even more explicit

⁶⁶ On the repetition of roots in rabbinic texts see Yonah Frenkel, *שְׁלֵמָה וְמַלְאֲכָה* (Massada: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), 260–74 and his "Sh'elot hermeneutiyot be-heqrer sipur ha'agadah," *Tarbits* 47 (1977/78), 139–72 [Hebrew, reprinted in: idem, *The Aggadic Narrative: Harmony in Content and Form* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2001), 11–50]. For an integration of Frenkel's structuralist hermetic readings into historical contextualization and the use of repetition during the Second Sophistic see e.g. Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*.

⁶⁷ Hasan-Rokem notes that Rabbi Yohanan "walks over to Vespasian's camp, just as he had walked through the market of Jerusalem in a previous section of the story" (eadem, *Web of Life*, 181). She also

when Rabbi Yohanan, at least in manuscript Rome, is able to remember the time of day through the strength (*חיליה*) of his study. Most importantly, we learn that the strength (*חיליה*) of Rabbi Zadok, to teach despite the intensity (*חיליהון*) of his fasts, could almost through his own piety stem the Roman forces. The story concludes with another repetition of the root when reflecting on the Western Wall: in effect, its enduring existence is proof of God's continued dwelling, but the foolish Panegyrist mistakes it for a memorial for Vespasian's might (*חיליה*).⁶⁸ Here, the Midrash ponders on the polysemy of history itself; a theme it develops throughout the story by juxtaposing the inside and the outside, Romans and rabbis, and conflicting interpretations of the destruction of Jerusalem. On the surface, the story clearly grapples with the assumption that the Jewish defeat seems utterly irreversible and perhaps the Jews even seem abandoned by God. Yet the Midrash finds hope between the lines that the events are actually proof that Rabbi Yohanan mastered the situation as well as was possible, and that the destruction of Jerusalem disjoins the (imagined) chain of rabbis from the events of the Jewish uprising in the first century and the bellicose revolutionaries left behind within the city walls.⁶⁹ Whatever Jewish transgression caused the destruction of the Temple, by no means were the rabbis part of it.

The story overlays a second interlaced structural web on the first one by repeating the nearly homophonic roots '*rb*' and '*rb*'. Inviting the audience to fuse the various contexts in which the roots appear, the story dramatizes the respective penetration of the city walls by the smart rabbi and the brute Romans. The root '*rb*' denotes "four," and the root '*rb*' "West," or "Arabia" (a region I shall define below). In Version Aleph, the Midrash develops a spatial parallelism by depicting four (*ארבעה*) generals outside the walls of Jerusalem, and four (*ארבעה*) councilmen inside. In Version Bet, a weaker numerical parallelism is enhanced by pointing to the superiority of the Romans: three councilmen cannot stand up to four generals. In the story's two central moment, Rabbi

realizes the story's emphasis on Torah study, yet does not analyze how it juxtaposes Roman and rabbinic strength (*ibid.*, 182).

⁶⁸ Hasan-Rokem draws our attention to the fact the "story includes a local piece of wisdom about the Wall's continued existence, and gives it an etiology, a narrative explaining the existence of something observed in reality" (*eadem., Web of Life*, 187).

⁶⁹ Note that the Bavli, in its retelling of the story, turns the hermeneutical screw even further, and in turn question the wisdom of the decisions of Rabbi Yohanan (cf. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 139-175).

Yohanan manages to permeate these walls twice through ruse and cunning, first by escaping through a gate (*פִּילֵי*) and second by negotiating that everybody leaving through the Western gate (*לְפִילֵי מַעֲרָבָה*) until the fourth (*אֶרְבָּעָה*) hour will be saved. Finally, Vespasian penetrates the walls in a Roman way: his army goes up into the city, and then he orders the destruction of the divide between inside and outside, assigning the four (*אֶרְבָּעָה*) walls to his four (*לְאֶרְבָּעָה*) generals. Here, the two structural nets become intertwined: the Midrash reemphasizes that heaven decreed that the western rampart, i.e. the Western Wall still visible today, will not be destroyed despite, since the Shekhina is in the West (*בַּמִּעֵרֶב*). Accordingly, the Western (*מַעֲרָבָה*) Gate—apparently *pars pro toto* for the Western Wall—falls to the doomed duke of Arabia (*דָּעֵרְבִּיא*). The cadence thereby links the second structural web of references to the first one. In a preliminary reading, we see that the Midrash emphasizes the importance of the intellectual strength that separates the rabbis from the military strength of the Romans; it emphasizes the city walls and gates, and especially the Western Wall, which it connects to the fate of the story's villain, Panegyrist. This intra-textual reading provides the structure in which to place the following intertextual interpretation of the story as in dialogue with the rabbinic account of the fall of Betar and with elements known from Josephus' account of that of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem and Betar

The story begins by defining the length of the siege as “three and a half years.” This opening line already guides the audience from the onset to read the story, in the Mishnaic tradition, against the background of the fall of Betar where the same opening words are used, “three and a half years” and “encircle” (*שִׁלְשׁ שָׁנִים וּמַחְצָה הַקִּינָּף*).⁷⁰ The period indicated by this particular parallel on its own may allude to other Jewish disasters as well: the same time period is already connected to disaster in Jerusalem by Josephus, who also uses it as the time span for the sacrilegious rule of Antiochus Epiphanes in Jerusalem in *War* V.394, and may even hearken back to Daniel.⁷¹ However, the entire narrative of the fall of Jerusalem recasts elements known from both traditions, the rabbinic narrative

⁷⁰ See Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life*, 175.

⁷¹ On a possible parallel with the Book of Daniel see also Peter Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba Aufstand* 20.

of Betar and Josephus' narrative of Jerusalem, at almost each and every point of the story; it is on this cumulative evidence that my analysis relies.⁷² I claim that *Ekha Rabbah* can only be understood in its own fifth-century context and its period's discussion about the Temple. It may bear traces of cultural memory of the cataclysmic events of the first century, yet we attest that these traces are overlaid by elements known from the Betar narrative and from Josephus which it recasts as a tacit polemic against the patristic historiography.

Vespasian's Officers and his Council of War (Sections I and VIII)

When comparing the rabbinic narrative about the destruction of Jerusalem to its likely “sources”—Josephus and the rabbinic narrative of the destruction of Bethar—we must keep in mind that at the time this narrative was composed, the older narratives were certainly not circulating in the precise form in which we have them today, and that even our record of the narrative will have undergone many retellings before it was written down. Yet we can still compare the three narratives as approaches to a long lost oral discourse.⁷³ For example, *Ekha Rabbah* introduces Vespasian's four dukes, the Roman officers, one of whom will later argue with Rabbi Yohanan about whether or not Jerusalem needs to be destroyed in order to quell the insurgency. The list of Vespasian's commanders in *Ekha Rabbah*, the scene of the council of war, and even the arguments exchanged all seem reminiscent of Josephus' *War*. In Josephus, we find six officers, four of whom are named, and one of whom comes from Alexandria (*War* 6.238). Some of them are in favor of preserving the Temple, while some, Titus among them, oppose it. The cumulative level of detail suggests textual rather than cultural memory. Yet despite

⁷² Many, but not all of the parallels between *Ekha Rabbah* and Josephus, and between the rabbinic “Jerusalem” and the rabbinic “Betar” narratives respectively have been discussed in some detail by Peter Schäfer, whose focus on the relative lack of historicity of the rabbinic narratives in many ways laid the groundwork for the present literary-historical argument. See idem., “Die Flucht Yohanan b. Zakkais” and idem., *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand*, 136-94.

⁷³ The complexity of rabbinic modes of adoption of previous rabbinic and non-rabbinic material has received a lot of scholarly attention over the past decades. We have become acutely aware of the fact that each rabbinic manuscript only reflects a fraction of the rich textual world to which it relates (see above, note 8). It may be wise to avoid the two possible extreme forms of construction textual relationships. We should not imagine a rabbinic text to “depend” on earlier ones if we thereby eclipse the literary agency of later texts. At the same time, we should be very careful to listen to a text's varied approaches to previous discourse in terms of reiteration and alteration. Textual similarity creates a framework in which difference generates a message, and only when allowing for the fact that an existing tradition is retold later can we access both similarity and difference, see Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, esp. 1-26.

these “striking” similarities, the many slight variances in detail lead to the impression that *Ekha Rabbah* does not retell Josephus directly. In effect, the story works best if we surmise that it expects its audience to have some notion of a narrative like Josephus, but not the extant Greek text. *Ekha Rabbah* then loosely recreates a scenario close enough to evoke “Josephus” by introducing four officers, one of whom is from Alexandria, as a preparation to introduce its own anti-hero by name as Panegyrist and Abgar (in version Aleph and Bet respectively). The Midrash attributes the arguments in favor of the Temple’s destruction to the duke of Arabia, those against it to Rabbi Yohanan.

Ekha Rabbah renders the discussion about the necessity of destroying the Temple by continuing to retell material that is very close to Josephus, with slight differences. In Josephus, some of the officers argue that the Jews would rebel as long as the Temple stands. *Ekha Rabbah* inverts the agency implied by Josephus throughout a passage it introduces by poetic juggling.⁷⁴ The text seems to play freely with its source: the Midrash, like Josephus, associates the Temple with military attacks on Jerusalem. In Josephus, however, the Jews’ are the aggressors, whereas in *Ekha Rabbah* the gentile attackers become the aggressors in the duke’s insincere mouth. *Ekha Rabbah*, hence, is clearly not rewriting Josephus as he has been transmitted, but an oral rendering. We do not know how similar the underlying oral tradition would have been to Josephus, and when and to which degree the story was “rabbanized.” Yet at the same time, we will see that the rabbinic parallels with “our” Josephus are so strong and pervasive that we can clearly sense of some form of a comprehensive oral retelling of Josephus’ narrative in the background. It seems less likely that such a retelling would have circulated in Jewish circles for centuries, especially since the earliest version we have of it—in *Ekha Rabbah*—bears the marks of refuting the period’s Christian discourse. Only when considering the evidence in its entirety, and in conjunction with the retelling of the Betar narrative, can we start to make sense of the rabbinic techniques of retelling and rabbanizing an oral rendering of the *War*.

⁷⁴ The text indicates its playfulness first by using a vat (חַבֵּית) as a playful homophonic metonymy for the temple (בִּתְהָא in the story’s Aramaic, הַבִּתָּה in Hebrew). Both version Aleph and Bet play with the consonance and assonance of the ending -gr which their respective duke (*abgr* and *pngr*) shares with the words “neighbor” (אֲגִירִיָּה), “defender” (סְנִיגּוֹרִיָּה) “accuser” (קָטִיגּוֹרִיָּה) and “attack” (מַתְגִּרִיָּה) in a way that almost rhymes, directing attention to the duke’s treacherous role. Intimating treason by connecting these terms to the similar ending of the duke’s name, the audience’s fears are worsened by Yohanan’s explicit doubt of the duke’s sincerity.

The Burning of the Food Reserves and Rabbi Yohanan's Escape (Section II)

The Midrash's play with the narrative figure of Josephus also dominates the next section. In its depiction of Yohanan's flight, Ekha Rabbah faithfully imitates Josephus' story that citizens sought to escape the city by all means, and that the rebels would kill any citizen caught in the attempt (*War* 4.378-9, see also 5.30). When Rabbi Yohanan is accused of defeatism, the Midrash also evokes Josephus' report that the citizens of rank were accused of treason (*War* 4.146 and 5.439, hearkening back to Jeremiah 38). The Midrash's play with Rabbi Yohanan's exclamation "vey!" that leads to the charge against the rabbi has a parallel in rabbinic literature: a similar wordplay between וְיַהֲיָה and וְיַהֲיֵה can be found in the roughly contemporary Pesiqta deRav Kahana, where the damned wicked ones first misperceive the Gehenom as pleasant, exclaiming "wow!" but then realize their predicament, exclaiming "vey!"⁷⁵ Intriguingly, the lament is also identical to a lament uttered in a comparable situation in Josephus (noticeable in the Greek, and verbatim similar to Josephus' Syriac translation via a quotation in Eusebius).⁷⁶ In Josephus, one Jesus son of Ananias prophetically bemoans the impending fall of Jerusalem, only to be killed by a Roman projectile. Ekha Rabbah reuses the words found in the rabbinic parallel, and when placing them in Yohanan's mouth it simultaneously evokes the fate and words of this Jesus. It thereby emphasizes the rabbi's prophetic perception of the impending fall. Portraying him as a trickster figure who can evade death at the hand of the rebels simultaneously emphasizes his cunning mastery of adversity. No matter if the midrash or a previous oral rendering had transferred and rabbinalized the roles, the similarities and differences between Josephus and Ekha Rabba allows us to understand the text as a retelling in which Josephus' characters are replaced by rabbis whose actions are reminiscent, but much superior, to those of the "original" characters.

Ekha Rabbah's main model for Rabbi Yohanan, however, seems to be no other character in Josephus' narrative than the Jewish general himself as he appears in the *War*. Here, the resemblances are persistent enough to stipulate a consorted literary strategy of

⁷⁵ Pesiqta deRav Kahana 10.4, later parallels in Tanhuma (Buber) *Re'eh* 10 and Midrash Mishle 31.6. The same usage of the two terms is also attested in the later Midrash Esther, *Petihtha* 6.

⁷⁶ See William Wright and Norman McLean, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac: Edited from the Manuscripts, with a Collation of the Ancient Armenian Version by Adalbert Merx* (Cambridge: University Press, 1898), 133. On the relevance of the Syriac witnesses see xx below.

rabbanization of Josephus either by Ekha Rabbah or by its oral sources. The Midrash retells much of Josephus' speech as coming out of Yohanan's mouth for a first time in the immediate sequel. The *War*, like the Midrash, emphasizes the fact that Jerusalem initially had ample food reserves in order to sustain herself over years of siege, and that these reserves were burnt by the insurgents within the city walls (*War* 5.24-5).⁷⁷ The character of Josephus then exhorts the citizens of to surrender, and himself emphasizes that the shortness of food will soon destroy the combatants (*War* 5.370), exactly the same reasoning the Yohanan expresses in the Midrash.

Creating meaning by difference within similarity, the Midrash has Rabbi Yohanan give some sense to the senseless destruction of food which we encounter in Josephus. Yohanan disingenuously argues that the destruction of the food would be a motivation for the Jerusalemites to fight! The Midrash also adopts from Josephus the difficulty of fleeing from the city.⁷⁸ It seems that Ekha Rabbah, on the one hand, uses a narrative very similar to that of Josephus as a mere starting point for its staging of Rabbi Yohanan's craft. On the other hand, however, it begins to portray Rabbi Yohanan in a role that supersedes and obliterates that of the historical Josephus (or whoever held his role in the previous oral rendering) as a character in his own narrative, mending the latter's shortcomings as well as appropriating his historical importance for rabbinic ends in the process.

The Midrash, simultaneously with recapturing Josephus, continues to draw on the narrative about the fall of Betar, whose relevance became already clear through the narrative parallels outlined above, and the shared setting (such as a siege by the Romans, divisions within the city, divine intervention, etc). Without losing focus on "Josephus," Ekha Rabbah describes Yohanan's actions by using numerous Hebrew and Aramaic terms originating in the Betar account. In both narratives the rabbi is the "uncle" (*חביב*) of the rebel leader who is introduced as "present" (*שם*; in both texts we have sages *עד מתי* / *עד אימת עבדיתו ה כי* (*שליח/שלחו*) to the rebel leader in order to criticize him (*אתה עושה* (*שליח ואתיה*) (*אצלון ואמרון*); in both texts the rabbi is denounced and brought to the rebel leader; in both narratives the rabbi is interrogated and accused of treason by the

⁷⁷ See Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais," 66-7. The fact is also reported in Tacitus' *History* V.12.

⁷⁸ See Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais," 72-74.

rebel leader; in both narratives the rabbi's life is in danger, and both stories involve trickery (*עבד גרמיה*).⁷⁹

We cannot be sure, of course, if it is the Midrash or its oral source that imitates these elements from the fall of Betar. In either case the procedure emphasizes the difference between the two narratives, and casts Yohanan in a role that supersedes and corrects that of one of his Jewish predecessors in Betar. I see the inner-rabbinic adaptation technique as parallel to the way in which the Midrash, or its oral source, deals with the figure of Josephus (as described above and also below). Again, the differences between Betar and Jerusalem, set against the strong similarities of both narratives, invite the rabbinic audience of the Jerusalem narrative to re-examine two different characters in Jerusalem, Rabbi Tsadoq and Rabbi Yohanan, in light of the the two roles played by Rabbi Elazar haModai in Betar.

First, in Betar, Rabbi Elazar haModai is credited with having been responsible for the delay in divine judgment. The Midrash attributes this role to Rabbi Tsadoq in Jerusalem, whose presence *could have* prevented the Romans from conquering the city had he had an equal counterpart.⁸⁰ It takes a person as crafty and skilled in negotiations as

⁷⁹ The narrative also uses the expression *אמר כל סמא דמיילתא* which also occurs in the immediate context of the Betar narrative in *Ekha Rabbah*. Galit Hasan-Rokem points out that “in both stories, the spiritual hero and the leader face each other, intimacy between them is suggested, and someone incites the secular leader against the rabbi... The wording of the incitement is also very similar to that in the Bar Kokhba story and, in both cases, stress is placed on the intimacy between the leader and the slandered rabbi. The slanderers use these hints of intimacy to compel the leader to restrain the sage’s independent activity. In the story about the fall of Betar we read, “Your friend [uncle] asked to surrender the city,” and here, “Your uncle [friend] said ‘woe.’” In this story [about the fall of Jerusalem], the opposition between the two figures is less extreme than that between the typical power hero and R. Eleazar of Modi’in, who emerges as much more passive than R. Yohanan ben Zakai... The set of roles is thus parallel, but the balance between [the rabbi and the leader] is reversed” (eadem., *Web of Life*, 176). Hasan-Rokem comes very close to the reading I suggest here, that the Jerusalem narrative imitates and alters the Betar narrative. Her analysis, however, does not focus on the opposition between the two narrative as a means of generating a literary message, and she also does not engage in a closer analysis of the manifold narrative and linguistic parallels beyond those mention in my citation. Moreover, Hasan-Rokem points out that Ben Batiach is not necessarily the military commander. While not unreasonable an objection, this seems overly cautious. *Ekha Rabbah* would signal to its audience if it were important that Ben Batiyah were anything less than a high ranking military leader. Condoning my argument from silence, the author of the *Bavli* certainly understands Rabbi Yohanan to face a military leader, as does the copyist in manuscript Rome of *Ekha Rabbah* who later changes Ben Batiach’s name to that of the rebel leader in the *Bavli*. On the close relationship between the Betar and the Jerusalem narrative cf. also most recently Matthew V. Novenson, “Why Does R. Akiba Acclaim Bar Kokhba as Messiah?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 40 (2009), 551-572.

⁸⁰ I shall return to the reason of Tsadoq’s role below. The motif of a Jewish dignitary who *could have* delayed the conquest of the city is also reminiscent of the role of the pious’ Ananus in *War* 7.26. Had Ananus not been killed by the rebels early on, he would have “arranged terms... or greatly retarded the victory of the Romans.” Josephus, however, credits this to Ananus’ skills as a military leader and

Rabbi Yohanan to save Rabbi Tsadoq, the Midrash lets us know, in a passage in which it models Rabbi Yohanan in turn on Josephus' own success in saving a few of his relatives and friends. Josephus saves his brother, fifty friends, and acquaintances, especially three people already crucified. These are treated by physicians at the order of the Emperor. The imagery in *Ekha Rabbah* casts Yohanan in a way that again corresponds to that of Josephus very precisely: Yohanan is granted the wish to save any of his relatives and friends, and Rabbi Tsadoq is treated by the Emperor's physicians.⁸¹

Second, in Betar, Rabbi Elazar haModai also fills the role of a passive pious figure tricked by a Samaritan who “pretends” (*עבד גרמיה*) to whisper in his ear, and is killed by his nephew. This second role, in an inverted way, is filled by Rabbi Yohanan in Jerusalem. Yohanan, rather than being killed by his nephew, enlists his nephew’s help to escape the city, he is not fooled by a Samaritan who “pretends” to communicate secretly, but himself “pretends” (*עבד גרמיה*) to be a corpse.

If the rabbinic audience of *Ekha Rabbah* would have followed the Midrash’s invitation to read the Jerusalem narrative against the background of Betar, the many linguistic similarities would have emphasized the difference between the two respective rabbinic leaders. Yet even if we choose not to attribute such precision to *Ekha Rabbah*, we still see that the theme that dominates the sequel is Rabbi Yohanan’s intellectual craft and mastery of the Torah that distinguishes him from Josephus and, to a degree, from Elazar haModai (who knows Torah, but lacks mendacity). We can now see how the intra-textual structural emphasis guides the text’s intertextual engagement: an endorsement of “rabbinic wit” may be the story’s central message, as already indicated by the emphasis of the rabbi’s intellectual “strength,” as outlined above.⁸²

negotiator, and not to his piety. See also note 16 on the motif on the piety of certain Jews that delayed calamities.

⁸¹ See Schäfer, “Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais,” 92. The respective passage in Josephus stems not from the *War*, but from the *Vita*,

⁸² Reading Yohanan as a recasting of Josephus’ *character* in the *War*, to reiterate, does not make any claims regarding the way in which the Midrash may or may not perceive of Josephus’ *authorship* of his own narrative. The role of Josephus as author is likely not on the forefront of the rabbinic author’s mind, as I shall discuss below when considering the case of Eusebius. In this context, however, it is noteworthy that the motif of Rabbi Yohanan’s escape in the guise of a corpse is itself already attested elsewhere in Josephus, as Steven Weitzman has pointed out to me. However, since this escape does not occur in the *War*—seemingly the main text behind the literary focus of the story—but in Josephus’ *Antiquities* (15.46), we should bracket the evidence until we know more about the relationship of this text to *Ekha Rabba*. See also A. Kaminka, *מירקלה*, 99–100, Baer, “Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt,” 179–81, and Schäfer,

Yohanan before Vespasian, the Test, and the Annunciation (Segments V, VI, and VII)

When Rabbi Yohanan appears before Vespasian, he now fully steps into the role of Josephus.⁸³ The way in which the Romans test Yohanan's knowledge, and the annunciation of Nero's death and Vespasian's Emperorship have received the most detailed attention in previous scholarship.⁸⁴ Here, the Midrash, or its sources, fully rabbanizes Josephus' own role and casts Yohanan to fill it, largely in far-reaching congruence with Josephus, and then again with noteworthy differences. These differences generate the central message for a rabbinic audience familiar with the Josephus narrative, or its oral retelling.

When Josephus, for example, announces to Vespasian that he will be Emperor, he claims that he comes "as a messenger of greater destinies," and to be "sent on this errand by God" (*War* 3.400). Yohanan, likewise, greets Vespasian prematurely and thereby predictively as Emperor, as has often been remarked. Yet the contrast of Yohanan's epistemology may be as significant as his eclipse of Josephus: the rabbi derives his knowledge from the study of Torah, without pompously claiming to be a prophet! Moreover, Josephus asks to be locked up in "stricter custody" (*War* 3.402).⁸⁵ The Midrash recasts Josephus' request for strict custody by having it fulfilled—Rabbi Yohanan is placed "behind of seven latticed gates." The point is, of course, to show once more the real rabbinical "strength" of Rabbi Yohanan, who can tell the time of day and night from the course of rigorous Talmudic study to which he is accustomed.⁸⁵ Yohanan is cast as

"Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais," 74-5 on medieval stories featuring the motif of a flight in a coffin. The parallel in Josephus seems more relevant: it predates rather than postdates Ekha Rabbah, moreover, it speaks about a flight from Jerusalem, not another city like in the medieval versions. Likewise, Hasan-Rokem argues that "saving a persecuted individual by having him feign his death is an international folk-literary motif, as is the motif of hiding the leader in order to save the community" (eadem., *Web of Life*, 179 and 246). This suggestion has to be reevaluated in light of Weitzman's observation.

⁸³ The conversation between Yohanan and Vespasian may loosely be modeled on the exchange between Bar Kokhba and the informer in Betar; in both narratives a figure expresses the fear that the king will kill him; both narratives state מִלְכָא קָטֵל לַיה לְהֹא גִּבְרָא. The use of the expression in the Jerusalem narrative, however, seems more like a mere recycling of text, an engagement with its content as in previous examples is less visible.

⁸⁴ See Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais," 83-8.

⁸⁵ Yohanan's Torah learning is also the main point of the playful way in which he heals Vespasian's foot with the help of his Torah learning, highlighted by the homophony of "foot" (פֶּתַח), and the verb "hate" (דְּסַנְאֵת). The passage has evoked much scholarly interest; as Baer has pointed out, the motif of the healing of a leg is associated with Vespasian already in Suetonius' *Life of the Twelve Caesars*. Here, Vespasian himself heals the leg of one of his subjects as "Serapis had promised in a dream; for the god declared that

Josephus, but as a much improved rabbanized version. Instead of esoteric claims to prophecy and individual chosenness, the Midrash points to the exoteric wisdom that a rabbi can derive from the Torah.

The Midrash, in my view, deploys the similarities between its own account and the likely version of Josephus with which it was familiar to emphasize those differences. One may argue that the differences could be the “natural” result of a text’s rabbanization. Of course Rabbi Yohanan knows Torah, of course Josephus is not a rabbi. At the same time, a focused appraisal of the degree of similarity and of difference allows us to see that *Ekha Rabbah*, or its oral source, deals with a large segment of a narrative very closely reminiscent of Josephus. It likely expected its audience to know just as much, and to compare the new version against the old one. The same creative liberty with which *Ekha Rabbah*, or its oral source, approaches a version of Josephus can, in turn, be assessed with the help of the similar approach the Midrash exercises in its adaptation of the Betar narrative. Without positing that *Ekha Rabbah* or its oral source followed a rigorous literary strategy, we can still note that the Midrash’s first “recasting” of Rabbi Elazar haModai, the interlocutor of the rebels, as Rabbi Yohanan reinforces and lets us assess its “recasting” of Josephus himself as Yohanan.

Both aspects come together in the narrative’s penultimate section, in which Rabbi Yohanan saves Rabbi Tsadoq in a way reminiscent of the way in which Josephus saves his own friends and relatives, as outlined above. Rabbi Tsadoq in Jerusalem, in turn, evokes the second role of Elazar haModai in Betar, now in his function as the holy man protecting the city. Not having been able to follow the narratives as they were presented in the Palestinian academies in the early fifth century, we must of course leave a lot of

Vespasian would restore the eyes, if he would spit upon them, and give strength to the leg, if he would deign to touch it with his heel. Though [Vespasian] had hardly any faith that this could possibly succeed, and therefore shrank even from making the attempt, he was at last prevailed upon by his friends and tried both things in public before a large crowd; and with success” (*ibid* 7.2-3 translation by John Carew Wolfe, *Suetonius* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Since Josephus informs us that Vespasian’s *own* foot is injured in *War* 3.236, it seems plausible that the Midrash fuses its reading of Josephus with the tradition known from Suetonius when casting Yohanan as the healer of Vespasian’s foot, inverting the roles, and leading to a clever and playful display of medical midrash. However, the issue needs to be bracketed given the lack of any clarity about the possible (Latin!) sources of *Ekha Rabbah*. The matter is further complicated by the fact that medieval retellings of the fall of Jerusalem in turn credit Josephus with the healing of Vespasian’s foot, bringing the redistribution of roles almost to a full circle (See Baer, “Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt,” 181-4 and Schäfer, “Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais,” 93-5). We may want to resist the temptation of deriving too much about the rabbinic sources from medieval ones, as I argued already in note 80.

room for the vagueness that will always separate our written texts from its oral precedents. Yet even so, it surely is hardly an over-reading to follow the Midrash's manifold invitations to read its Jerusalem narrative against the background of the Betar narrative preserved in the same collection and against the rendering of Josephus to which it hints in so many ways, and which its implied audience therefore likely knew.

Christian Historiography, the Rebuilding of the Temple, and the Churches in Jerusalem

Ekha Rabbah, we can conclude, invites its audience to read its Jerusalem story with two other narratives in mind: most likely, an oral rendering of Josephus' *War* and that of the fall of Betar. Its literary strategy is consistent throughout; at no point can we sense that the text would distinguish between the genres of the two texts it recasts. Ekha Rabbah treats both narratives as models to retell and to improve upon, without differentiating between a "rabbinic" and a "non-rabbinic" source. The Jerusalem narrative likely had been retold many times, and the rabbanization of Josephus likely occurred through a number of retellings of the material.⁸⁶ To a degree, the results of reading the destruction of Jerusalem as a retelling of Betar and of Josephus' life are rewarding at this point already—the Midrash retells the events the destruction of Jerusalem in the light of the fall of Betar, and corrects the shortcomings of the rabbis who failed in their task of dealing with Bar Kokhba. It uses a version of Josephus' narrative as a basis for its retelling of the events, and in turn appropriates and improves his role for its own rabbinic purposes.

While this reading seems valid to me, we can, and I think we must, go further, and try to contextualize Ekha Rabbah's focus on the Jerusalem narrative and on Josephus historically. I have mentioned above the fact that we see few traces of Josephus in earlier rabbinic literature. The Temple's destruction, likewise, did not receive much aggadic attention by the Tannaim, and in one Amoraic instance in which it does, the rabbinic narrative did not reflect any interaction with Josephus. Ekha Rabbah therefore marks a

⁸⁶ I have made the argument that rabbis would approach rabbinic and non-rabbinic material by employing the same literary techniques—albeit sometimes, but not always, with starkly different results—in much of my previous work, see Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, esp. 137-236; idem, "Rabbanizing Jesus, Christianizing the Son of David: The Bavli's Approach to the Secondary Messiah Traditions," in Rivka Ulmer (ed.), *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism*, University Press of America, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth (UK), 2007, 99-128; and idem., "How Plutarch Gained his Place in the Tosefta," in *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture*, volume 4, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 2004, 19-28.

true shift towards the development of a rabbinic historiography that pays more attention to the details of the destruction of the Temple. Given the likely traditional and oral nature of its sources, of course, such arguments from silence do not bear excessive weight.

Why, then, did the fall of Jerusalem begin to be perceived as the more momentous event in Jewish history in the early fifth century, deserving a full and elaborate retelling at the time of *Ekha Rabbah*? The answer is in all likelihood somehow related to the historical events and discourse surrounding Jerusalem in the time of *Ekha Rabbah*: the Christianization of Jerusalem from the fourth century onwards as the Empire's new "Holy Land;" the Christian discourse about Julian's attempt to rebuild the Temple; the central importance of the destruction of the Temple for Christian triumphalism; the invention of Christian historiography by Eusebius of Caesarea Maritima and his successors; and the role of Josephus' narrative as a witness to the Christian cause all effected any Jewish claim to citizenship in Roman Palestine. A more detailed look at Palestinian discourse during the fourth and early fifth centuries suggests that regardless which rabbinic traditions about the Temple's destruction may have circulated previously, the Temple and Josephus was a focal point of Palestinian discourse in the decades preceding the redaction of *Ekha Rabbah*. I first present the historical situation and then the likely reaction to it in the Midrash.

In detail, we first should note the rabbis' likely exposure to Constantine's extensive building efforts in Jerusalem. The Christianization of the Roman Empire may have taken centuries, in Jerusalem, one could hardly miss it. The most important aspect of the amply documented building campaign was the completion of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 335 C.E.⁸⁷ As summarized by Timothy Barnes,

⁸⁷ For the Christianization of the entire Empire see Günther Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century*, 88- (T&T Clarke, 2000), 48-85; Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, AD 100 – 400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). For an extensive bibliography on the Christianization of Jerusalem up to 1988, see James D. Purvis, *Jerusalem the Holy City: A Bibliography* (Metuchen and London: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, 1988), 267-81. For a more recent summary see Oded Irshai, "The Christian Appropriation of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century: the Case of the Bordeaux Pilgrim," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), 465-86; Thomas Parker, "The Byzantine Period: an Empire's New Holy Land," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62 (1999): 134-80; and John Wilkinson, "Constantinian Churches in Palestine," in Yoram Tsafrir (ed.), *Ancient Churches Revealed* (Jerusalem and Washington: Israel Exploration Society and Biblical Archaeology Society, 1993), 23-7. The situation was of course very different in the rabbis' Galilee, as perhaps most amply illustrated by Epiphanius' famous report of the count Joseph and his (unsuccessful!) efforts at building a church in Tiberias (*Panarion* 30). See Mordechai Aviam, "Christian Galilee in the

“Eusebius delivered a speech on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre [in Constantine’s presence]… Eusebius expatiated on the generosity of the emperor in building the church and endowing it richly with objects… As mark of respect, Constantine insisted on standing while Eusebius recited the speech—which is regrettably lost… And as part of the festivities [on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the emperor’s accession], on 25 July 336, Eusebius delivered his *Panegyric to Constantine*, celebrating the Christian empire.”⁸⁸

After Constantine’s death, Eusebius wrote his laudatory *Life of Constantine*, which again details the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the most grandiose terms.⁸⁹ The names of the Roman Emperor Constantine and his Palestinian admirer Eusebius, therefore, were ostentatiously linked to the Christian claim to Jerusalem throughout the early history Byzantine Empire.

We can safely assume that the rabbinic authors of *Ekha Rabbah* were aware of the existence and the political significance of one of the central architectural statements of the early Byzantine Empire. As the Bordeaux pilgrim tells us, and Jerome and rabbinic sources corroborate, Jews would once a year enter the city, apparently on the ninth of Av, to wail over the Temple, and on the very day the Biblical book of *Ekha* would likely already be read (see *Soferim* 14:1), Jews would see the architectural manifestations of Christian triumph.⁹⁰ The story in *Ekha Rabbah* dissociates the rabbis from the events that led to the Temple’s destruction, and portrays them as piously and wittedly negotiating the storm of the first century in a way that would allow one to face the Christian Jerusalem once a year.

A second reason why the Temple was prominent in fourth and fifth century Palestine was that old prophecies regained new urgency after Constantine. Fergus Millar has recently drawn our attention to the fact that the very specific prophecy in the Gospels that “the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down” (Luke 21:5-6 and parallels) has lead to constant speculation about the parts of the

Byzantine Period,” in Eric M. Meyers, *Galilee Through the Centuries* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 1999), 281-300.

⁸⁸ Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 266.

⁸⁹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.25-40; on the compositional context see Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 265-71.

⁹⁰ See *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, CSEL 38, 22 and Jerome, *Commentary on Zephaniah* I.15-16 (CCL LXXVIA 673-4), on the difficult testimony of the Bordeaux pilgrim see Günther Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land*, 40-3.

Temple that *did* remain after 70 C.E. (I will return to Jesus' unfulfilled prophecy below.) Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the early 350's without any anticipation of his timeliness, speculated the following when explaining how the Antichrist will "seat himself in the Temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:4)

"What Temple then? He means, the Temple of the Jews which has been destroyed. ... For if [the Antichrist] comes to the Jews as Christ, and desires to be worshipped by the Jews, he will make great account of the Temple, that he may more completely beguile them, making it supposed that he is the man of the race of David, who shall build up the Temple which was erected by Solomon. And Antichrist will come at the time when there shall not be left one stone upon another in the Temple of the Jews, according to the doom pronounced by our Savior, for when either decay of time, or demolition ensuing on pretence of new buildings, or from any other causes, shall have overthrown all the stones, I mean not merely the outer circuit, but of the inner shrine also, where the Cherubim were, then shall he come with all signs and lying wonders, exalting himself against all idols, at first indeed making a pretence of benevolence, but afterwards displaying his relentless temper, and that chiefly against the Saints of God."⁹¹

We do not see in *Ekha Rabbah* any consideration of a Jewish Antichrist rebuilding the Temple. What we do see in the *Midrash*, however, is a tacit rejoinder to the claim of that other Christ, Jesus' prophecy of "all stones thrown down," which for Cyril is the shrine as well as the outer circuit, which remains to this day. *Ekha Rabbah* places a lot of emphasis on the term "west," the western gate and the western rampart, concluding that it was, and will be preserved since God's presence continues to dwell there.

One can imagine the excitement that followed in many camps as Julian in 363 then attempted the undertaking of rebuilding the Temple. While Julian's intentions are well established, the precise events that led to the possible commencement of the building work, and to its possible rapid abandonment, do not concern us here.⁹² What makes the

⁹¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis 15.15, see also 10, 11, translation in Philipp Schaff, Philip (ed.), *Select Library of the Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Church* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893), Series II, Volume 7, xx. Fergus Millar points out that another noteworthy advocate for the rebuilding of the Temple, in addition to Julian and the Antichrist, was the "heretical" late fourth – century Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea in Syria. According to Theodoret, "Apollinaris promises us another bulding of Jerusalem and a (Christian) observance in accordance with the Jewish Law, with belief in Christ added to the respect for the law." (Theodoret *In Ezechiel 48:35*, PG LVII/VIII, col. 1248, quoted by Millar, "Rebuilding the Temple," 26, see also Jerome, *In Zechariam 14:10-11* (Corp. Chr.. ser. Lat. LXXVIA, 885)."

⁹² The purported failed attempt under Julian to rebuild the temple, as reported by Ephrem and Gregory of Nazianzen, and recorded by Rufinus and Socrates, does not seem reflected at all in the story as preserved in

attempt so intriguing for the present purposes is the prominent role it played in Christian discourse just as much as the complete rabbinic silence about it. As Millar notes, the many church fathers who wrote about Julian's attempt range from Gregory of Nazianzen to Ephrem the Syrian, and patristic in the sixth century and thereafter continued to debated the event intensely. Unanimously, the Christian writers depict the Jews as joining in the effort, which in Millar's view may not have been entirely fictional.⁹³ Be this as it may, the rabbinic strategy to dissociate themselves from the Temple's destruction we saw in *Ekha Rabbah*, in conjunction with the Midrash's insistence on God's ongoing if inscrutable dedication to the site of the Temple, may be seen as a powerful ideological bulwark that would not let the Christian accusations enter the rabbinic houses of study. Some patristic notions, however, still managed to penetrate the walls, and found the rabbis well prepared, as we shall see.

The Christian claim to Jerusalem, Christian discourse on the Temple in general, and the persistent patristic exploitation of the attempted failure to rebuild the Temple since the mid-fourth century already supplies us with ample evidence that would help us understand the rabbis' literary impulse to compose a Midrash about Jerusalem's second fall, embedded in the exegesis of the Lamentations about the first time Jerusalem fell. The rabbis had tasted the fickle attitude of the Byzantine Empire towards the Jews as it is reflected in the Theodosian Code, and likely experienced the abolition of the patriarchate in between 415 and 424 C.E.⁹⁴ For the rabbis in the fourth and fifth century, the Roman Empire was again slowly conquering the city, this time not by military might, but by ideological state apparatuses and an ambitious building program. The entirety of *Ekha Rabba*, in my view, should be read in this context, as the rich Christian intertextuality of *Ekha Rabbah* already demonstrates, and the burden of proof to do otherwise should be on

Ekha Rabbah. For a good overview of the studies see Fergus Millar, "Rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple : Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions," *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 1 (2008), 20 note 7 and 22 note 15. See also Francois Blanchetiere, "Julien Philhellene, Philosemite, Antichretien: l'affaire du temple de Jérusalem," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 31 (1980): 61-81; Sebastian Brock, "A Letter Attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem on the Rebuilding of the Temple under Julian," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40 (1977): 267–86; and idem., "Rebuilding of the Temple under Julian: a New Source," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 108 (1976): 103-107.

⁹³ See Fergus Millar, "Rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple," 23-32.

⁹⁴ As Roland Deines reminds me, we must weigh the rabbinic perception of the Christian rise to power against the fact that many Jewish communities in Palestine prospered throughout the Byzantine period, see e.g. Lee I. Levine (ed.), *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

the shoulders of those who imagine the rabbis to live outside history.⁹⁵ A turn to Josephus as the rabbis' historical source may then have followed from such a literary endeavour to come to terms with the past. A more precise reason for Josephus relevance, however, emerges when considering Josephus' role in the writings of Eusebius and other church fathers.

Yitzhak Baer was the first to suggest that the rabbinic versions of the destruction of Jerusalem integrate a response to Christian literature that uses Josephus, stating that the "legends about the fall of Jerusalem found in Talmudic literature are based on Josephus' tales... and on late Christian legends."⁹⁶ While I agree with Baer's overall reading and his emphasis on Josephus, we must also remember Schäfer's important criticism of Baer's audacious reconstruction of literary sources where none are apparent.⁹⁷ Moreover, while most of Baer's suggested relevant "Christian literature" is either too late to be of interest (like the *Landolfus Sagax*) or geographically too far removed (like Orosius' Latin compilation *Historia adversus paganos*), one of the Christian sources Baer is especially worthwhile revisiting: Eusebius, whom he mentions in passing only.

Baer's substantial article received much attention recently, after Israel Yuval pointed to its importance. Yuval seeks to furnish more precise Christian intertexts to the rabbinic narrative. For example, he points to the importance of Jesus' prophecy about the Temple's destruction in Luke 19:43-4, arguing that a different rabbinic narrative about Titus' sacrilegious actions in the Temple responds to the Christian interpretation of the Temple's destruction in general, and to the *Vindicta Salvatoris* in particular.⁹⁸ The Christian reading of the Temple's destructions and of Titus' conversion to Christianity should inform our reading of Ekha Rabbah's story about Vespasian as well. Yet the

⁹⁵ For this debate, see the studies listed in note 9. Especially Hasan Rokem engages in a Christian contextualization of Ekha Rabbah, however, without considering the broader evidence of fourth and fifth century Palestinian discourse.

⁹⁶ Baer, "Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt," *Precis-* English, see also 185 in the Hebrew.

⁹⁷ Peter Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan b. Zakkais," 43-101.

⁹⁸ Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 40-3. Yuval also discusses a number of medieval Christian legends pertinent especially to the legend of Titus in *Wayiqra Rabbah* 22.5, see above, note seven. It is noteworthy that in the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, attested as early as the sixth century and possibly reaching back to the time of Ekha Rabbah, Titus himself becomes a believer in Jesus. In the rabbinic Babylonian retelling of the destruction of the Temple, conversely, Titus' nephew considers converting to Judaism (*Gittin* 56b-57a).

Vindicta Salvatoris, even if it were known at the time of Ekha Rabbah, offers hardly any concrete details to explain the rabbinic destruction narrative in Ekha Rabbah.

In a different context, however, Yuval also suggests in a footnote that the rabbis “may have known Josephus indirectly, through its confrontation with the arguments of the Church fathers.”⁹⁹ I agree with Yuval, and would emphasize that the rabbinic appropriation of Josephus’ destruction narrative, either in Ekha Rabbah or in its oral sources, would have been quite extensive. What seems unlikely is the possibility that Josephus, or his own oral or written sources, were transmitted within rabbinic (or other Jewish) circles for three centuries without leaving any trace in the Tannaitic or earlier Amoraic literature, only to resurface in great detail precisely just after the Temple—and Josephus, as we shall see—regained new urgency in Christian discourse. We cannot of course exclude this possibility, but even if it were so, we should note that the narratives closely resembling Josephus that do (re-)surface in Ekha Rabbah from their first attestation respond to Josephus’ patristic use.

In Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* and after him throughout patristic discourse, notably in Jerome, we find a Christian triumphalist reading of Josephus. As mentioned before, Eusebius’ *History* was an influential literary testimony to the Christian rise to power, and was itself avidly read, copied, told and retold in fourth- and fifth-century Palestine. Eusebius himself was an important Palestinian figure in the Christianization of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁰ While Eusebius may have exaggerated his real sway over the emperor, the importance of his *History* for Roman Imperial discourse can hardly be overemphasized. After its completion before 326 it was vividly discussed throughout the fourth and fifth centuries and forms the basis of much of the later Byzantine and Syriac historiography.¹⁰¹ There is no need to surmise that any rabbi would have read any of these writings. Their

⁹⁹ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 55 note 57. Yuval does consider the likely primacy of the Palestinian rabbinic sources and considers the story’s later Babylonian rendering.

¹⁰⁰ On Constantine and Eusebius in general see Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Life of Constantine*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 1-53; Timothy D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 261-71; and idem., *Constantine and Eusebius*.

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius* (Macon, Mercer University Press, 1986). In the Syriac tradition, see esp. John of Ephesus, Jacob of Edessa, and Michael the Syrian. See Muriel Debié (ed.), *L'historiographie syriaque* (Paris: Geuthner, 2009), On the independent development of Syriac historiography see also S. A. Harvey, “Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches,” *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 295-308; J-M. Fiey, “Les Chroniqueurs syriaques avaient-ils le sens critique?,” *Parole de l'Orient* 12 (1984-5), 253-64.

general world view likely permeated popular Palestinian discourse in the early fifth century. Moreover, in the figure of Jerome, we do have one church father who had contact with Jewish sages. As becomes clear when considering the intensity of the collaboration of Jerome with Jewish sages, as recently summarized by Fergus Millar, there can be no doubt that Jerome's discussions with Jewish sages led to exchange of information in both directions.¹⁰² Given the renewed focus on the Temple in the period's patristic and rabbinic literature, we can safely assume that any dispute between a Jew and a Christian in the time of *Ekha Rabbah*, be it among learned or unlearned citizens of Palestine, would have sooner or later addressed the topic of the Temple.

If the church fathers exploited Josephus in order to use the destruction of the Temple as a proof for Christian replacement theology, the narrative strategy of *Ekha Rabbah*'s use of Josephus gains force and precision. I would guess that the rabbis knew that the church fathers used Josephus, and that they remembered that Josephus was the source of their own narrative in case his rabbanization occurred earlier. Yet this we cannot prove, and the midrashic narrative works regardless as a rejoinder to the Christian claims they may have heard in passing on the market square, or in learned discussion.¹⁰³ Rabbi Yohanan became a new and improved "Josephus," eclipsing and rabbinizing whomever figured in the previous oral renderings, and the rabbis keeps the upper hand throughout the destruction of Jerusalem itself. Directly or indirectly, two central Christian assumptions falter in light of *Ekha Rabba*: that the destruction of Jerusalem was a complete disaster for the Jews, and that Josephus' narrative proves this fact. The Midrash cannot deny the destruction of Jerusalem, and it cannot deny the necessary Late Antique theological conclusion that this was caused by Jewish guilt, nor the historical reality of the ascendency of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Yet *Ekha Rabbah* can challenge Christian triumphalist hermeneutics, it can challenge, directly or indirectly, Christian appropriations of Josephus' narrative as the central witness to the events, and it can make it very clear that only part of the Jewish population was responsible for the

¹⁰² Fergus Millar, "Jerome and Palestine," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 29 (2010), esp. 67-8

¹⁰³ On the interaction between elite and popular Christian discourse and the rabbis see also Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, 141. On the rabbis' (limited) explicit engagement with the Christianization of Rome see e.g. Martin Goodman, "Palestinian Rabbis and the Conversion of Constantine to Christianity," in Peter Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture II* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 1-9; and Oded Irshai, "Constantine and the Jews: The Prohibition against Entering Jerusalem, History and Hagiography," *Tsiyon* 60 (1994-5), 129-78.

disaster—had the rabbis ruled, it would not have occurred. The rabbis’ engagement with patristic discourse, though generally implicit, does however, show some signs of specific familiarity. Considering the prominent examples of Eusebius and Jerome allows us to read *Ekha Rabbah* even more fruitfully.

Eusebius, Josephus, and Christian Triumphalism

Eusebius, the encomiast of Constantine, was an inhabitant of Caesarea Maritima, and therefore a fourth-century neighbor of the Palestinian Aramaic rabbis. As is the case with Jerome, Eusebius’ regular contact with learned Jews and rabbis is well documented in his own works, and by other Christian writers of his time, even if the rabbis do not explicitly reflect on this interchange.¹⁰⁴ If we are to consider the less likely possibility that the rabbis read patristic literature without wanting to consider their access to Greek, we should note that Eusebius, just as Josephus’ *War*, may have been available in Syriac at the time of the composition of *Ekha Rabbah*.¹⁰⁵ These translations cannot be used as direct evidence in this context, despite the intimate cultural exchange between rabbinic Palestine and Babylonia, and between Palestinian Christians and the Syriac church.¹⁰⁶ The Syriac translations of Eusebius and Josephus, however, are the closest approximation to any Palestinian Aramaic rendering of these texts, and I will make occasional reference to them as secondary witnesses.

Eusebius, unlike *Ekha Rabbah*, explicitly advises his readers to read Josephus:

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. the summary by Arieh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea Against Paganism* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 94–5.

¹⁰⁵ Eusebius was translated into Syriac in the fifth century at the latest, the earliest surviving manuscript dates from 462, see William Wright and Norman McLean, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac*, v-xii. On the importance of the Syriac literary record for Palestinian rabbinic texts see Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, esp. 142f.

¹⁰⁶ Jerome had some knowledge of Biblical Aramaic, yet it is not clear how familiar he was with Palestinian Aramaic, see Millar, “Jerome and Palestine.” Syriac, that is Eastern Christian Aramaic, was hardly spoken in Palestine, but the active literary exchange between Mesopotamia and Palestine that we see both among Jewish and the Christian intellectuals points to the relevance of Syriac literature for Palestine as well. On Syriac in Palestine, see D.C. Baramki, and S.H. Stephan, “A Nestorian Hermitage between Jericho and the Jordan,” *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquity of Palestine* 4 (1934), 81–86; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, “From Sacred Travel to Monastic Career: The Evidence of Late Antique Syriac Hagiography,” *Adamantius* 16 (2010), 353–370; S. P. Brock, H. Goldfus, H., and A. Kofsky, A., “The Syriac Inscriptions at the Entrance to Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem,” *ARAM* 18–19 (2006–2007), 415–438; and A de Halleux, “Nouveaux textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabbog. I: Lettre aux moines de Palestine; Lettre liminaire au synodicon d’Éphèse,” *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), 31–62; J.-M. Fiey, “Le pèlerinage des Nestoriens et Jacobites à Jérusalem,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 12 (1969), 113–126; idem., “Rabban Bûya de Shaqlâwâ, et de Jéricho,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 33 (1983), 34–38.

“Those who wish can retrace accurately from the history written by Josephus how many evils at that time overwhelmed the whole nation in every place and especially how the inhabitants of Judea were driven to the last point of suffering, how many thousands of youths, women and children perished by the sword, by famine, and by countless other forms of death.... It was indeed right that on the same day on which [the Jews] had perpetrated the passion of the Savior and benefactor of all men and the Christ of God they should... receive the destruction which pursued them from the sentence of God.” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.4-5)¹⁰⁷

I note three points 1) that Eusebius had a Josephus text which he quoted accurately, for the most part, and extensively, 2) that Eusebius expected his audience plausibly to have access to Josephus as well—a trustworthy claim, given the wide attestation of Josephus in patristics previous to Eusebius—and 3), that Eusebius famously blames the temple’s destruction on the Jews’ killing of his Christ, using Josephus as his witness. This is the context in which we must place the midrashic re-appropriation of the Jewish historian in general. A closer look at Eusebius guides the way.

Eusebius adopted and enhanced Origen’s ingenious explanation of why the Temple’s destruction occurred only several decades after Jesus’ death.¹⁰⁸ Eusebius claims that God delayed the punishment on account of Jesus’ brother James’ consistent prayer in the Temple, and he later states explicitly:

“For forty whole years [Providence] suspended [the Jews’] destruction, after their crime against the Christ, and during all of them many of the apostles and disciples, and James himself, who is called the Lord’s brother, the first bishop of the city, still survived in this world. By their dwelling in Jerusalem, [James and the apostles] afforded.... a strong protection to the place; for the government of God had still patience... these things have been thought worthy of mention by the historian already quoted [i.e. Josephus], and there is nothing better than to append them for the readers of this work. ... (3.7.8-9)¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Translation by Kirsopp Lake, *The Ecclesiastical History* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 201-3.

¹⁰⁸ On Origen’s reasoning regarding the cause of the destruction of the Temple see Zvi Baras, “The Testimonium Flavianum and the Martyrdom of James,” in Louis J. Feldman and Gohei Hata (eds.), *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, 338-48. Eusebius’ text seems much more pertinent to Ekha Rabbah than Origen, the subject requires further inquiry. See also Sabrina Inowlocki, “Did Josephus Ascribe the Fall of Jerusalem to the Murder of James, Brother of Jesus?” *Revue des Etudes Juives* 170 (2011), 21-49.

¹⁰⁹ Translation by Kirsopp Lake, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 219.

In effect, the midrashic retelling of Josephus wittily absorbs and neutralizes Eusebius' employment of James. Ekha Rabbah imitates three aspects of the figure of James in three of its three main characters.

Rabbi Tsadoq, Rabbi Yohanan, and Panegyrist

The Midrash's literary play with previous narrative peaks in its triple adaptation of James. Even if the traces of textual adaptation and the respective signals to the audience are weaker here than in the case of "Betar" and Josephus, the cumulative impact of the evidence remains forceful. To begin with, Eusebius claims that the presence of James effectively protected the city from the Romans. This is precisely the role in which Ekha Rabbah casts Rabbi Tsadoq who is, in turn, partially inspired by the figure of Elazar haModai in the Betar narrative—again, midrashic allusion is never fully one thing or the other, but depends on the audience's capacity to combine a plurality of signals. Ekha Rabba aggregates more than one tradition, fusing its rabbinic and its Christian narrative horizon. Without conflating the events and the points of view of the narrators, any attempt to disentangle them entirely proves futile as well: Eusebius, for example, equally marshals the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt as proof of the Christian cause.¹¹⁰

A closer look at the death of the figure of James in Eusebius' Greek and Syriac narrative points to role as a model for Rabbi Tsadoq, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, and Panegyrist in Ekha Rabbah:

"Hegesippus, who belongs to the generation of the Apostles, gives the most accurate account. ... 'The charge of the Church passed to James the brother of the Lord... He was called the 'Just' (δίκαιος, *dtsdyqa*) by all men from the Lord's time to ours, since many are called James, but he was holy from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or strong drink, nor did he eat flesh, nor razor went upon his head, he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not go to the baths... He used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people. So from his excessive righteousness (δικαιοσύνης, *dtsdyqwth*), [James] was called 'the Just' (δίκαιος) and 'Oblias,' that is in Greek 'Rampart (περιοχὴ) of the people' and 'righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη)" [Syriac: 'the Just' (*tsdyqa*) and 'Door (*wshurh*) of the people' and 'righteousness' (*wtsdyqwth*)]. Thus some of the [Jews] inquired of him what was the 'gate (θύρα, *tr'a*) of Jesus' [see John 10.9]... So the Scribes and Pharisees made James stand on the battlement (πτερύγιον, *knpa*) of the

¹¹⁰ Eusebius discusses the Bar Kokhba revolt in 4.6. 1-4 and 4.8.4 of his *Ecclesiastical History*.

temple and they cried out to him and said, ‘tell us what is the gate ($\thetaύρα$, *tr'a*) of Jesus?’ [James announces Jesus’ Messianic role publicly. Then, the Scribes and Pharisees decide to] “throw him down.... So they went up and threw down the Just, and they said to one another, “Let us stone James the Just,” and they began to stone him since the fall had not killed him... And a certain man among them, one of the laundrymen, took the club with which he used to beat out the clothes and hit the Just on the head, and so he suffered martyrdom... and at once Vespasian began to besiege them.” (2.23.3-18)¹¹¹

Eusebius reports to have received this passage from the historian Hegesippus, tradition that is corroborated by Jerome, who tells a very similar story about James’ death.¹¹² Ekha Rabbah retells three elements of the patristic tradition. The Midrash’s response to it is simultaneously more allusive and more subversive than its adaptation of the Betar narrative and of Josephus. Yet the midrashic fusion of all three narratives—Betar, Josephus, and his patristic rendering—reinforces our grasp of its engagement with each of them. The incidental similarities between the role of Rabbi Elazar HaModai in Betar and Eusebius’ James in Jerusalem—both sit and pray each day for forgiveness for the people, and at the moment of their respective deaths the city is captured—allows Ekha Rabbah to combine both the rabbi and the Christian holy man in its portrayal of Rabbi Tsadoq. First, Ekha Rabba casts rabbi named Tsadoq, literally, “the Just,” or “the Righteous,” in James’ role. The Midrash signals to its audience to perceive Rabbi Tsadoq, “Rabbi Righteous,” not only in terms of the unsuccessful Rabbi Elazar haModai, but also as superceding James, “the Just.” Hence, the Midrash signals its use of the previous figures in three ways: Tsadoq is, like Elazar and James, (almost) capable to thwart of the attack; like Elazar and James, Tsadoq engages in ascetic practice; and like James *tsdyqa*, Tsadoq is called “the Just.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Translation by Kirsopp Lake, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 171-5. The Greek here and in the sequel follows G. Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée: Histoire ecclésiastique*, (Sources chrétiennes; Paris: Éditions du Cerf) 1952-58. The Syriac here and in the sequel follows William Wright and Norman McLean, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac*. For the transliteration, I follow the simplified transliteration of Hugoye: *Journal of Syriac Studies*: ' b g d h w z h t y k l m n s c p s q r sh t.

¹¹² See Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* II. On Hegesippus see T. Halton, “Hegesippus in Eusebius,” *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982), 688-93. This second century historian is not to be confused with Pseudo-Hegesippus, the fourth century Latin paraphrase of Josephus and other Latin historians that is of no apparent relevance to Ekha Rabbah, see Hans Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition*, 56-8.

¹¹³ The importance of the names of rabbinic figures for the narrative is a literary strategy recently emphasized by Jeffrey Rubenstein (see idem., *Talmudic Stories*). Note also that Hasan-Rokem aptly states that “a phonological link could be assumed between the name Ben Batiah and the word *bitahon* (safety, security), which in this story undergoes a transformation, from a designation related to his role to secure food for Jerusalem’s inhabitants, into an ironic designation (although he is the one who ensured R.

In Tsadoq, the midrashic narrative re-enacts the events at Betar, where the rabbi's death lead to Roman assault, in a way that reacts just as well to the Christian myth of James' death as leading to Romans assault. Elazar haModai is as important to understand the narrative as is James the Just, and both figures function as negative as well as positive role models for the new Jerusalem narrative. The Midrash minimizes the undisputable catastrophe, and points to Jewish survivors about whom Eusebius conveniently passes over. To the contrary, Eusebius emphasizes that exclusively those were saved who believed in Jesus, a final instance in which we can see the Midrash as seeking to eclipse the Christian narrative:

"Now after the ascension of our Savior in addition to their crime against him the Jews at once contrived numberless plots against the disciples.... In addition to all, James, who was the first after the ascension of our Savior to be appointed to the throne of the bishopric in Jerusalem, passed away in the manner described above... On the other hand, the people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart (*μεταναστῆναι/dnpqwn*) and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed migrated from Jerusalem, that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the holy land of Judea, the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out form among men."¹¹⁴

Eusebius continues with his exhortation to consult Josephus I quoted when introducing

Yohannan's safe exit)" (eadem, *Web of Life*, 246). If one were fanciful enough to develop the Midrashic use of names in the context of a response to James the Just, one could see a triple-barreled allusion to the text's engagement with Christianity when Rabbi Yohanen sends his students into the city to find Tsadoq: Rabbi Joshua (*yhwsh'*) serves as Jesus' (*yshw'*) namesake; Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus features as Jesus' alter ego in previous Palestinian narrative; and Rabbi Tsadoq (*tsdwq*) is the stand-in and namesake for James the Just (*tsdyqa*). Strictly playing registers of rabbinic vocabulary, the Midrash evokes and eclipses the Christian other. Pushing the associations even further, one could then connect Yohanen's oddly phrased request to leave the "western gate" as a safe passage for fleeing inhabitants to the similarly idiosyncratic image of the "gate of Jesus," in a way that depicts Rabbi Yohanen as imitating a second aspect of the character of James. Eusebius' "gate of Jesus'," especially in the Syriac *tr'a dyshw'*, evokes a "gate of salvation." Yohanen's request to leave one of the city gates open for people to flee in Ekha Rabbah may then be a narrative response to James' "Gate of Jesus," emphasizing rabbinic pragmatism and the salvation of Jerusalem's citizens. The textual basis for this reading, however, is too tenuous, especially in the lack of a commonly acknowledged methodology of rabbinic allusions to Christian themes. (On the role of Rabbi Eliezer to stand for inner-rabbinic Christian tendencies see Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, 213-36, and Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 49.) Regardless of the metaphorical use of the names, the spatial movement of Yohanen's students completes the movements and juxtapositions which the Midrash introduced earlier: after helping Yohanen pierce the city walls through rabbinic craft, the students have time to act before the Romans pierce the walls through Roman craft. The event that connects Yohanen's departure to the Roman intrusion is Tsadoq's momentary suspension in the middle; accordingly, the rabbis find Tsadoq in a liminal position, at one of the city gates.

¹¹⁴ Kiropp Lake, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 199-201.

him. In *Ekha Rabbah*, it is not the believers in Jesus but the rabbis' friends and relatives who are singled out to be spared. More specifically even, the *western* (*m'rb'h*) gate, left open until the *fourth* ('*rb'h*) hour, is a concession that Yohanan ben Zakkai can wrest from Vespasian, an event whose centrality is emphasized by the homophony of the terms used and the spatial metaphors of penetrating the city walls from the inside and outside. Just as Eusebius' inhabitants of Jerusalem leave the city (*dnpqwn mn h mn mdynta*) towards Pella, so do *Ekha Rabbah*'s inhabitants of Jerusalem leave (דָנְפִיק) the city (מַלְיָנָתָא) towards Lod, the idea of leaving and its Aramaic root *npg* constituting the central theme of the rabbinic story. Later rabbinic narrative, such as the *Bavli*, completes the parallel by connecting Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's action to the request of Yavneh and its sages, ten miles beyond Lod.¹¹⁵ We do not have to surmise any specific familiarity with Eusebius' specific rendering to see that the Midrash refutes and eclipses the Christian trope of the salvation of the Jerusalem church with a rabbinic version of the salvation of the rabbis. In addition to recasting James as Yohanan and Tsadoq, *Ekha Rabbah* models the execution of Panegyrist/Abgar, the duke of Arabia, on Eusebius account of James' death, a scenario that deserves a more detailed look.

The Death of the Duke

In the Midrash, the narrative setting of the destruction of the city's towers once more comes from Josephus' story, where the Emperor orders the razing of the city, but precisely not of the towers and "the portions of the wall enclosing the city on the west," seemingly the Western Wall (*War* 7.1).¹¹⁶ Josephus explains that the towers should be left standing "to indicate to posterity the nature of the city and of the strong defenses which had yet yielded to Roman prowess" (*War* 7.2, see also 6.413). *Ekha Rabbah* retells the elements known from Josephus. Here, the Emperor orders the razing of the ramparts, yet it is God who decrees that the Western Wall be left standing. The Duke of Arabia disobeys the Emperor's command, defending his actions with the argument borrowed from Josephus, that the wall be left as a testimony to the "might of Vespasian." Accepting the argument, the Emperor still sees a need to inflict punishment on the duke

¹¹⁵ See *Gittin* 55b-59a and the plethora of scholarship on the topic (see note nine).

¹¹⁶ See Schäfer, "Die Flucht Yohanan ben Zakkais," 97.

for his disobedience, and in the punishment we can see the third moment when the Midrash preempts a motif also known from Eusebius, namely the narrative of the death of James.

It is the Pharisees and Scribes who, in the rendering of “Hegesippus” by Eusebius, throw down James the Just from the temple ramparts. James initially survives, but falls at the hands of Eusebius’ brute Jewish villains. In the Midrash, it becomes the Roman Emperor who, having healed James’ Jewish alter ego Rabbi Tsadoq, orders the duke to throw himself down from the top of the temple mount, the very same location from which James fell.¹¹⁷ The text not only reflects the method of execution, it also evokes the possibility of initially surviving the fall that had marked the drama of James’ death. The Emperor wants to see whether or not the duke may survive the fall: He does not and the story of the destruction of Jerusalem ends, miraculously, with a partial rabbinic victory in Jerusalem.

In the figures of Tsadoq, Yohanan, and Panegyrist, Ekha Rabbah effectively responds to aspects of the patristic James as attested by “Hegesippus,” Eusebius, Jerome, and many other church fathers. Without presupposing direct knowledge of the patristic accounts, the narrative in Ekha Rabbah functions as a forceful contradiction and subtly undermining of the ideological edifice on which Eusebius’ *History* rests. Not James the Just, but Tsadoq was responsible for the divine mercy, the gate of salvation is not Jesus, but the Western Gate negotiated for by Rabbi Yohanan, and the death of a man jumping from the roof was the just punishment for the duke’s wicked act and disingenuous reasoning that caused the destruction of the Temple, not the crime that caused it. Most specifically, the rabbiniization of Josephus deprives the *Ecclesiastical History* of its crown witness, Josephus. More broadly, we can see how Ekha Rabbah may agree with the

¹¹⁷ In the Midrash, אַרְוֹת, without any specification, usually refers to the temple mount (see Sokoloff, *ad loc.*); the context dictates this meaning as well. The motif of death through a fall from the temple mount seems to be transferred to another Roman officer in the Bavli (see *Ta'anit* 29a). In Ekha Rabbah, it may also evoke echoes of Gospel passages such as Matthew 4:5-7 and Luke 4:9-12 where the devil places Jesus at the pinnacle of the temple and tempts him to test special providence by jumping down. However, the fact that Ekha Rabba speaks of an execution makes the Eusebian material much more relevant to the Midrash than the Gospel tradition. It has been argued for a long time, of course, that Luke himself may have read Josephus, making secondary any distinction of which text to consider. See Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, Second Edition (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).

church fathers that God took away his favor from “the Jews,” as has happened many times throughout Biblical history. Yet this favor was always extended to the just ones of each generation, and since the time of Rabbi Yohanan it lay on the rabbis. The rabbinic narrative functions both for an audience that would know concrete aspects of the Christian claims, yet it functions just as well for the more likely rabbinic audience that would only the general outlines of Christian triumphalism in as far as they couldn’t be missed in early fifth century Palestine.

The list of correspondences between the Ecclesiastical History and *Ekha Rabbah* is long, and the Midrash’s imitation and alteration does add up to a palpable message:

- Most importantly, the Midrash’s turn to Josephus echoes that of the church fathers, neutralizing their use of the Jewish historian and eclipsing his relevance for shaping the world of the rabbis. In this sense, we can state that rabbinic historiography *per se* was born in response to the Christian appropriation of Josephus.
- The Midrash eclipses Eusebius’ portrayal of James the Just with aspects of the role of Rabbi Tsadoq, Rabbi Yohanan, and the duke of Arabia.
- The Midrash allows survivors to leave the city towards Lod, overlaying Eusebius’ claim that all righteous citizens had left towards Pella.
- The Midrash uses Vespasian to evoke the Emperor who turned the kingdom to *minut*: Constantine himself evokes his Flavian predecessor, the destroyer of the Jerusalem Temple as portrayed in the Midrash, while Constantine’s efforts at claiming Jerusalem for Christianity form the cultural context of the rabbis’ turn to the city’s history.

Still, the key to reading the Midrash may be not to over-determine its signifieds. *Ekha Rabbah* engages Eusebius just as likely as it engages the world of early Byzantium as a whole. Yet this world was shaped in no small part by Eusebius. The Midrash does not differentiate between the author and the content of the *Ecclesiastical History*, just as we saw the Midrash engage Josephus and his text without clearly indicating the difference between the two. We may be well advised not to tie too closely the Midrash’s textual allusions to a critically reconstructible historical reality. In other words, the main concern for *Ekha Rabba* is neither Josephus and Eusebius, nor the *War* and the *Ecclesiastical History*, but the intellectual climate of early Byzantium which permeated rabbinic oral culture both in its active repudiation of this climate and in its natural participation in it.

The next step in research may now be to examine in how far we can find appropriations of Josephus *War* and *Life* in other parts of Palestinian Rabbinic literature, especially in *Ekha Rabbah*. Next, one may want to assess the rabbis' access and attitude to Josephus' *War* and *Life* on the one hand, and to his *Antiquities* on the other in Palestine and in Babylonia in ways which reflects the differences between the Byzantine and the Sasanian rabbinic communities, as well as the Greek and Syriac Christian reception history of Josephus.

Appendix: Abgar, Praise and Panegyrist: the Duke of Arabia

I am inclined to argue that the rabbis vagueness when responding to patristic triumphalism is reflective of the vagueness of the rabbis' notion of patristic discourse, and indeed we should obviously not imagine droves of rabbinic students engaged in a detailed study of Eusebius' *History*. At the same time, however, the *History* had become the foundation of all later church histories. Its centrality, to reiterate, can hardly be overstated, and the most basic knowledge about Palestine in the fourth and fifth century would include indirect or direct exposure to the author of the *Panegyric to Constantine* and its historical embodiment in the *Life of Constantine*.

The rabbis who told and retold stories about the destruction of Jerusalem in the decades following Constantine's death in 337 (Eusebius died in 339, the year in which the *Life of Constantine* was published posthumously), as well as the rabbis who collected and reshaped these stories in the early fifth century were an elite of literate intellectuals living in the aftermath of Constantine's deeds and Eusebius' eulogies thereof. The rabbinic authors of *Ekha Rabbah* lived in a discursive world shaped in no small degree by their Christian contemporaries, whose discursive world was shaped in turn in no small degree by Eusebius. If the rabbis hinted to the Christian narrative in terms less clear than those employed to signal their engagement with previous rabbinic narrative and Josephus, then the Midrash's vagueness may be reflective of the low deictic threshold necessary to indicate to the identity of the Christian adversary. Such a low threshold allows a sophisticated engagement with the target of polemics without heavy handed literally plastered references. The rabbis of Palestine, just like modern polemicists, often prefer the implicit and the allusive, depriving their adversary the honor of being named and the

honor of precision, as I have argued elsewhere.¹¹⁸ A final brief look at the role of the dukes, and especially that of Panegyrist/Abgar, the duke of Arabia, may be illustrative of the Midrash's Byzantine context and its manifold ways of hinting to Eusebius even as a historical person.

A brief look at the narrative's political *realia* allows for a more secure contextualization of the narrative in early Byzantium, and thereby after Eusebius. To begin with, the Midrash's usage of the term "duke" accurately depicts the Roman administrative structures not of Josephus' but of its own Byzantine times, thereby providing us with the rabbis' clear focus on the political structures of the Byzantine Empire. Constantine and his successors continued the reforms initiated by Diocletian which led to the formation of the twelve Byzantine *dioceses*.¹¹⁹ Palestine became part of the *diocesis orientis*, and subdivided into provinces, whose military was administered by a new class of military officials, the *duces*, or "dukes," a Latin term novel in Greek which Eusebius elsewhere sees in need of explanation.¹²⁰ The use of the title "duke" in *Ekha Rabbah* shows how the rabbinic composition reflects the realities of its day. As Baer already noted, the two versions of *Ekha Rabbah* reflect the provinces of the *diocesis orientis* in the surroundings of Jerusalem: Palestina, Arabia, Phoenicia, as well as "Alexandria;" the military of these four diocesis was, in effect, led by dukes.¹²¹ The story's realia thereby become an important witness to its Byzantine period of origin.¹²²

¹¹⁸ See Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, 137-236. The rabbinic use of Psalm 109:13 ("may his name be blotted out," e.g. in *Bereshit Rabbah* 65.3 and passim, see also Psalm 9.6), or the cognate punishment of a rabbi's name being struck from the record (*Hagiga* 15b), explicates a similar attitude.

¹¹⁹ See Timothy D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*; idem, "Emperors, panegyrics, prefects, provinces and palaces (284–317);", *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996), 539–42; Fergus Millar *The Roman Near East: 31BC – AAD 337; 374-87*; and idem., "Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 165, 25-49.

¹²⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* IX, 5, 2, see also Fergus Millar *The Roman Near East*, 191. It should be noted that Josephus' himself is named "duke" by Orosius (*Historia adversus paganos* VII.9, the main argument Baer provides for the pertinence of this text (idem, "Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt," 182-3, see also above, note 87). The similarity of titles in Orosius and *Ekha Rabbah*, however, seems a parallel adaptation of previous military terms into the current Byzantine jargon, and thereby only points to the Byzantine Origin of *Ekha Rabbah*, not to the Midrash's dependence on the Latin source.

¹²¹ In an eclectic rendering, the witness of *Ekha Rabbah* list [1] "Palestina," the province which in the time was subdivided into *Palestina I*, *II*, and *III*, roughly the area from Eilat to Tiberias, [2] "Arabia," the province roughly equal to trans-Jordania, [3] "Phoenicia," which was subdivided into *Phoenice* and *Phoenice Libanensis*, and finally [4] "Alexandria," which was in effect the capital of the *diocesis aegypti*. This confirms Baer, "Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt," 170, pace Shaye Cohen's dismissal of the list of dukes (idem, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 254); cf. also Joseph Derenbourg, *Essai sur l'histoire et la géographie de la Palestine, d'après*

More precisely, the province of Palestine is governed from the Metropolis of Caesarea, the see of Eusebius. When introducing the story of Jerusalem's fall, Ekha Rabbah explicitly points to the enmity between Caesarea and Jerusalem, another tacit indicator of the Christian adversary. The Midrash interprets the verse from Lamentations (1:5) that Jerusalem's "enemies have advanced" as denoting both Vespasian and Caesarea, since this city was made a Metropolis only because of Jerusalem's fall.¹²³ The historical enmity between Jerusalem and Caesarea again reflects the reality of early Byzantium more than of Imperial Rome.¹²⁴ The ascendency of Caesarea over Jerusalem as described in the Midrash is tied to the rise of Christianity, and thus reflected by the two cities' status even within the Church, as Lee Levine has pointed out:

"There can be no doubt that Caesarea was the most important see in Palestine during the third and fourth centuries. In the provincial system emerging within the Church, the bishop of a metropolis was accorded special dignity over the bishoprics in the area... By virtue of the pre-eminence of [Caesarea]... the Caesarean bishop enjoyed this prestigious position vis-à-vis other Palestinian bishops, including Jerusalem."¹²⁵

les thalmuds et les autres sources rabbiniques (Paris: Impr. Imperiale, 1867), 264-5. The spelling "Africa" (דָאָפְרִיקָא) in the *editio princeps* and in Oxford 164, Parma 1408, and London (British Museum Add. 1076) as well as "Sebastia" (סִיבַתִיָה) in manuscript Rome and פרקי in manuscript Parma 1426 seem corruption, even if a town of "Sebastia" was in effect established near today's Nablus, the province of Palestina II. The latter corruption therefore does not necessarily reflect ignorance of the geography of Palestine, only of the Byzantine administrative structure.

¹²² Pace Zunz' dating of the text in the Islamic period, see idem, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* (1966 [1892]), 190-1. Zunz reads the text's use of "Arabia" as a reference to Islam, a methodology that ignores the Byzantine use of the geographical term "Arabia" which obviously shifts with the Muslim conquest. On the dating of Ekha Rabbah see note 10.

¹²³ The Midrash explains that the meaning of "here enemies have advanced" (הֵזֶר צָרִיה לְרֹאשׁ) to be that "before Jerusalem was destroyed, no city was worth anything. Since it had been destroyed, Caesarea was made a Metropolis (and a מִנְפָלִין, explained by Jastrow *ad loc.* as a corrupted dittoigraphy). It then reads "her enemies have advanced, her adversaries are at ease" as signifying Vespasian and Titus, respectively, thereby introducing the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem. Manuscript Rome adds the rise of "Antipatris" and Flavia "Neapolis" to that of Caesaria, and suggests "Trajan" (the Emperor responsible for the suppression of the Diaspora revolt) instead of Titus in addition to Vespasian. On Jerusalem and Caesarea see also the famous passage in Bavli *Megilla* 6a.

¹²⁴ Caesarea was indeed founded as a Roman colony by Vespasian; in section nine of Ekha Rabbah we learn for example that Vespasian heard about Nero's death while planning his advance on Jerusalem in Caesarea. Yet only in the third century did Alexander Severus make the city a Metropolis. All the while, it remained an important Jewish and rabbinic center, see, for example, Genesis Rabbah 36.8 and passim, as well as Lee Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), and Gideon Foerster, "The Early History of Caesarea," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research. Supplementary Studies* 19 (1975), 9-22.

¹²⁵ Lee I. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule*, 115. Levine also notes that the seventh canon of the Council of Nicea fixes the superiority of Caesarea over Jerusalem ("Aelia"), and moreover that "Eusebius refers to the bishops of both cities [Caesarea and Jerusalem] on numerous occasions in his *History*. At times he places the Caesarean bishop first... at times the bishop of Jerusalem... Caesarea, however, is mentioned first in the more significant contexts" (*ibid.*). The conflict between the two cities, even if

If Caesarea took precedence over Jerusalem within the Church, one could argue that the authors of *Ekha Rabbah* recast the ascendancy of the former as metropolis over the latter as tantamount to the ascendancy of Christianity.¹²⁶ The see of the metropolis Caesarea, in turn, was inextricably tied to its most preeminent Bishop Eusebius. The astuteness of the Midrash's realia extends from its geography and politics to intimate knowledge of events equally portrayed in (but not necessarily taken from) the *Ecclesiastical History*.

Namely, when seeking to understand the Midrash's discussion of the name of the duke of Arabia, we should exercise historical precision similar to the one displayed in the text's political geography. To reiterate, version Bet of *Ekha Rabbah* gives his name as Abgar (אַבְגָּר). Version Aleph names the duke "praise" (קִילוֹת) and Panegyrist (פָּנֶגֶר). The proper names "Abgar" and "Panegyrist" share the ending *-gr* which informed the word play in section eight of the Midrash's narrative. The poetic cohesion hints to the respective originality of each name in each version. Within both versions, both names constitute the majority reading as well as the respective *lectio difficilior* among the variants for the name of the duke, and both names function to reinforce the Midrash's response to elements from the *Ecclesiastical History* by alluding to a figure within this narrative, and to its author, Eusebius of Caesarea, respectively.¹²⁷

The duke's name of Abgar, in version Bet, has been discussed by Baer. For Baer, it is clear that the Midrash uses the name in order to evoke the figure of one of the Christian kings of Osrhoene by the same name, who resided in Edessa. This figure, an alleged early royal convert to Christianity and thereby a predecessor to Eusebius' view of Constantine, was indeed a prominent figure in Syriac Christian literature.¹²⁸ Baer's

Levine's dating were too early, certainly informed Christian discourse the time of the composition of *Ekha Rabbah*.

¹²⁶ See Oded Irsai, "The Jerusalem Bishopric and the Jews in the Fourth Century: History and Eschatology," in Lee I Levine, *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 204-20.

¹²⁷ Within version Bet, the occasional use of אַמְגָר, "destroyer" or "neighbor," is very likely a scribal correction of an incomprehensible Abgar (אַבְגָּר), likely inspired by the word play in section eight itself which mentions a neighbor (אַמְגִירִיהָן and לְמַגִּירִיהָן). Within version Aleph, "praise" (קִילוֹת) is a translation of Panegyrist (פָּנֶגֶר); manuscript Parma 1426, moreover, seems to substitutes "Pantera" for Panegyrist. I will return both forms below. It is possible that the readings of "mute" (אֵלִם) in manuscript Rome and the slightly more coherent reading of "violent" (אַלְיִם) in two other witnesses of version Bet (manuscripts Oxford 164 and Parma 1408) are in turn derived from the optically similar (קִילוֹת) in version Aleph.

¹²⁸ See Baer, "Jerusalem in the Times of the Great Revolt," 172-4. Baer mentions Eusebius' discussion of Abgar, but does not consider Eusebius directly as a possible source of the rabbis' polemic. Instead, Baer

suggestion that the Abgar in the Midrash stands for Abgar of Edessa does not seem implausible. However, we should not base ourselves on the Palestinian rabbis' (quite plausible, yet unverifiable) familiarity with the vast Syriac tradition of Abgar, but first and foremost with the long narrative about Abgar in Eusebius' *History* (where Eusebius claims to have translated his letters from the Syriac). Abgar, after being healed by Jesus, learns about the crucifixion and responds in the following way, according to Eusebius:

And Abgar said... “So much have I believed in (Jesus) that I wished to take an army and destroy those Jews who crucified him, had I not been prevented from this by the Roman Empire.” (I.13.16)¹²⁹

Abgar is a Christian who seeks to destroy “the Jews,” and hence Jerusalem, as a punishment for their killing of Jesus; he only refrains from attacking them since Jerusalem is located in the (then pagan) Roman Empire. The choice of the name Abgar in version Bet of Ekha Rabbah therefore becomes another means by which the Midrash guides the gaze of the reader to the discursive field shaped by Eusebius, who introduces Abgar to early Byzantium. As Alexander Mirkovic makes more than clear, Eusebius constructed Abgar as a direct precursor to Constantine.¹³⁰

If the Midrash hints at Abgar of Edessa, why then does it make him the Duke of Arabia? In Roman and Byzantine literature Edessa is often associated with the vague notion of “Arabia” not only as a province of the *diocesis orientis*, but also as the vast region beyond the Jordan in the same province, including the Roman province Osrhoene whose duke is stationed in Edessa.¹³¹ The Midrash’s employment of the figure of Abgar as a duke of the (Byzantine) Roman army in charge of ‘*rby*’ clearly denotes the province neighboring Jerusalem. At the same time, however, it co-notes the broader notion of Arabia of which Osrhoene and its capital Edessa are part, and Abgar the Duke of Arabia seeking to destroy Jerusalem can easily be understood as a clear reference to Edessa’s

discusses the Syriac tradition of the Ascension of Mary to which Lieberman had pointed earlier (*idem*, מִנְשָׁרֶת מִנְשָׁרֶת, 15). Many of the Syriac Abgar traditions have been edited and translated in William Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London: 1864). See also Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 43.

¹²⁹ Translation by Kirsopp Lake, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 93.

¹³⁰ See Alexander Mirkovic, *Prelude to Constantine. The Abgar Tradition in Early Christianity* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

¹³¹ See Glenn W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 80, who adduces examples from Eutropius, Septimus Severus, Festus, and Zosimus. Pliny the Elder (*H.N.* 6.25, 117, and 129) classifies the people of Osrhoene as Arabs, see also H. I. MacAdam, and N. J. Munday, “Cicero’s Reference to Bostra (AD Q. FRAT. 2. 11. 3),” *Classical Philology* 78 (1983) 131-136, esp. 133 note 17.

Christian king whose desire to besiege and destroy the Jews is well known from Eusebius. Such Midrashic polysemy is to be expected in *Ekha Rabbah*, especially so as part of the plurality of the duke's names that may hint to Eusebius more directly in version Aleph.

In version Aleph, the duke's odd name קילוֹס can mean "derision," certainly a fitting name for the doomed duke. Its main denotation, however, is not derision, but "praise."¹³² This meaning, in turn, confirms Jastrow's reading of פנָגֵר, in the same version, as Panegyrist, reinforced by Panegyrist's claim that he left the Western Wall standing "for the praise of the kingdom" (לשבחא דמלכותא)—a phrase that tellingly also occurs only in version Aleph.¹³³ It seems more than likely that "praiser" is a translation of the Greek "panegyrist."

The name of the duke of Arabia as a "praiser" and "panegyrist" of Vespasian not only reinforce each other, but guide the audience towards recasting Vespasian and Panegyrist in terms of Constantine and his panegyrist Eusebius. Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus, or Constantine the Great, like his father carried the name Flavius after Titus Flavius Vespasianus, and his line continued the dynastic reference to the Flavians. In light of Constantine's name and his actions in Jerusalem, the portrayal of Vespasian and Panegyrist in *Ekha Rabbah* becomes more palpable. As mentioned before, Eusebius praised Constantine in his *Panegyric to Constantine* and the *Life of Constantine*. Eusebius' publicly functioned as Constantine's panegyrist during the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and this dedication in itself functioned as the central ceremony symbolizing the Christian dominance over the holy city.

It seems likely that educated citizens of Palestine, such as the rabbis, would have known about Eusebius' function as Panegyrist. Eusebius' uncritical praise for Constantine in numerous public appearances and texts, moreover, did not even escape his Christian successors, after the initial enthusiasm about the Christianization of the Empire had been sobered by the experience of the exploits of the Neo-Flavian dynasty and its

¹³² See Jastrow, *A Dictionary*, 1360. Note that the Greek homophonic κιλλός denotes a donkey, donkeys being an important, yet ever elusive theme of ancient anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemic.

¹³³ According to Jastrow, the term פנָגֵר denotes the encomiast (*πανηγυριστής*) at a panegyric (idem., *A Dictionary*, 1186).

successors. Sometime around 439, Socrates Scholasticus opens his own *Ecclesiastical History* with the sharp remark that:

“Eusebius, surnamed Pamphilus, . . . , in writing the life of Constantine, valued the praises (τῶν ἐπαίνων) of the king and the panegyrical plurality of words (τῆς πανηγυρικῆς ὑψηγορίας τῶν λόγων), as if in an encomium (ἐγκωμίῳ), more than the accurate statement of facts.” (1.1.1-2)

Socrates, of course, writes in Constantinople, and likely after Ekha Rabbah. It seems plausible that attitudes like Socrates’ were known to the rabbis, and that the names “praiser” or “panegyrist” that Ekha Rabbah gives to the duke of Arabia, would reconfirm Eusebius as the target of the text’s implicit polemic. To a Palestinian rabbinic audience familiar with only the most rudimentary aspect of early Byzantine discourse, with their own Neo-Flavian or Theodosian Emperor, and with the reality of Byzantine Jerusalem, the name Panegyrist speaks volumes. We know little about rabbinic perceptions of authorship in general, leave alone about their knowledge of a particular Christian author. Still, given that the narrative I presented here may be the most precise and concrete example of rabbinic engagement with a non-rabbinic historical figure, Josephus, and with a non-rabbinic text this figure authored, his *War*, would it not be possible that the rabbis engage another person and text, albeit with less precision, and even greater fluidity?

The rendering of the duke’s name as “Pantera” in manuscript Parma 1426 also deserves mentioning. *Pntr*’ which only occurs in one manuscript, is likely another attempt by a later scribe to make intelligible the similar sounding *pngr* by only slightly modifying the spelling. In all of rabbinic literature, the term Pantera exclusively appears as the name of Jesus’ father, placing the narrative again in an anti-Christian context.¹³⁴ The paucity of the attestation in only one manuscript of only one of the two textual families makes it likely that the reading is a late emendation. Even and especially as such, however, it is evidence that some rabbinic redactor or copyist sensed a Christian intertext behind the rabbinic destruction narrative, providing us with a historical witness to my general reading of Ekha Rabbah, even at a time when the terms Abgar and Panegyrist would not be comprehensible any more, and the name of Eusebius had been effaced from Jewish memory.

¹³⁴ On Pantera see most recently Peter Schäfer *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7, 15-24, and 52-62.

In most witnesses of version Aleph and Bet, however, we find something much more specific than Pantera: the Midrash employs the duke of Arabia to undo the role of three characters of Eusebius: James the Just (in both versions), Abgar (in version Bet), and Eusebius himself (in version Aleph). These three figures occupied a central space in early Byzantine Christian historiography, certainly in learned circles and likely in popular imagination as well. The three figures together inform the core of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, the same text whose tenth book and culmination praise Constantine excessively. Are then Constantine and his panegyrist Eusebius the referents for the midrash's Vespasian and Panegyrist? Does the Midrash so specifically equate the Christianization of Jerusalem to its destruction, and condemn the memory of Eusebius, the "neighbor," as that of an "accuser" who should instead have stood up in the Jews' defense? Byzantine military language and governmental politics are accurately reflected by the Midrash. Christian texts may as well. Yet a lot more work will have to be done before we can surmise, or dismiss, this putative level of rabbinic intimacy with the church fathers. In the meantime, we can focus on the rabbis' general sense of patristic triumphalism, as developed in the main part of this article.