

TE'UDA

XXVI

MYTH, RITUAL AND MYSTICISM

Studies in honor of
Professor Ithamar Gruenwald

TE'UDA

THE CHAIM ROSENBERG SCHOOL
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XXVI

MYTH, RITUAL AND MYSTICISM

Studies in honor of
Professor Ithamar Gruenwald

Editors
Gideon Bohak, Ron Margolin, Ishay Rosen-Zvi



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ABSTRACTS

Myth and its transformations

Gersonides on the Serpent in the Garden of Eden

Sara Klein-Braslavy

The serpent is a central character in the biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden. It is a key to understanding how Eve was seduced into eating from the tree of knowledge as well as Adam's subsequent violation of the divine injunction not to do so. Although, to Gersonides, Adam and Eve were historical figures, he interpreted the serpent as an allegory of the human power of imagination. This is the only comprehensive treatment of the imagination in Gersonides's entire oeuvre and it supplements his psychology as expounded elsewhere. The article examines Gersonides's justification of this reading, the exegetical methods he employed, and his interpretation of the serpent in Genesis 3:1 and its punishment in Genesis 3:14–15, based on the Aristotelian psychology in Averroes's epitomes of *De anima* and *Parva naturalia*. As elsewhere in his biblical commentaries, Gersonides posits that Scripture expounds philosophical doctrines identical to those of Averroes, allowing for the latter to be used as a commentary on the former. The serpent and its punishment represent diverse aspects of the imagination, including its nature, actions, and modes of apprehension.

A Hurrian Myth in a Late Jewish Text: Sepher Zerubabel

Israel Knohl

Sepher Zerubbabel, a Jewish apocalypse redacted in the seventh century, tells of an angel who took the biblical figure of Zerubbabel to Rome and showed him a marble stone in the shape of a very beautiful virgin. The stone is the wife of Belial or Satan, whom he will impregnate to bear Armilus, who will rule over the whole world, except Israel. Although T. Nöldeke already noted in 1893 that "Armilus" was Romulus, the source for the motif of a villain conceived through the union of an evil divine being with a stone

has remained unclear. This article suggests that this motif is derived from the Hurrian “Song of Ullikummi.” R. E. Gane suggested that this myth is already reflected in the biblical vision of the “Little Horn” in Daniel 7:8-25 and 8:9-25. A similar impact of Hurrian literature and cult are thus apparent in later Jewish images as well.

Was My Father a “Wandering Aramaean?” an Intra-Biblical Polemic over the Myth of the Common Father

Dalit Rom-Shiloni

“My father was a wandering Aramaean,” begins the liturgical declaration, known as “*Mikra Bikurim*,” which every Israelite is commanded to say annually when bringing first fruits to the Temple (Deut 26:1–11). In honor of Ithamar Gruenwald and his contributions to the study of myth and ritual, this paper examines the “myth of the common father,” comparing this Deuteronomic identification of Jacob as an Aramaean to Genesis stories that refer to familial connections with the Aramaean family of Naḥor (Gen 24; 25:19–20; 27:46–28:9; 29–30, 31). Studying these texts through sociological perspectives on ethnicity and group identity reveals a rich polemical context within which Deuteronomy 26:5 should also be read. The paper suggests that these texts reveal a transformation of the understanding of “Aramaean,” from a geographical designation that builds the exclusivity of Israel through the non-Canaanite origin of their fathers (in priestly passages in Genesis and in Deuteronomy 26:5) to a thorough refutation of the possible ethnic meaning of “Aramaean,” that compels the split between Jacob and Laban the Aramaean in Genesis 31. All these texts reflect a shared myth of Israel’s allochthonic origins, formulated no later than the late eighth to seventh centuries BCE and which persisted through the fifth century BCE.

The Various Faces of the Jewish Myth: From the Bible To Its Conceptual Interiorization in Hasidism

Ron Margolin

Ron Margolin opens his essay on the various aspects of the Jewish Myth with a renewed discussion of the positions of Moshe Idel and Yehuda Libes on the issue of Myth in the Kabbala as well as in Biblical and Midrashic sources. Following Itamar Greenwald, and as opposed to Shalom Rozenberg’s view, Margolin argues for Idel’s and Libes’ position, basing his case on an examination of the Biblical ritual of sacrifice and several of its elucidations

in Midrashic Rabbinic literature. Margolin, however, disagrees with the equation of the Jewish Myth with the Pagan one, and suggests thinking of the ethical aspect as an integral part of Jewish Myth. Margolin, furthermore, includes a discussion of Myths and their downfall and does so while proposing an alternative theory of myth. Margolin's theory is exemplified through a linear analysis of the development of the Myth of Eden from Genesis to its interiorization in Hassidic thought in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Mircea Eliade: Androgyne, Totality, and Reintegration

Moshe Idel

In his paper, Moseh Idel reviews the development of Mircea Eliade's study of the myth of the androgyne, which, according to Eliade, was a central archetype in the archaic world. Idel shows how in the early stages of his research, Eliade relied on Kabbalistic sources, and how, apparently because of the presence of Gershom Scholem at the Eranos meetings in the 1950's, Eliade preferred in his later writings on the topic to base his analysis on other, non-Kabbalistic sources. Idel criticizes Eliade's view of the centrality and significance of the myth of the androgyne in Jewish sources, and reviews Eliade's study through an analysis of the various styles of Eliade's writing about this myth (academic, literary, autobiographical), finding a common thread running through them all.

Myth and History

Galut and Ghayba: The Exile of Israel and the Occultation of the Shī'ī Imām-Messiah - a Comparative Study of Judah Halevi and Early Imāmī-Shī'ī Writers

Ehud Krinis

The article examines important points of similarity and difference between the conception of the Exile of Israel offered by Judah Halevi (twelfth century), and the conception of the Occultation of the Imām offered by early Shī'ī writers (tenth century). The similarities culminate in the characterization of both the Exile and the Occultation as *default periods*. Exile and Occultation reduce not only the believers to a *default position*, but also God Himself. His connection to the world becomes limited, and He is less present within history. In the prolonged historical situations of the Exile and Occultation,

the ongoing survival of the chosen exiled group in the Jewish case, or the chosen hidden leader in the Shī‘ī case, comes to function as the last sign of the presence of God within history.

From Sunset to Dawn: Transformations in Ancient Jewish Messianism

Michael F. Mach

The article discusses some basic changes between the Messianic idea as expressed in Second Temple apocalyptic literature and the later Rabbinic traditions. The article opens with some methodological clarifications of the recent scholarly discussion, and a schematic overview of messianic/apocalyptic features of both bodies of literatures is offered. It then concentrates on 4 Ezra as a bridging work leading from one corpus to the other.

The Birth of the Goy in Rabbinic Literature

Ishay Rosen-Zvi

Goy, as a general term for all non Jews, makes its first appearance in rabbinic literature, and has been in current use since. While the *status* of gentiles in rabbinic literature has received extensive treatment, the *concept* was considered self-evident, and its history remained undetected. The fact that the term continues to play a central role in Jewish discourse of all kinds to this very day, made it almost invisible in scholarship. This is especially remarkable in light of the variety of studies about the birth and development of the term *Yehudi* and its Greek counterpart *Ioudaios*. How did the term *goy*, which in biblical and second temple literature means “people” or “nation”, come to denote non Jews in rabbinic literature, and why? Is this term identical, in meaning and use, to the biblical *nochri*? Does the terminological transformation conceal a deeper conceptual one?

Myth and Ritual

The Phylactery Knot: The History of a Jewish Icon

Adam Afterman

The paper analyses the history of one Jewish icon, Phylacteries, and specifically the knot on the back of the head phylactery as a divine icon. The paper examines how this knot achieved this significance in medieval Jewish

literature, and examines its emergence from earlier sources in Midrash, Ashkenazi esoterica, Jewish theology and early kabbalah, and its significance for the understanding of ritual and religious experience in medieval Jewish theology and Kabbalah.

Myth and Midrashic Thinking: The Case of Pride and Humility

Richard Lewis

Ithamar Gruenwald introduced a new way of thinking about “myth” into Jewish Studies, according to which myth is a feature of human culture, central in but not limited to religion. One of his basic claims is that mythical narratives ground a reality of value not available to sense perception, yet are experienced as real because they establish a reciprocal relationship with some form of behavior, most frequently, but not exclusively, rituals. The article applies Gruenwald’s idea to a genre he did not discuss – rabbinic texts that promote some ideal behavior. Gruenwald’s theory of myth allows us to see that rabbinic homilies and narratives that promote the ideal of *anavah* (humility) are mythic representations of an idealized behavior which serves as their “ritual” counterpart. This approach invites the reader to imagine what the world would look like to the humble person, which is to imagine what myth underlies the ideal behavior described in the text. Just as the Sabbath embodies the myth of creation, so humility as presented in these texts embodies – and hence interprets – some of the deeper implications of that myth. This leads to some speculation about the necessity of myth in human life.

Bibliomancy in Jewish Tradition: The Lot attributed to the Gaon of Vilna (*Goral Hagra*)

Shraga Bar-On

Bibliomancy was a broadly accepted technique in Jewish tradition from ancient times, and remains so in contemporary halakhic writings and practice. The article hypothesizes about the source of the mistaken attribution of a certain bibliomantic practice known as “*Goral Hagra*”, to Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna *gaon*, and the different reasons for its widespread use. Finally, it records the objections to bibliomancy in Modern Hebrew literature. The appendix deals with a curious and surprising text for finding treasures by adjuring a demon through a mirror and using a Torah scroll, and claims that this text represents the “conversion” of a Christian prescription.

Myth and Mysticism

Consumed by Love: The Death of Nadab and Abihu as a Ritual of Erotic-Mystical-Union

Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel

This article discusses the interpretation of the enigmatic biblical story of Nadab and Abihu by tracing its development from Philo and rabbinic literature to the Zohar and other contemporary medieval mystical writings. It claims that while in the ancient world, the death of Aaron's sons symbolically represented martyrdom, in later kabbalistic literature it became an example for a mystical and erotic union with God. Nadab and Abihu were presented as archetypes of human initiative that raises a person upward, using fire as a transformative tool. "The Mystical Union of Fire" is derived from the rabbinic idea that Aaron's sons intended "to add love to a love" and from Philo's glorification of their dedication to God. These ancient homilies informed a contiguous development of this model in subsequent generations, as well as the mutual relationship between Judaism and early Christianity. In particular, this model informed two ideas which significantly influenced medieval mystical literature: eroticism and martyrdom.

New Fragments of Hekhalot Literature from the Cairo Genizah

Gideon Bohak

The importance of the Hekhalot fragments found in the Cairo Genizah has often been noted by previous scholars, and much important work on them was carried out by Ithamar Gruenwald, Peter Schäfer, and others. In my paper, I briefly survey the Hekhalot Genizah fragments and their contribution to the study of early Jewish mysticism. This is followed by a description and an edition of a hitherto unpublished Hekhalot fragment, which joins a previously published fragment to form a complete bifolium. The new fragment contains detailed descriptions of the heavenly realms, and is characterized by its numinous language and by some unusual neologisms. Moreover, the newly constructed bifolium joins other, published and unpublished fragments from the same quire, thus allowing the tentative reconstruction of a hitherto unknown Hekhalot composition.

Mythical Mysticism and Intellectual Mysticism

Menachem Lorberbaum

The study of Jewish thought in the middle ages has been dominated by a bipolar distinction between rational philosophy and mystical Kabbalah. This paper argues against this approach by stressing the common overarching framework of Jewish theology common to these enterprises. Such a perspective enables the argument that Kabbalah is not the sum total of Jewish mysticism and allows for a renewed evaluation of the mystical quality of Neoplatonically inclined forms of philosophical intellectual mysticism. A more useful distinction proposed in the paper is between mythic and intellectual mysticisms.