

LIEVE M. TEUGELS

The Meshalim
in the Mekhiltot

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*

Mohr Siebeck

Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism

Edited by

Maren Niehoff (Jerusalem)
Annette Y. Reed (Philadelphia, PA)
Seth Schwartz (New York, NY)
Moulie Vidas (Princeton, NJ)

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Lieve M. Teugels

The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot

An Annotated Edition and Translation
of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael
and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

With the assistance of
Esther van Eenennaam

Mohr Siebeck

LIEVE M. TEUGELS, born 1965; 1994 PhD; 2000-02 visiting professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York; currently professor of Jewish Studies at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam; involved in a research project on parables in early Jewish and early Christian literature, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).
orcid.org/0000-0002-0013-782X

ESTHER VAN EENNENNAAM, born 1990; BA in Theology & Religious Studies, Utrecht University; currently master's studies in Religion & Society, Utrecht University; involved with Pardes, an organisation concerned with the study of Jewish sources.

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Foreword

This book came to be as the result of my work for the NWO¹-sponsored project ‘Parables and the Partings of the Way’ that started in 2014. The objective of this project is the comparison between the parables attributed to Jesus in the New Testament and other early-Christian writings, and the rabbinic parables, the most contemporaneous of which are found in the tannaitic works. Applicants of the project are Eric Ottenheijm (Utrecht University), Annette Merz (PThU Groningen) and Marcel Poorthuis (Tilburg University). Three PhD students are preparing dissertations on the crossroads of early Christian and rabbinic parables: Albertina Oegema (parables about family relations), Jonathan Pater (parables about meals) and Martijn Stoutjesdijk (parables about slaves and slavery). Two student assistants, Suzanna de Vries, and Esther van Eenennaam have delivered all sorts of assistance for this project. Esther’s special role in the making of this book will be acknowledged further.

This project has already yielded several smaller publications, all of which will be mentioned in this book at some point.² The ‘parables project’, as it has become known, has become a noticeable authority with respect to parables research, in the Netherlands and beyond. Our monthly parable seminars, usually held in Utrecht, have become venues for scholars dealing with parables, related genres such as fables,³ and the ‘big’ question of the ‘parting(s) of the ways’.⁴ We have organized sessions at major conferences (SBL, EABS, EAJ, World Congress of Jewish Studies) and our enthusiastic members present papers and give lectures and classes about all things parables in various venues. Especially worth mentioning is our popular website that features monthly blogs by the members of our team.⁵ But most importantly, the ‘parable team’ is a fantastic group of people to work

¹ *Nederlands Instituut voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). See www.nwo.nl.

² A volume of collected papers of this project is still forthcoming at the moment of this writing: Eric Ottenheijm, Annette Merz, and Marcel Poorthuis, eds., *Parables in Changing Contexts: Interreligious and Cultural Approaches to the Study of Parables* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019).

³ On March 13, 2018, the three PhD students of the project organized a well-attended symposium ‘Parables and Fables in the Graeco-Roman World’, with guest speakers Ruben Zimmerman, Annemarie Ambühl-Tehrany, Gerard Boter, our ‘own’ Annette Merz, and myself. A volume about parables and fables, edited by this promising trio, has been announced.

⁴ Other guest scholars that we have hosted include Tal Ilan, Paul Mandel, Boaz Zissu, Reuven Kiperwasser, Ronit Nikolsky, Matthijs den Dulk, and Peter Tomson.

⁵ Parabelproject.nl

with. Besides colleagues, we have become a kind of family. I especially want to mention Eric Ottenheim, our *pater familias* who holds it all together. This is my occasion to thank all the members of the project team for their contributions, help and support. Each of them has read earlier versions of this book and provided these with critical notes and suggestions.

The department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Utrecht University have hosted me for four years on the attic of a beautiful building in an inspiring work environment. The Protestant Theological University, my new academic haven, deserves to be thanked for the support and the freedom they gave me to continue with the research for this book, and hopefully for the next volumes in what I hope will become a series of editions that covers all parables in tannaitic works. My special gratitude goes to Annette Merz, my colleague in the project, as well as the manager of my team at the PThU. Thomas Bakker, student of the PThU, was able to help me with straightening out the bibliography and the footnote references.

My sincere gratitude goes to the many scholars that have helped me with tips and references, and have answered the many questions that I fired at them about some detail or major question relating to this edition. Apart from the colleagues already mentioned above, and the many others who helped me with their writings, ideas or suggestions, I want to mention Menachem Kahana, who gave me invaluable tips, send me many references, and gave me all his relevant offprints; Daniel Boyarin who donated his entire 'Mekhilta archive' to our project; and Marc Bregman and Reuven Kiperwasser, who each sent me more than one PDF of an obscure early twentieth-century Hebrew journal article that could only be found in the Hebrew University Library. Paul Mandel gave feedback to an earlier version of this book, as well as many helpful suggestions. In May 2018 we hosted a 'parable seminar' at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem together. Finally, Arie Kooyman, the author of *Als een koning van vlees en bloed*,⁶ is the hero of our team. His popular-yet-scholarly book not only provides us with beautiful Dutch translations of the parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael and Sifre, which come in very handy for our parable blogs and lectures in Dutch, but also donated us his microfilms and photographs of manuscripts.

One person needs very special mentioning, and that is Esther van Eenennaam, the student-assistant of the parable project, who has been my right hand in the editing work involved in this volume. Esther has not only been a meticulous reader, she has also done substantial work for the edition by entering Hebrew texts in the database. In doing so, she displayed a remarkable knowledge of the material by making suggestions for the interpretation of the texts and correcting mistakes which I had made. She also contributed to the indices in this volume.

⁶ Arie C. Kooyman, *Als een koning van vlees en bloed: Rabbijnse parabels in midrasjiem* (Kampen: Kok, 1997).

I am indebted to Albertina Oegema, Martijn Stoutjesdijk, and Ronit Nikolsky for helping me with the huge task of checking the proofs. All remaining mistakes are, of course, my responsibility.

I am grateful to Mohr Siebeck Publishers who accepted to publish this book, and to their editors who worked on it, in various stages and in various capacities.

Finally, my loving thanks goes out to my partner Rob, and to my daughters Judi, Hanna and Ester. My parents, Gaston Teugels and Germaine Teugels-Huybrechts could never have ventured that their daughter would end up editing ancient Jewish parables, but they have always been supportive, interested in my work, and proud, I guess. To them I dedicate this volume.

Amsterdam, 1 February 2019

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Introduction to the Series

1. The Purpose and Approach of the Annotated Editions in this Series

1.1. The editions: purpose and nature

This introduction is intended to serve the entire series of editions of tannaitic meshalim:⁷ after this volume on the Mekhiltot, I hope to publish the meshalim contained in Sifre Deuteronomy and the Mekhilta to Deuteronomy; Sifre Numbers and Sifre Zuta; the Sifra, and Mishnah and Tosefta. A specific introduction to this first volume, focusing on the text critical situation of the Mekhiltot, follows after this general introduction. Because this is the first volume to appear, most examples in the introductions will come from the Mekhiltot.

This series of annotated editions of tannaitic meshalim has a double purpose: a critical study of the textual witnesses of the parables in the tannaitic sources; and a commentary on their meaning and function in the literary and historical context.⁸ The choice for a synoptic rather than a full critical edition, whether eclectic or diplomatic, is determined by the nature of this enterprise, which is not to make an edition of a complete work, but rather the presentation of many small sections, i. e. meshalim, culled from larger works. The purpose of this edition is to give its user a transparent presentation of the various textual witnesses of these selected meshalim. Making an individual eclectic edition for each parable would make the differences between the versions less visible. For each parable, I discuss the differences and similarities between these versions. In each chapter, section 3 ('Versions') fulfils the role which a critical apparatus fulfils in an edition of a complete work.⁹

⁷ Throughout this book, I use the terms 'parable' and 'mashal' interchangeably. When not specified, 'mashal' denotes the entire literary unit, including the so-called 'nimshal'. When I want to distinguish specifically between the constituting parts of the mashal, I speak of 'mashal proper' and 'nimshal'. The function and nature of the distinct parts of the mashal as well as the form as a whole will be discussed in this introduction.

⁸ The choice for the *tannaitic*, i. e. the earliest rabbinic meshalim as an object of study and of this series of editions, is the result of the Utrecht-based project 'Parables and the Partings of the Ways' from which this research issues. See my Foreword.

⁹ The debate about the best way to present rabbinic texts in critical editions is extensive, and has largely been dominated by the differences of opinion between Peter Schäfer and Chaim Milikowsky. See, for a summary of the debate by the two scholars, with references to their previous statements, most of which are re-published in the same volume: Peter Schäfer and Chaim Milikowsky, "Current Views on the Editing of the Rabbinic Texts of Late Antiquity: Reflections

For practical reasons, the disciplines of textual criticism and literary analysis of rabbinic texts are usually kept separate. Yet, to get the complete picture, one needs both. Textual variants can be very illuminating when studying contents or literary structure, as often the clue to a hard-to-understand, seemingly incomplete parable may come from a different textual variant than the one contained in the standard editions. For the text critical side of my study I rely heavily on Menachem Kahana's work on tannaitic texts.¹⁰ The text critical aspects of each volume will be discussed in the specific introductions to each volume, as these are particular to each set of Midrashim. It is my conviction, as I hope to make evident in this series, that thorough literary study cannot do without text critical work. Both reinforce each other.¹¹

1.2. The commentaries: literary and historical approaches

Whereas there is no actual rift in Jewish Studies between 'literary' and 'text critical' approaches – they are just not often applied by the same people at the same time – there is, or at least was until recently, a tension between 'literary' and 'historical' approaches. Since the beginning of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the nineteenth century, scholars tended to be historically oriented as they were eager to use the (now academically accessible) rabbinic texts to learn about an

on a Debate after Twenty Years," in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine: Proceedings of the British Academy*, ed. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79–88. See also Burton L. Visotzky, "On Critical Editions of Midrash," in *Recent Developments in Midrash Research*, ed. Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 155–61; Giuseppe Veltri, "From the Best Text to the Pragmatic Edition: On Editing Rabbinic Texts," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Reimund Bieringer et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 63–78. Relevant to this discussion is the 'new philology', recently advocated in Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions, Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).

¹⁰ See among others: Menachem Kahana, *Manuscripts of the Halakhic Midrashim: An Annotated Catalogue* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1995); *The Two Mekhilot on the Amalek Portion* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999); *Genizah Fragments of the Halakhic Midrashim* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005); *Sifre Zuta on Deuteronomy: Citations from a New Tannaitic Midrash* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005); "The Halakhic Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages. Part II*, ed. Shmuel Safrai et al., CRINT (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2007), 3–105; *Sifre on Numbers: An Annotated Edition*, vols. 1, 2, 3 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2011); Liora Elias Bar-Levav, *The Mekhilta De-Rabbi Shimeon Ben Yohai on the Nezikin Portion*, ed. Menachem I. Kahana (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2013). More titles are included in the bibliography.

¹¹ I set forth how I go about approaching individual meshalim, before they end up in the edition, in a dialectical move between a text-critical and a form-critical approach in Lieve M. Teugels, "Towards an Annotated Edition of Tannaitic Parables," in *The Present State of Old Testament Studies in the Low Countries: A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap*, ed. Klaas Spronk (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 248–66.

tique and modern practices.¹² Yet the tables turned after the second half of the twentieth century. In reaction to the ‘historicizing’ approach of their predecessors, scholars, notably of the Jerusalem ‘literary school’, but also in the US and in Europe, focused their attention back on the text *as text*, which was not necessarily a critical text. Co-text became the new context: outside the text, it was claimed, we cannot know anything for certain. An extreme exponent of this a-historical ‘school’ was the Frankfurt scholar Arnold Goldberg, whose views and method will be discussed in this introduction.¹³ The benefits of this turn to the text were great: unencumbered by the need to derive historical information, new methods of analysis were designed, and the intricacies of the texts were laid bare in a way preceded only by the ancient rabbis themselves. Without denying the assets of the new literary approaches, the turn of the new century brought a new turn to history. In a modified form, a historical approach is experiencing a comeback in Jewish Studies, and can serve as a welcome counterweight to an exclusively literary focus.¹⁴ New literary approaches that combine text and context promise the best of both worlds.¹⁵

¹² A critical discussion and suggestions as to how rabbinic sources may still be used for historiographical purposes (i. e. by triangulation: compare any phenomenon in rabbinic literature with similar phenomena in Christian and pagan text) is offered by Philip Alexander, “Using Rabbinic Literature as a Source for the History of Late-Roman Palestine: Problems and Issues,” in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine: Proceedings of the British Academy*, ed. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7–24. See also in the same collection: Günter Stemberger, “Halakhic Midrashim as Historical Sources,” 129–42 and Moshe Lavee, “Rabbinic Literature and the History of Judaism in Late Antiquity: Challenges, Methodologies and New Approaches,” 319–52.

¹³ See below 2.6 and 2.10. Cf. Arnold Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung: Gesammelte Studien II*, ed. Margarete Schlüter and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

¹⁴ For an overview see Seth Schwartz, “Historiography on the Jews in the ‘Talmudic Period’ (70–640 CE),” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, and David Sorkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 79–114; Lavee, “Rabbinic Literature and the History of Judaism in Late Antiquity,” 332–36. In the preface to the second edition of his dissertation, Martin Goodman sketched the development of historical studies of tannaitic literature since the time of the first appearance of his book in 1983: Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A. D. 132–212* (London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), vi–xvii. Goodman argued that for historical reconstruction of life in Roman Galilee in the period that he covers ‘it would be wise to rely on the midrashim less than on the Mishnah and Tosefta, and to use the Mekhiltas as little as possible’ (ibid., 10).

¹⁵ Carol Bakhos, “Method(ological) Matters in the Study of Midrash,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. Carol Bakhos (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 161–85, argues against the sharp fissure between ‘literary’ and ‘historical’ approaches and suggests a more integrative ‘literary-contextualist’ approach, which she also calls ‘cultural poetics’. See also, in the same book, Joshua Levinson, “Literary Approaches to Midrash,” 189–226, esp. 204–5. Levinson advocates ‘a renewed and more sophisticated dialogue between text and context’. See also J. Levinson, “Post-Classical Narratology and the Rabbinic Subject,” in Constanza Cordoni and Gerhard Langer, *Narratology, Hermeneutics, and Midrash: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Narratives from the Late Antique Period Through to Modern Times* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014), 81–106.

In most analyses of meshalim presented in this series, historical or other contextual issues will be discussed, but only after the text as text has been analyzed text critically and synchronically. I subscribe entirely to Gunter Stemberger's succinct evaluation of Arnold Goldberg's method: 'This strict approach to midrash as pure literature beyond which we may never go, will not satisfy most of us who have still historical questions on our mind: but it is at least the necessary first step before historical questions may be approached.'¹⁶ Where I see a lead, or the necessity, to bring in elements of historical, social or religious context, I will do so, with reference to the research of experts in the field. Literary analysis, on the other hand, I have internalized, as it were, based on year-long study of rabbinic texts along this line of research.¹⁷ My inspiration and methodological insights in the study of the rabbinic meshal, as in midrash in general, come mostly from Arnold Goldberg, Yonah Fraenkel, and Daniel Boyarin, particularly in his *Intertextuality*.¹⁸ An additional asset of the latter book for the present volume is that most examples of meshalim contained in it come from the Mekhilta. Despite the considerable differences between these scholars, all three focus on midrash as, in the first place, hermeneutics. With respect to the study of the rabbinic parable, I am also indebted, like anyone else, to David Stern. His examples come almost exclusively from Eicha Rabbah, and he is therefore more focused on meshalim in amoraic than in tannaitic midrash.¹⁹ I have mixed and matched what I appreciate

¹⁶ Günter Stemberger, "The Derashah in Rabbinic Times," in *Judaica Minora Teil II: Geschichte und Literatur des Rabbinischen Judentums*, by Günter Stemberger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 672. This study appeared before as Günter Stemberger, "The Derashah in Rabbinic Times," in *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments*, ed. Alexander Deeg, Walter Homolka, and Heinz-Günther Schöttler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 7–21. For Goldberg, see Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte*.

¹⁷ Cf. e. g. "Midrash in the Bible or Midrash on the Bible? Critical Remarks about the Uncritical Use of a Term," in *Bibel und Midrasch*, ed. Gerhard Bodendorfer and Matthias Millard (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 43–63; Lieve M. Teugels, "Der Aufbau von Aggadat Bereshit und die Idee der Einheit des Tenakh," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 25 (1998): 23–37; "Concern for the Unity of Tenakh in the Formation of Aggadat Bereshit," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 187–202; Lieve M. Teugels, "Two Centuries of Midrash Study: A Survey of Some Standard Works on Rabbinic Midrash and Its Methods," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 54 (2000): 125–144; "Gap Filling and Linkage in the Midrash on the Rebekah Cycle," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. Andre Wenin (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 585–98; *Bible and Midrash: The Story of "The Wooing of Rebekah" (Gen. 24)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); "Blending the Borders between Literature and Commentary, Interpretation and Self-Reflection: Metalepsis in Rabbinic Midrash," in *Über die Grenze: Metalepse in Text- und Bildmedien des Altertums*, ed. Ute E. Eisen and Peter von Möllendorff (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 405–30. Cf. e. g. Lieve M. Teugels, "Consolation and Composition in a Rabbinic Homily on Isaiah 40: Pesiqta' de Rav Kahana' 16," in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A. Beuken*, ed. Jacques M. Van Ruiten and Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 433–46.

¹⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See section 2.9.

¹⁹ David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). See section 2.9.

most of the insights of these scholars, and some of it I have modified, as I will explain throughout this introduction.

1.3. Methodological matters

‘Method’ and ‘approach’ are terms that cover a variety of things. They include not only my choice for a primarily textual over a primarily historical approach, but also the decision as to which texts to include (what is a parable?) and how much (co-)text to include before and after each parable in the edition. They also pertain to my views on the function of the mashal as a form of midrash, and on the role of the individual parts of the mashal in this. The most relevant methodological choices made in this edition will be briefly addressed here. In section 2 of this introduction, these and other methodological issues will be explained in more detail, and contextualized in previous scholarship. References between brackets refer the reader to the more extensive treatments of specific methods, scholars and topics in section 2.

1.3.1. *The midrashic mashal*

All the meshalim that are presented in these editions are found in rabbinic works called ‘Midrashim’. As a matter of fact, the majority of meshalim in rabbinic literature are found in Midrashic works, and of those found in other works, such as the Talmudim, many still function in rabbinic biblical interpretation, i. e. ‘midrash.’²⁰ I refer to meshalim that are found in Midrashim, or that are used in a midrashic context, i. e. in the context of the interpretation of a specific biblical text, as ‘midrashic mashal’. It is a matter of debate between scholars whether midrash is the original *Sitz im Leben* of the rabbinic parable. David Flusser conceded that the midrashic, exegetical, mashal is a secondary, belated manifestation of the mashal: originally, according to Flusser, meshalim functioned in different contexts, such as popular teaching, as is the case with most of the parables attributed to Jesus.²¹ In the beginning of his book on the rabbinic mashal, David Stern refers to two different settings of the rabbinic mashal, the ‘narrative’ and the ‘exegetical’ setting, and concludes that ‘most meshalim in Rabbinic literature, however, are preserved not in narrative contexts, but in exegetical ones, as part of midrash, the study and interpretation of Scripture.’²² Similarly, Yonah Fraenkel distinguishes between ‘rhetorical’ and ‘hermeneutical’ meshalim but quickly moves on to say

²⁰ Throughout my publications I systematically refer to an individual midrash unit as ‘midrash’ (lower case) and to a work of midrash as a ‘Midrash’ (capital). Also in these editions this distinction will be marked as such. For the ‘process’ of midrash, i. e. the activity of rabbinic biblical interpretation, I also use lower-case ‘midrash’.

²¹ David Flusser, *Die rabbinischen Gleichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler Jesus. 1. Teil: Das Wesen der Gleichnisse* (Bern: Lang, 1981). See further on Flusser in section 2.2.

²² Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 7. See more on Stern in section 2.9.

that most rabbinic meshalim are ‘hermeneutical’ and need to be approached with hermeneutical tools.²³ A similar distinction is found in Goldberg, and in most other scholars of rabbinic midrash: after naming the rare existence of meshalim in non-midrashic contexts, they move on to discuss ‘parables in midrash’.²⁴ This is not surprising as, indeed, most extant rabbinic meshalim have survived in midrashic contexts and function as elements of midrash: they take a role in the biblical interpretation. Whatever the rabbinic pre-history of the mashal – and this may indeed have included narrative, popular, even oral teaching – most extant meshalim are transmitted as parts of midrash and, when analyzed textually, they need to be analyzed as such. Even more, admitting that meshalim may have functioned in non-midrashic contexts in the pre-rabbinic period, most extant meshalim seem to have been specifically composed to function in midrash, and if they have an oral or narrative pre-history, they have been deliberately adapted to their new midrashic context. This redactional decision should be respected and considered when reflecting on the meaning of a mashal. It should not be treated in an isolated a-contextual way, but in its literary, midrashic, context.

The various ways in which meshalim function in midrashim will be set out further in section 1.4. It suffices for now that midrash is in the first place an inner-textual enterprise, or meta-text, as Goldberg has it, and that all the meshalim included in these editions are included in midrash. However – and this is something which Goldberg sometimes seems to forget –, midrash is more than explanation of difficulties in the text. Paul Mandel states this succinctly in that ‘midrash has one eye on the text and one eye out the window’.²⁵ That is, while dealing with grammatical and syntactic issues in the biblical text, midrash also has different, ideological (religious, political, philosophical etc.), agendas. Many scholars express this dual function of midrash as ‘hermeneutical’ versus ‘homiletical’, or ‘rhetorical’. However, ‘hermeneutics’ is not only the explanation of difficulties in the text: hermeneutics also contains an element of an existential change that is the result of interpreting a text.²⁶ Therefore, the distinction between ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘rhetorics’ is not all that sharp: whereas hermeneutics brings about a change

²³ Yonah Fraenkel, “Hamashal,” in *Darkhei ha-aggadah vehamidrash*, by Jonah Fraenkel, 2 vols. (Givataim: Yad letalmud, 1991), 323–93. See more on Fraenkel in section 2.8.

²⁴ Arnold Goldberg, “Das schriftauslegende Gleichnis im Midrasch,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 9 (1981): 1–90. See more on Goldberg in section 2.6.

²⁵ As he stated in a class which he gave for my undergraduate students as a visiting scholar at the PThU in Amsterdam in January 2017. See also: Paul Mandel, *The Origins of Midrash: From Teaching to Text* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018).

²⁶ This double view of hermeneutics is lucidly set out by Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975): 34. ‘The task of hermeneutics, defined as the task of displaying the kind of ‘world’ projected by a certain type of text, would find its fulfillment at this stage: in the deciphering of the *limit-experiences* of human life (as well as the peak experiences ...). At the same time, the task of connecting the interpretation of the text and the interpretation of life would be satisfied by a *mutual* clarification of the limit-expressions of religious language and the limit-experiences of human life’. See also Clemens Thoma, Simon Lauer, and Hanspeter Ernst, *Pesiqta*

in the interpreter him- or herself, rhetorics is rather directed towards another, who needs to be convinced.

In my perspective, therefore, good rhetorics depends on good hermeneutics, and since most rabbinic meshalim are included in midrash and share in its function of biblical interpretation (in the broad sense that I have just set out), the quest for the ‘message’ of the mashal depends on the success of the mashal as biblical interpretation; there is no contradiction between the two.²⁷ Central to my approach is the notion that a major task of midrash, and the mashal as a form of this, is ‘gap-filling’: the ‘filling in’ of (perceived or sometimes even artificially created) unclear relations between biblical verses or events or of missing elements in the biblical text.²⁸ Related to this, I always try to identify a ‘peg’ on which a mashal, like any form of midrash, hangs. Such a peg must be an element from the biblical text: rabbinic meshalim are not illustrations of mere ‘ideas’; they are textually anchored. In other words, (rabbinic midrashic) meshalim are not just interesting ‘stories’ or ‘illustrations’. Since they function in midrash, they need, first and foremost, to be approached as midrash. Any further meanings and messages can only be fully grasped if the often strenuous task of deciphering the interpretative move of the midrash, and of the mashal in this, has been completed.

1.3.2. *Selection of the material: where to find tannaitic meshalim?*

In this series of annotated editions of tannaitic meshalim,²⁹ the identification of *tannaitic* meshalim is approached in a pragmatic way: I go by the collection in which the meshalim are included. Thus, this volume deals with all the meshalim in the two Mekhiltot, of which I accept that they are tannaitic Midrashim in their entirety.³⁰ For all meshalim included in tannaitic Midrashim and other works

deRav Kahanā (PesK): Einleitung, Übersetzung, Parallelen, Kommentar, Texte, vol. 1 of *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen* (Bern: Lang, 1986), 69–77.

²⁷ Cf. Lieve M. Teugels, “Between Hermeneutic and Rhetoric: The Parable of the Slave Who Buys a Rotten Fish in Exegetical and Homiletical Midrashim,” in *Hebrew Texts in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Surroundings*, ed. Eveline Van Staaldoune and Klaas Spronk (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 50–64.

²⁸ The term ‘gap’ was first used with this meaning by Meir Sternberg in his chapter entitled, “Gaps, Ambiguities, and the Reading Process,” in Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 186–229. It is applied to midrash by Boyarin in his *Intertextuality*, 14–20 and passim. See also Teugels, “Gap Filling and Linkage in the Midrash on the Rebekah Cycle.”

²⁹ See note 8 for the reason why the tannaitic meshalim in particular are the object of this study.

³⁰ I follow Menachem Kahana in that the Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai is a tannaitic work in its entirety. About the dating of the tannaitic Midrashim, see Kahana, “The Halakhic Midrashim,” 60–64; Stemberger, “Halakhic Midrashim as Historical Sources,” 131–32. The dates of the individual tannaitic Midrashim will be discussed in the individual introduction to the volumes in this series of editions. Lauterbach, in the Introduction to his edition, note 22, disposes of some alleged (by Z. Frankel) amoraim mentioned in Mekhilta de rabbi Yishmael. See

that are accepted to be ‘tannaitic’, notably Mishna and Tosefta, this serves as a sufficient selection principle. The problem of selection only arises with meshalim that are attributed to tannaim, or that are otherwise marked as tannaitic, and that are included in rabbinic works of a later date, such as the Talmudim and the whole gamut of amoraic and later Midrashim. This issue needs very careful attention that surpasses the scope of this edition; such meshalim will not be included in this series.³¹

Attribution is another very complicated issue.³² The attribution of a mashal to a sage known as ‘tannaitic’ (from existing lists, such as Bacher’s or Stemberger’s)³³ is not a reliable selection criterion.³⁴ There is much pseudo-epigraphy in tannaitic as well as in later Midrashim, and the same mashal is often found attributed to different sages, even in various textual witnesses of the same Midrash. Differences between attributions will obviously be marked from a text critical point of view, yet I will not derive much historical conclusions from attributions.

1.3.3. Selection of the material: How to identify a mashal?

A more pregnant question is which texts are identified as *meshalim*. In a study that focused on the comparison of parables in the New Testament with rabbinic meshalim I have tried to formulate my own working definition of the ‘parable’. For that purpose, the definition needed to be broad enough to cover the parables in the two corpora, and yet specific enough to exclude other (narrative) forms. Specifically, to include the Gospel parables, biblical interpretation as the

Jacob Zallel Lauterbach and David Stern, eds., *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition, Based on the Manuscripts and Early Editions* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), xxvi. See also Robert M. Johnston, “Parabolic Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim” (PhD diss., Hartford Seminary, 1977), 141 note 1. From now on I will abbreviate Mekhilta de rabbi Yishmael as MRI. Despite the fact that I transcribe the name as ‘Yishmael’, according to the system of transliteration explained in the introduction, I chose the abbreviation MRI because most scholars use the name ‘Ishmael’ in English works.

³¹ The series started by Clemens Thoma and his colleagues includes meshalim in most amoraic Midrashim. See Thoma, Lauer, and Ernst, *Pesiqṭā de-Rav Kahanā*; C. Thoma and S. Lauer, *Von der Erschaffung der Welt bis zum Tod Abrahams: Bereshit Rabba 1–63: Einleitung, Übersetzung mit Kommentar, Texte*, vol. 2 of *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen* (Bern: Lang, 1991); C. Thoma and H. Ernst, *Von Isaak bis zum Schilfmeer: BerR 63–100; ShemR 1–22: Einleitung, Übersetzung mit Kommentar, Texte*, vol. 3 of *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen* (Bern: Lang, 1996); C. Thoma and H. Ernst, *Vom Lied des Mose bis zum Bundesbuch; ShemR 23–30: Einleitung, Übersetzung mit Kommentar, Texte*, vol. 4 of *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen* (Bern: Lang, 2000).

³² On attribution, and dating of rabbinic traditions in general, see Günter Stemberger, “Dating Rabbinic Traditions,” in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Reimund Bieringer et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 79–96. One of the criteria for dating is the development of halakhic positions, but for aggadic texts such as meshalim, this is of no use.

³³ Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten*, 2nd ed. (Strassburg: Trübner, 1903); Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 9th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2011).

³⁴ See about this Jacob Neusner, “Evaluating the Attributions of Sayings to Named Sages in the Rabbinic Literature,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 26 (1995): 93–111.

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