

YAKIR PAZ

From Scribes to Scholars

*Culture, Religion, and Politics
in the Greco-Roman World*

6

Mohr Siebeck

Culture, Religion, and Politics in the Greco-Roman World

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Rabbinic Biblical Exegesis in Light
of the Homeric Commentaries

Mohr Siebeck

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To my parents

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	XIII
Note on Editions, Translations, and Abbreviations	XV
Abbreviations	XVI
Introduction	1
1. <i>Midrash, Scrolls, and Homeric Scholarship</i>	4
2. <i>Survey of Scholarship</i>	10
2.1 Rabbinic Literature and the Homeric Commentaries	10
2.2 Homeric and Biblical Scholarship in Alexandria	17
2.3 Homeric Commentaries and Christian Biblical Commentaries	18
3. <i>The Present Study</i>	18
4. <i>Outline of the Book</i>	20
5. <i>Analogy vs. Genealogy</i>	21
6. <i>Sources</i>	28
6.1 Overview of the Homeric Commentaries	28
6.1.1 The A Scholia	33
6.1.2 The bT Scholia	34
6.1.3 The D Scholia	35
6.1.4 Scholia to the Odyssey	36
6.1.5 Papyri	36
6.1.6 Scholarship on the Homeric Commentaries	37
6.2 Halakhic Midrashim	38
Chapter 1: Source of Knowledge	41
1. <i>Introduction</i>	41
2. <i>Locus Classicus</i>	43

2.1 Topos Didaskalikos	43
2.2 I too Specify (נִא טרוף נָא)	48
2.3 Conclusion	52
3. <i>Didactic Texts</i>	54
3.1 Introduction	54
3.2 Logos Paideutikos	56
3.2.1 Homer the Philhellen	56
3.2.2 Plutarch, “How to Study Poetry”	60
3.3 The Poet Teaches Us (διδάσκει ἡμᾶς ὁ ποιητής)	64
3.4 Philo: Moses the Educator	69
3.5 The Torah Teaches Proper Conduct	70
3.6 Conclusion	78
4. <i>Re-Scripturizing</i>	80
4.1 Introduction	80
4.2 Re-Scripturizing in Homeric Scholarship	81
4.2.1 Mythological Dependence	82
4.2.2 Mis-Dependence	85
4.2.3 Literary Dependence	87
4.2.4 Philosophical Dependence	88
4.2.5 Dependence of Proverbs	88
4.2.6 Dependence of Ethical Maxims	89
4.2.7 Legal Dependence	90
4.3 Re-Scripturizing in the Halakhic Midrashim	91
4.3.1 Dependence of Ethical Maxims	93
4.3.2 Dependence of Proverbs	94
4.3.3 Legal Dependence	96
4.3.4 Dependence of the Mishna and other Edited Texts	97
4.4 Ideological Bibliographical Note	100
5. <i>Conclusion</i>	101
Chapter 2: Justifying Redundancies	103
1. <i>Introduction</i>	103
2. <i>Repetitions</i>	105
2.1 Introduction	105
2.2 Double Tongues	109
2.2.1 The Paronomastic Infinitive in the Halakhic Midrashim	109
2.2.2 Internal Object in the Homeric Commentators and Philo	113

2.3 Duplication	120
2.3.1 “Man Man” in Halakhic Midrashim	120
2.3.2 Duplication in Rhetorical Handbooks	122
2.3.3 Philo on anthrōpos anthrōpos	124
2.4 Conclusion	125
 3. <i>Synonyms</i>	128
3.1 Two Tongues	128
3.2 Synonyms in Homeric Commentaries	130
3.3 Philo on Synonyms	132
 4. <i>Transition Formulae</i>	137
4.1 Metabasis	138
4.2 The Verse Transfers It	142
4.3 Separating the Matter	143
4.4 As a Seal of the Matter	148
4.5 Conclusion	150
 5. <i>Isolating Particles</i>	151
5.1 Particles in the Early Homeric Commentaries	152
5.2 Particles in the Grammatical Treatises	153
5.3 Particles in Rabbinic Literature	155
5.3.1 Raq – Separated the Matter	157
5.3.2 Akh – Divided	162
5.3.3 Etim, Gamin, Akhim and Raqim	163
 6. <i>Conclusion</i>	165
 Chapter 3: Questions and Answers	167
1. <i>Introduction</i>	167
2. <i>Whence Does He Know?</i>	172
2.1 Whence Does He Know? (πόθεν οἶδεν;)	172
2.2 Whence Did He Know? (מַנִּין הִיא יָדַע?)	179
3. <i>Whence Does He Have?</i>	184
3.1 Whence Does He Have? (πόθεν αἴτῷ;)	184
3.2 Whence Did He Have? (מַנִּין הִיא לו?)	187
4. <i>Questions of Consideration</i>	190
4.1 Why Did He Not? (διὰ τί ... οὐκ;)	190

4.2 Why Did He Not? (מפני מה לא?)	193
5. <i>Why Character X and not Character Y?</i>	196
6. <i>Verisimilitude</i>	198
6.1 Impossibilities (ἀδύνατα)	199
6.2 How is it Possible? (היאך יכול)	204
7. <i>Contradictions</i>	207
7.1 Opposing Verses (τὰ μαχόμενα)	207
7.2 Two Verses Which Refute One Another	216
8. <i>Conclusion</i>	223
<i>Appendix: Hyperboles</i>	227
Chapter 4: Ambiguities	229
1. <i>Introduction</i>	229
2. <i>The Matter is Balanced</i>	231
2.1 Introduction	231
2.2 Amphibolia	232
2.3 And We Do Not Know	237
2.4 Conclusion	244
3. <i>Going Both Ways</i>	245
3.1 Nicanor and Consigning Words to Both Sides	246
3.2 Issi b. Yehuda and Unadjudicated Verses	254
3.3 Nicanor and Issi b. Yehuda	267
4. <i>Conclusion</i>	269
<i>Appendix: Prosody</i>	270
Chapter 5: Order and Disorder	273
1. <i>Introduction</i>	273
2. <i>Hyperbaton</i>	274
2.1 The Rhetorical Use of the hyperbaton	274
2.2 Hyperbaton in the Derveni Papyrus	276

2.3 Hyperbaton in Plato, Protagoras	278
2.4 Hyperbaton in Homeric Commentaries	279
2.5 Hyperbaton in Philo and Christian Commentators	284
<i>3. Order</i> ($\tauά\xi\zeta$)	286
<i>4. Sares</i>	288
<i>5. According to the Order</i> ($\gamma\gamma\gamma\gamma\gamma$ עיל)	294
<i>6. Conclusion</i>	297
<i>Appendix: Sares, Anastrophē, and Nestor's Cup</i>	301
 Conclusion	307
 Bibliography	315
 Index of References	351

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Note on Editions, Translations, and Abbreviations

The translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* follow Lattimore 1951 and 1967, but I have occasionally modified them to render the text more literal (and at times more awkward) in order to facilitate the understanding of the commentaries. Translations of the Hebrew Bible follow JPS, at times modified. Translations of Philo are based on Colson and Whitaker 1929–1968, unless noted otherwise.

All translations of the scholia are mine, unless stated elsewise.

Citations from rabbinic literature follow *Ma'agarim: The Historical Dictionary Project* (<http://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx>), unless stated otherwise. The references are based on the editions cited in the bibliography. I have noted textual variants only when necessary; in order to facilitate the reading, I have occasionally added punctuation and completed abbreviations.

Abbreviation of biblical books, Philo's treatises and mishnaic tractates follow the SBL guidelines.

In the citations of the scholia the following abbreviations are used: Ariston. = Aristonicus; Did. = Didymus; ex.=exegetical; Herod. = Herodianus; Nic.=Nicanor; pap. = papyrus; sch. = scholia.

Abbreviations

AFO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AJPh	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
BNJ	<i>Brill's New Jacoby online</i> : https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-new-jacoby
BNP	<i>Brill's New Pauly online</i> : http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-new-pauly
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CPh	<i>Classical Philology</i>
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
RivFil	<i>Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HSCPPh	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>The Journal of Religion</i>
JSIS	<i>Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal</i> : http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LGGA	<i>Lexicon of Greek Grammarians of Antiquity</i> : https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/lexicon-of-greek-grammarians-of-antiquity
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> , Stuttgart, 1941–
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RE	A. Pauly et al. (eds.), <i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft: neue Bearbeitung</i> , Stuttgart 1894–1980
RechSR	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
RQ	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RRS	<i>Review of Rabbinic Judaism</i>
SPhA	<i>Studia Philonica Annual</i>
TAPhA	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
WCJS	<i>Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Introduction

Ομηρος δὲ καὶ πρῶτος καὶ μέσος καὶ ὕστατος, παντὶ παιδὶ καὶ ἀνδρὶ καὶ γέροντι τοσοῦτον ἀφ' αὐτοῦ διδοὺς ὅσον ἔκαστος δύναται λαβεῖν.

But Homer comes first and in the middle and last, in that he gives of himself to every boy and adult and old man just as much as each of them can take.

(Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse 18*)¹

In late antiquity, the Homeric poems and the Torah were identity-forming canonical texts in Hellenistic and Jewish cultures, respectively. Their immense impact manifested itself mainly in the pivotal and almost exclusive role they played in the *paideia*, in the wide sense of the term as it was translated by Roman scholars: *humanitas* – that is, the molding and perfecting of the human being.² These texts were at the center of the curriculum of both the novice student and the scholar, and were an important factor in forming social norms.³

In the opening of his treatise *Homeric Problems*, Heraclitus (ca. 100 CE) writes the following:⁴

Εὐθὺς γάρ ἐκ πρώτης ἡλικίας τὰ νήπια τῶν ἀρτιμαθῶν παιδῶν διδασκαλίᾳ παρ' ἐκείνῳ τιτθεύεται, καὶ μονονούκ ἐνεσπαργανωμένοι τοῖς ἔπεσιν αὐτοῦ καθαπερεὶ ποτίμῳ γάλακτι τὰς ψυχὰς ἐπάρδομεν· ἀρχομένῳ δ' ἐκάστῳ συμπαρέστηκε καὶ κατ' ὀλίγον ἀπανδρουμένῳ, τελείοις δ' ἐνακμάζει, καὶ κόρος οὐδὲ εἰς ἄχρι γήρως, ἀλλὰ πανσάμενοι διψῶμεν αὐτοῦ πάλιν· καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν πέρας Ὁμήρῳ παρ' ἀνθρώποις, ὃ καὶ τοῦ βίου.

¹ Dio Chrys. 18.8; tr. Cohoon 1939, p. 219.

² See Marrou 1956, pp. 98–99 who discusses the widening of the meaning of the term *παιδεία* in the Hellenistic period.

³ On the centrality of Homer in Greek education see Jaeger 1945, pp. 35–56; Marrou 1956, pp. 162–170; Verdenius 1970; Morgan 1998; Hock 2001; Cribiore 2001, pp. 194–197; Lamberton 2002 (on the role of Homeric allegory and rhetoric in education); Sluiter 1997; Sandnes 2009; Niehoff 2012b; Pontani 2011; 2012 (on the use of Homer by the grammarians). On the canonic status of Homer see Finkelberg 2003. On Jewish education in Late Antiquity and the centrality of the Torah see Hirshman 2009 (and detailed bibliography pp. 121–126); Safrai 1976; Aberbach 1982; Hezser 2000b, pp. 39–109; 2010; 2016; Schwabe 1950. On the role of canonical texts in the *paideia* of Late Antiquity see Stroumsa 2012. For a comparative study of the role of the text in education of Pagan, Christians, and Jews in antiquity see Snyder 2000. For a comparison of the status of Moses and Homer in antiquity see Alexander 1998; Hezser 2016.

⁴ Heracl. *Quaest. Hom.*, 1.5–7, pp. 2–3 (tr. Russell and Konstan).

From the very first age of life, the foolishness of infants just beginning to learn is nurtured on the teaching given in his school. One might almost say that his poems are our baby clothes, and we nourish our minds by draughts of his milk. He stands at our side as we each grow up and shares our youth as we gradually come to manhood; when we are mature, his presence within us is at its prime; and even in old age, we never weary of him. When we stop, we thirst to begin him again. In a word, the only end of Homer for human beings is the end of life.

A similar concept can be found in rabbinic literature. So, for example, in a *baraita* adduced to the end of the mishnaic tractate Qiddushin (4:14), R. Nehorai (second half of the second century CE) states:

רבי נהורי אומר: מניה אני כל אומנות שבעולם ואני מלמד את בני אלא תורה,
שאדם אוכל לשכירה בעולם זהה וקרן קיימת לעולם הבא.
ושאר כל אומנות איןן כן כשהאדם בא לידי חולין או לידי יסורים ואין יכול לעסוק במלאכתו הרי הוא
מת ברעב.
אבל התורה אינה אלא שמרה מכל רע בענורותנו ונונתנו לו אחרית ותקוה בזונותו.
בענורותנו מה הוא אומר? "וקו ה' יהליפו כח" (יש' מ (31).
בקנותו מה הוא אומר? "עוד ינברון בשיבה" (תה' צב (15).

R. Nehorai says: I would set aside all the crafts in the world and teach my son naught save the Torah, for a man enjoys the reward thereof in this world and its whole worth remains for the world to come. But with all other crafts it is not so; for when a man falls into sickness or old age or inflictions and cannot engage in his work, lo, he dies of hunger. But with the Torah it is not so; for it guards him from all evil while he is young, and in old age it grants him a future and a hope. Of his youth, what does it say? "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Is. 40:31). Of his old age what does it say? "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age" (Ps. 92:15).⁵

The difference between R. Nehorai's statement and that of Heraclitus reflects the essential gap between the attitude of Greek culture toward Homer and of Jewish culture toward the Torah: for Heraclitus the role of Homer ends when one dies, whereas for R. Nehorai the Torah leads man to the World to Come. Yet the similarity between the texts is no less important. R. Nehorai and Heraclitus agree about the centrality of the Torah and Homer in man's life and believe that their respective texts accompany man from youth through old age, adjusting themselves to the different periods of life.

The centrality of these texts and their undisputed canonical status led to the development of exegetical communities in which these texts were interpreted in a collective effort by dozens of scholars over hundreds of years. In the Alexandrian library from the third century BCE onwards, numerous scholars labored at editing the Homeric poems and interpreting them according to philosophical, rhetorical, grammatical, and literary criteria, especially from the school of Aristotle, while developing sophisticated hermeneutical tools and technical terms. This exegetical tradition continued to evolve during the first centuries of the Common Era throughout the Roman Empire and was later redacted over

⁵ Tr. Danby 1933, p. 329.

hundreds of years into a voluminous exegetical collection, following verse order, which has come down to us mainly through the scholia on the margins of Byzantine manuscripts.

Parallel to the exegetical efforts on the Greek side, dozens of rabbis dedicated themselves during the first centuries CE to interpreting the Torah, using a wide array of exegetical methods. These rabbis were divided into distinct exegetical schools, and their commentaries were collected and redacted during the third century CE into Midrashic compilations, known as the Halakhic Midrashim, which were organized as a line-by-line commentary displaying a rich terminological system. These Midrashim have exerted a crucial impact on the formation of the role of the exegete vis-à-vis the holy text and on exegetical methods in the Jewish culture down to present times.

The non-allegorical Homeric commentaries and the Halakhic Midrashim which have come down to us are vast and significant corpora. Yet to date they have barely been compared by scholars, despite the fact that the rabbis were active within a distinct Greco-Roman context, and that Saul Lieberman and David Daube have already noted similarities between a small number of methods used by the Homeric scholars and the rabbis.⁶ In light of this, the goal of this work is to systematically compare the two corpora for the first time. My argument is that it is possible to point to various ways in which the Greek commentaries deeply impacted the rabbis' exegetical approach. Moreover, I will argue that we cannot understand the very appearance of the edited Midrashic compilations and some of their core hermeneutical assumptions without a familiarity with the contemporaneous Homeric commentaries.

In addition to its influence on rabbinic terminology and exegetical techniques, I will demonstrate how Homeric scholarship – as a representative of the literary, rhetorical, linguistic, and didactic discourse of the time – impacted the rabbis' methods of organizing knowledge and their learning practices, as well as their very understanding of the concept of the canonical text and the role of the commentator. The rabbis, I will argue, were in many ways part of the exegetical world of their time. Furthermore, the comparison with the Homeric scholarship may also advance our understanding of the background to the development of the distinct approaches of the schools of R. Akiva and R. Yishmael.

The comparison between the two corpora, however, will not only reveal similarities, but will also enhance our understanding of the unique features in the rabbinic exegesis. Indeed, only by understanding how the rabbis adopted and adapted the hermeneutical principles and methods of Greek scholarship while incorporating them into a different exegetical system can we appreciate the novelty and uniqueness of the rabbinic project.

⁶ On Lieberman's and Daube's research, as well as later scholarship, see below.

1. Midrash, Scrolls, and Homeric Scholarship

One of the greatest enigmas in the study of rabbinic literature is the seemingly sudden appearance of a rich, fully-crystallized scholastic exegetical corpus, divided into different schools, comprised of the sayings of dozens of sages, and applying well-developed sophisticated hermeneutical techniques and a wide array of technical terms. Is this a product of a continuous evolutionary process; did it result from a “Big Bang” – a dramatic and sudden change during the relevant period; or was there perhaps some kind of combination of the two? In other words: what is the relation between the rabbinic Midrash and the Jewish biblical commentaries that preceded it?

The fact that almost nothing has survived from the literature of the Pharisees or from the non-allegorical Jewish-Hellenistic commentaries poses great difficulties in reconstructing the development of the Midrash. Various scholars have tried to locate the buds of the Midrash in inner-biblical commentary and in the Second Temple literature.⁷ Some of these studies have emphasized the similarities in common narrative expansions and legal traditions, and thus outlined an exegetical continuum.⁸ Others, as I shall discuss below, looked to Hellenistic culture for the Midrashic roots.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls significantly advanced the study of the ancient Jewish commentaries. Alongside the genre of rewritings of the Bible that does not explicitly disclose its exegetical thrust,⁹ the scrolls also include commentaries such as the *pesharim*,¹⁰ which follow the order of the verse, differentiate between verse and commentary, and contain the beginnings of technical terminology, at times even employing the term “Midrash.”¹¹ Many

⁷ See, e.g., Zeligman 1980; Vermes 1975a; Fishbane 1985; Shanan and Zakovitch 1986. For attempts to reconstruct early Jewish commentary see Goldberg 1981; Albeck 1969, pp. 84–93; Lieberman 1963, pp. 186–189; Urbach 1958; Brewer 1992 (who anachronistically projects later sources onto the Second Temple period).

⁸ See, e.g., Kugel 1998, who is one of the dominant scholars of the school which focuses mainly on shared traditions, which began with Ginsburg’s monumental project *The Legends of the Jews* (1913–1928).

⁹ See, e.g., Kugel 2009.

¹⁰ Most of the *pesharim* are dated to the end of the second-first centuries BCE. Some consist of a running commentary to the verse, where a citation of a verse is followed by such formulae as פשׁר דבר or פשׁר על. Most of the *pesharim* address prophetic texts giving them an actual or eschatological interpretation. The commentator is anonymous and authoritative. On the *pesharim* see Nizan 2009, Berrin 2005; Jassen 2012; Machila 2012; Goldman 2019, pp. 30–42.

¹¹ There is extensive scholarship on the hermeneutics and exegetical terminology in the scrolls. See, e.g., Fishbane 1973; Maier 1996 (general overview); Nizan 2009; Shemesh 2004; Elledge 2003; Bernstein 1994a; 1996; 1998; 2013 (collection of essays); Berrin 2005 (with bibliography), as well as references in the following note. Special scholarly attention has been given to the commentary known as *Pesher Genesis A* (4Q252), see Bernstein 1979; 1994b; Brock 1996; 2005; Werman and Shemesh 2011, pp. 54–55; Machila 2012.

scholars have sought to identify in this literature the “missing link” between the Bible and rabbinic Midrash.¹² Some have compared the terms used in the scrolls to those found in rabbinic literature,¹³ at times even trying to reconstruct the hermeneutical methods that supposedly lie at the basis of the commentaries of the scrolls and comparing them to the rabbinic *middot* (measures of interpretations).¹⁴ So, for example, Aaron Shemesh writes:

I do not claim that there is an actual literary connection between the formulae in the scrolls and rabbinic midrash, but the comparison is important in order to show that already in the scrolls there are beginnings of fixed exegetical formulae also regarding Halakha, and these represent the first stages of the *middot* for commenting on the Torah.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that there are important common features between the exegetical methods of the authors of the scrolls and the rabbis. However, there are also crucial differences. First, unlike the scrolls, the Halakhic Midrashim do not present their commentary as the sole and unequivocal interpretation of a divinely-inspired authority, but rather as a commentary based on human efforts to resolve various difficulties in the biblical text.¹⁶ In addition, Steven Fraade has highlighted several central characteristics of the rabbinic Midrash that seem almost self-evident, but are almost never documented in the scrolls:¹⁷

¹² For a comparison between rabbinic and scroll commentaries see, e.g., Goldberg 1981; Werman and Shemesh 2011, pp. 51–71 (see p. 53 for a discussion of the term “Midrash” as representing a written treatise); Kugel 2009; Fraade 1991, pp. 1–23; 1998; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2007b; 2007c; Shemesh 2000; 2004; 2009; Kister 1998; 1999 (esp. pp. 332–335); Bernstein 1996; Bernstein and Koifman 2005; Mandel 2001; 2006; 2017; Milgrom 1989; Brock 1985; 2000; 2009; Heger 2005; 2011; Schiffman 2005; Schremer 2001; Milikowsky 2013, vol. 1, pp. 61–62 and notes on pp. 99–101.

¹³ For example, some have pointed out the similarity between the exegetical formula **כ כי** (“for A is B”) found in the scrolls and the rabbinic formula **ב אין א אלא ב** (“A is nothing other than B”). See Werman and Shemesh 2011, p. 57. It is worth noting that Lieberman (1962, p. 49 n. 19) suggested that the rabbinic formula is equivalent to the Greek formula **οὐδὲν ἄλλο Α ἢ B**. I have not, however, found use of the formula in the Homeric scholia.

¹⁴ Bernstein and Koifman 2005, for example, sought to identify in the scroll the use of such *middot* as *qal va-homer* (*argumentum a fortiori*) and *biyan av* (prototype) alongside more general techniques such as harmonization and combining of verse. Cf. Milgrom 1989.

¹⁵ Werman and Shemesh 2011, p. 57 (my translation).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Fraade 1998 (and in many more articles; see note below); Heger 2005; Kahana 2006, p. 10. On the difference in the concept of authority in scrolls and Jewish Alexandrian commentary see Niehoff 2012c, pp. 456–457.

¹⁷ Fraade 2006c, p. 279. Fraade has often emphasized the fundamental differences between rabbinic commentaries and that found in the scrolls. See, e.g., idem 1991; 1998; 2006a; 2006b; 2007b. Kahana (2006, pp. 10–11) noted further differences between the scroll commentaries and the Halakhic Midrashim: The latter are written in Mishnaic Hebrew whereas the scrolls language is closer to Biblical Hebrew; the Halakhic regulations are much more detailed in the Halakhic Midrashim; in many cases the interpretation in the Halakhic Midrashim is further from the literal meaning of the verses.

(1) In the Midrash, numerous traditions are attributed to various named sages. In the scrolls, by contrast, no *specific* commentary is attributed to any individual, not even to the Teacher of Righteousness.¹⁸

(2) The sages explicitly point out the exegetical methods they use. That is, there is a reflexivity concerning the techniques used by the commentator. A wide range of technical terms present the exact method implemented in a given instance. In the scroll commentaries, on the other hand, the exegetical process is usually implicit. It is indeed possible that this process was based on various methods used during the teaching of the text.¹⁹ However, our interest lies in the textual product, and, as noted, we do not find in the scrolls an explicit use of the techniques, contrary to the rabbinic texts.

(3) Exegetical intertextuality is common in the Midrashim; that is, the creative use of a biblical verse from elsewhere in order to explain a given verse. This technique is relatively rare in the scrolls. This does not mean, as Fraade once again emphasizes, that in the background of these commentaries there was no use of intertextuality; but even if there was, it is not stated explicitly.²⁰

(4) The Midrashic discourse is dialogical and contains question and answers as well as rhetorical alternatives, which are absent from the scrolls.

(5) A distinct feature of rabbinic literature is the appearance of several interpretations for a single verse. In the scroll commentaries only one opinion is presented, whereas in the Halakhic Midrashim there are explicit disagreements between different sages from different generations within a single editorial framework.²¹

¹⁸ This is also an important difference between the rabbinic and Mesopotamian exegesis. As Frahm notes (2011, p. 377): “[T]he commentators in the Assyrian and Babylonian tradition always remain anonymous”.

¹⁹ According to Fraade, the sectarian authors systematically refrain from presenting the exegetical technique which led to the creation of a Halakha, even in cases where it is clear that such a technique was used. The reason for that, in his opinion, is ideological and stems from the belief that the source of the authority of the new halakhot is grounded in inspiration. Shemesh supports Fraade’s approach and notes: “Exposing the exegetical moves inherently acknowledges the possibility to offer other interpretations, and this is exactly what the writers of the scrolls seek to avoid” (Werman and Shemesh 2011, p. 64, my translation). The few cases in which the writers of the scrolls reveal their exegetical logic are found in polemical contexts (*ibid.*).

²⁰ Fraade 2006c, pp. 270, 279.

²¹ Scholars have debated the significance of multiple interpretations in rabbinic literature (i.e., whether it should be understood as polysemy, indeterminacy, pluralism etc.). See, e.g., Stern 1984; 1985; 1996; Handelman 1985; Mack 1992; Boyarin 2002; 2004, pp. 151-201; Yadin 2003; 2004, pp. 69-76; 2014; Fraade 2007a; Hidary 2010a. For the possibility that already in Pesher Habakkuk (1:16-2:10) three distinct interpretations are offered to Hab. 1:5; see Weigold 2012, who discusses other cases from Second Temple literature which possibly contain multiple interpretations. Philo at times offers additional interpretations, but that is part of

These differences might seem at first to be merely external and technical. Yet, in fact, they represent a paradigmatic change in the concept of the text and the role of the commentator: the human commentators are external to the commented texts.

How can we explain these differences? One possibility is that they are the result of chronological and evolutionary processes.²² Between the Dead Sea Scrolls and rabbinic literature there is a temporal gap of at least two hundred years. During this “dark” period, Jewish commentaries might have evolved so that they began to approach the rabbinic model. In other words, it is possible that the rabbinic Midrash is the end product of an exegetical development whose inception may be discerned in the scrolls.

In his studies, Menachem Kister has highlighted the continuum between the Qumran commentaries and those of the rabbis, suggesting that some of the differences are anchored in the gradual transition from the biblical to the post-biblical period.²³ In addition, the period between the composition of the scrolls and the appearance of rabbinic literature also included some momentous historical events that might have also impacted the commentaries. So, for example, Kister argues that some of the differences between Qumran and the rabbis are a result of the failure of the revolts, which created a shift from an impending sense of eschatology to a suspended one, impacting the exegetical goals.²⁴

Another significant development that occurred between the writing of the scrolls and the appearance of the Halakhic Midrashim was the full canonization of the biblical literature. The fact that it was no longer possible to add books, or even to change the version of the verses, created the need for works that distinguished between the commentators and the canonized text. Moreover, canonization deeply impacts the exegetical methods, as Moshe Halbertal has noted:²⁵ “Canonizing a text results in increased flexibility in its interpretation,

his authoritative presentation (see Fraade 1991, p. 16). In the homily of Samson of Ps.-Philo (*de Sam.* 21) the author offers several interpretations and rejects them.

²² Fraade 2006c, p. 281.

²³ Kister 1998. See Werman and Shemesh 2011, pp. 63–64 for a comparison between the approaches of Kister and Fraade.

²⁴ Kister 1998, p. 103 n. 9.

²⁵ Halbertal 1997, pp. 32–33. See also p. 29: “The degree of canonicity of a text corresponds to the amount of charity it receives in its interpretation. The more canonical a text, the more generous its treatment.” For an implementation of these insights to the Homeric corpus see Finkelberg 2004, p. 241 (cf. eadem 2003, p. 92): “In the centuries that followed, the tendency to avoid altering the received text of Homer became the dominant one. What was offered instead were various methods of interpretation. To borrow the terms introduced by Moshe Halbertal in his discussion of the reception of the Hebrew Bible, “textual closure” of the Homeric corpus was accompanied by “hermeneutical openness” towards it – a sure sign of the canonical status that the poems of Homer had acquired.”

such as the use of complex hermeneutical devices of accommodation to yield the best possible reading.”

These explanations emphasize the continuity between the exegetical communities of Qumran and the rabbis. Another direction is to underscore the ideological differences between the two communities. According to Fraade, it is possible to explain some of the differences by assuming a different social structure with differing concepts of authority.²⁶ The formation of a rabbinic scholarly community that did not have a single authority, such as the Teacher of Righteousness, enabled the development of a dialogical literature. Menahem Kahana has suggested that the effort to confront opinions that undermined the Pharisaic Halakha motivated the creation of Halakhic Midrashim, at the center of which lies the effort to connect the Halakha to the verses. Kahana further suggested that the accumulation of Halakhic details which had no foundation in the literal sense of the verses, and the growing rift between the biblical law and the Pharisaic Halakha, alongside internal polemics between the different schools, may also provide a reason for the formation of the Halakhic Midrashim.²⁷

All these explanations are possible and, moreover, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Yet they explain in different ways the possibility for change, but do not provide a sufficient answer as to why the Halakhic Midrashim were formed in this very specific mold.²⁸

A preliminary overview of the Homeric commentaries, which are the product of the intellectual effort of generations of scholars, reveals that all five of the distinctive features of rabbinic commentary mentioned above also appear in these texts:

(1) The opinions of the scholars are very often cited with their names. So, for example, hundreds of comments state φησὶν Ἀρίσταρχος (“Aristarchus says”).

(2) The Homeric commentaries are transparent and reflexive. The commentators usually note their hermeneutical methods, employing a wide array of technical terms.

²⁶ See, e.g., Fraade 2006c, p. 283. Cf. Mandel 2001, pp. 167–168: “[T]he tool used by the Qumran sect, and by the early Christians, of reading the Bible as a treasure of hidden historical references may be seen as a major incentive to the rabbis’ peculiar reading of Scripture. The authority of the *doresh ha-Torah* at Qumran, understood to come directly from divine inspiration, was transmuted into the authority of the rabbinic *doresh*, who found his inspiration ultimately in the text itself.”

²⁷ Kahana 2006, 11. See also Schremer 2001.

²⁸ See, e.g., Fraade 2006a; 2006b; 1991, pp. 1–19.

(3) The Homeric scholars frequently use intertextuality as an exegetical tool. They often use citations from Homer and other authors in order to clarify obscure verses. Aristarchus was even credited with the rule “to clarify Homer from Homer”.²⁹

(4) The Homeric scholarship contains hundreds of questions and answers reflecting a lively dialogue between scholars. It also includes direct references to the reader and the student.³⁰

(5) A common phenomenon in the Homeric scholarship is the multiplicity of comments on the same words or verses. The editors of the exegetical compilations collected the opinions of various scholars from different periods, sometimes hundreds of years apart. Occasionally the names of the scholars are not stated explicitly and the various opinions are introduced by such terms as ἔνιοι/τινές φασίν (“some say”) and ἄλλοι φησίν (“others say”), identical to the rabbinic editorial terms שׁוֹאָמְרִים אַחֲרִים (“some say”) and אַחֲרִים אַוְמָרִים (“others say”), respectively.³¹ Alternative opinions taken from separate sources are usually introduced in the scholia by the technical term ἄλλως (“in another way”), equivalent to *דבר אחר* (*davar aher*, “another way”).³²

This clear similarity between the scholarly product of the Greek scholars and the rabbis justifies and enables a deeper and more comprehensive comparison than previously conducted. It points to the possibility that the essential differences between rabbinic exegesis and the earlier Jewish exegesis may be

²⁹ For a discussion of this rule see Chapter 1 Section 2.1.

³⁰ For a comprehensive discussion on the genre of questions and answers see Chapter 3. On the difference between the scrolls and rabbinic literature in this context see Niehoff 2012c, pp. 457–458. Van der Valk 1963–1964, vol. 1, p. 474, points to the direct addresses to the reader or student in the bT scholia by the common use of interjections such as ὅπα and σκόπει and suggests that this may reflect oral instruction.

³¹ On the use of the term אַחֲרִים אַוְמָרִים in Tannaitic literature see Kahana 1999, pp. 334–335; Epstein 2010, p. 19 n. 1. In b. Hor. 13b it is suggested that this term refers to R. Meir.

³² On *davar aher* see Goldberg 1982. Dating the beginning of the use of ἄλλως (and *aliter*) as a technical term for marking a transition to another source is highly important for dating the rise of scholiography. For a comprehensive discussion see Montana 2011. Previous scholars argued that this is a byzantine development influenced by the emergence of the catena, see Zunz 1975; Wilson 1967; 1968 (who even suggested that the term which appears in the catena of Procopius was influenced by Talmudic literature). In Mesopotamian commentaries, consecutive interpretations are marked by the terms *šanīš* (second), *šalšīš* (thirdly), *rebiš* (fourthly). Uri Gabbay (2015b; 2012, pp. 308–309 n. 128) has suggested that the term *šanīš* should be translated as ‘other’ and that originally it was used as a general term for introducing an alternative interpretation and not necessarily a second one (*šalšīš* and *rebiš* were therefore introduced only later). Furthermore, it is likely that the term designated the use of another source and not just another interpretation suggested by the same authority. In light of this, Gabbay suggests that the terms *šanīš* and *דבר אחר* are parallels not only in their scholarly role but also lexically (cf. Frahm 2011, p. 378, n. 1812). I will address the relation between the scholastic terms *šanīš*, ἄλλως, *aliter* and *דבר אחר* in a future study.

explained in part by the rabbis' direct or indirect acquaintance with contemporary Hellenistic scholarship.³³

2. Survey of Scholarship

2.1 Rabbinic Literature and the Homeric Commentaries

Many studies have dealt with comparisons between various aspects of Hellenistic culture and rabbinic literature, as well as the impact of Greek on rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic.³⁴ In the context of the present study, it is important to note those studies that have focused on the impact of Hellenistic rhetoric on the form and content of the rabbinic *derashot*, and in particular on the *chreia* ($\chiρεία$), diatribe, and the *progymnasmata* literature.³⁵ Yet surprisingly there are almost no studies offering a comparison between rabbinic and Hellenistic commentaries, despite the centrality of biblical exegesis for the rabbis and the large corpus of Homeric scholarship that has survived. The main studies dedicated to this comparison remain those of David Daube and Saul Lieberman, written over sixty years ago. Since scholars have cited and referred to these studies dozens of times, I shall now review them in detail.

In his groundbreaking 1949 article “Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and the Hellenistic Rhetoric,” Daube argued that “in its beginnings, the Rabbinic

³³ See, e.g., Niehoff 2012c, p. 445: “[T]he scholarly form of commentary culture, known in the Land of Israel from rabbinic sources, seems to have developed as a result of active engagement with Hellenistic culture.”

³⁴ For a general overview of Greco-Roman culture and the rabbis see Schäfer 1998; Levine 1998; Lieberman 1962; 1965; Hidary 2022. For studies on the impact of Greek on Hebrew and Aramaic of the rabbinic literature see Lieberman 1963; 1965; 1991; Rosen 1963; Sperber 2006. On Greek and Latin loanwords in rabbinic literature see Krauss 1898 and the review of Zunz 1956; Sperber 1982; 1984 (and review by Katzoff 1989); Sperber 1986; 2012; Hirshman 2010 and the review by Bar Kokhva 2013; Krivoruchko 2012; Heijmans 2013; Shoval-Dudai 2019. For the impact of Greek philosophy on the rabbis see, e.g., Goldin 1973; Fischel 1973a; 1973b; 2000a; Harvey 1992; Satlow 2003; Niehoff 2022. For the literary impact of the Greek novel see, e.g., Levinson 1996; Stern 1998. See also Kovelman 2004; Boyarin 2009 for the possible impact of Menippean satire. For a comparison between etymological methods used by the rabbis and Hellenistic scholars see Alexander 2004; Zingerman 2011. For an approach which minimizes the impact of Hellenistic culture and language on the rabbis see Alon 1970; Feldman 1983; Wasserstein 1994.

³⁵ For the impact of Greek rhetorical models and *progymnasmata* on rabbinic literature see Marmorstein 1929; Bickerman 1952; Fischel 1973a; Jaffee 1988; Ulman 1997 (on the diatribe); Visotsky 2006, pp. 120–126; Furstenberg 2012 (on the *agon*); Brodsky 2014; Hidary 2010b; 2018a; 2018b. On the impact of the *chreia* genre see Edelman 1961; Fischel 1968; 1969; 1973a; 1975; Avery-Peck 1993; Hezser 1996; Tropper 2004, pp. 174–184.

Index of References

Bible

Genesis

- 2:17 116
3:9 271
4:5 183
4:7 254, 262–265
5:32 241–242
6:10 241 n. 25
7:6 241
7:11 241
10:1 241 n. 25
10:11 241
10:12 244 n. 42
10:21 240–241, 244 n. 42
11:10 240–241
12:10 156
13:16 228
17:13 111, 112 n. 25, 118–119
19:33 188
21:12 244 n. 42
22:11 124
25:29 114
26:4 228
26:32 244 n. 42
28:15 296
28:20–21 296–297
31:20 111–112
34:7 255, 258–259
37:15 238
37:36 198
40:15 111–112
46:2 124
47:17–18 69
49:6–7 254–255, 260–261

Exodus

- 4:3 195–196
5:3 187
6:3 284
6:25 198
6:26 292
12:1 292
12:3 96
12:16 157
12:45 121
13:18 187 n. 57
13:19 180–181
14:6–7 178
14:22 272
14:29 272
14:30 187
15:1 156 n. 159
15:9 180
15:20 187–188
15:21 71 n. 107
15:25 74 n. 116
15:27 156
15:30 110
16:19 290
16:20 290
16:24 290
17:3 94
17:8–13 187
17:9 74, 254–255, 257–258
17:13 187
18:6 94
18:7 94, 237–238
18:12 71–72
19:3 156 n. 160
19:8 75–76
19:9 118

19:14	74 n. 117	23:40	51 n. 38
20:21	156 n. 158, 288–289	25:30	243 n. 38
21:5	112 n. 25	25:37–8	93
21:8	243 n. 38		
21:12	114–115	<i>Numbers</i>	
21:18–19	49	3:1	217–218
21:19	112 n. 25	3:2	218
21:28–29	50	4:3	218
22:7	150 n. 138	4:23	218 n. 130, 219
22:8	150 n. 138	4:30	218 n. 130
22:12	50–51	4:35	218 n. 130
22:20	93	4:39	218 n. 130
22:21–22	117	4:43	218 n. 130
23:24	118 n. 47	4:47	218 n. 130
24:7	108	5:29	149
25:34	254–255, 259–260	6:1–8	142
26:10	288 n. 49	6:2	118
29:2	52	6:3	128–9, 135, 137
31:13	162	6:5	143
32:32	264	6:6	143
37:20	254–255, 259–260	6:23	288
		6:27	288
<i>Leviticus</i>			
2:14	148 n. 133	8:24	219
4:25	268 n. 112	11:27	181
6:2	145 n. 128	11:28	74–75
6:7	145 n. 128	12:1	181
6:13	52 n. 41	12:3	94, 237–239
6:18	145 n. 128	12:4–5	193–194
7:1	145 n. 128	12:11	74–75
7:11	145 n. 128	12:13	73, 193
9:20	121 n. 55	15:19	156 n. 162
9:22	290	15:30–1	109–110
10:9	130, 135, 137	15:31	114 n. 35
11:32	156 n. 164	19:6	51 n. 37
14:4	51 n. 36	19:14	145 n. 128
16:23	294–295	27:2	291
16:23–25	295–296	27:17	195
16:34	294	27:18	195
18:6	124	28:5	52
18:21	243 n. 38	28:7	135 n. 97
19:9	98	29:39–30:3	146–147
19:23	246	30:1	146
19:24	96	31:6	197
19:32	254 n. 64	31:16	254–255
21:9	151	31:17–18	147–148
22:4	120–1	33:46–47	156
22:10	121		

<i>Deuteronomy</i>			
3:26	95	21:8 24:22	217–218 221–222
4:24	204–205		
6:13	163	<i>1 Kings</i>	
7:6	239–240	8:9	157–159
9:1	228	8:10	243 n. 38
10:20	163		
11:26	264	<i>2 Kings</i>	
12:2	112 n. 25	4:14	156
13:2	129 n. 77, 130	24:8	220
14:2	240 n. 23		
14:26	135 n. 97	<i>Isaiah</i>	
14:29	98	5:11	135 n. 97
15:14	112 n. 25, 114 n. 35	5:22	135 n. 97
17:6	115 n. 39	6:1	244 n. 42
22:1	112 n. 25, 114 n. 35	9:2	243 n. 38
22:7	112 n. 25, 114 n. 35	24:9	135 n. 97
22:22	163	28:7	135 n. 97
30:20	204–205	29:9	135 n. 97
31:16	254–255, 265–266	40:31	2
32:8–9	239 n. 22	58:9	193
32:14	205–206	63:9	243 n. 38
32:42	204–205		
33:13	132 n. 87	<i>Jeremiah</i>	
		10:16	239–240
<i>Joshua</i>			
2:16	180	<i>Ezekiel</i>	
11:22	157–158	8:3	156
<i>Judges</i>			
8:4	238	<i>Hosea</i>	
13:4	135 n. 97	12:5	244 n. 42
13:7	135 n. 97	<i>Joel</i>	
13:14	135 n. 97	4:18	188–189
<i>1 Samuel</i>		<i>Micah</i>	
1:11	135 n. 97, 136 n. 99	2:11	135 n. 97
1:15	135 n. 97, 136 n. 99		
2:3	244 n. 42	<i>Habakkuk</i>	
2:15	243 n. 38	1:5	6 n. 21
3:10	124	<i>Psalms</i>	
<i>2 Samuel</i>		68:19	205
6:23	217–218	92:15	2
16:18	243 n. 38	135:4	239–240, 244 n. 42
17:24	156	<i>Proverbs</i>	
17:27	156	19:7	243 n. 38
19:7	243 n. 38		

26:2	243 n. 38	<i>1 Chronicles</i>	
		1:28	228
<i>Job</i>		5:9	156
1:8	242–243	21:25	221–222
6:21	243 n. 38		
13:15	242, 244 n. 42	<i>2 Chronicles</i>	
14:19	244 n. 42	36:9	220
22:28	193		
25:2–3	219	<i>Ben Sira</i>	
27:5	242	50:20	291 n. 54
41:4	243 n. 38		
		<i>Luke</i>	
<i>Ruth</i>		1:15	135 n. 97
4:17	217–218	1:26–27	285
<i>Daniel</i>		<i>Romans</i>	
7:9	204–205	1:13–15	285 n. 38
7:10	210		
		<i>Ephesians</i>	
		1:15–17	285 n. 38

Biblical Translations

Aquila		Gen. 10:21	241
Gen. 4:7	262	Ex. 37:20	260
Gen. 10:21	241		
Isa. 28:7	135 n. 97	Peshitta	
		Gen. 4:7	262–263
Fragment Targum V		Gen. 34:7	259
Gen. 49:6–7	261	Gen. 49:6–7	261
		Ex. 17:9	258
Fragment Targum Geniza		Ex. 37:20	259–260
Gen. 49:6–7	261 n. 93	1 Chr. 21:25	221
		2 Chr. 36:8	221
Neofiti			
Gen. 4:7	262	Samaritan Pentateuch	
Gen. 34:7	259	Ex. 18:7	238
Gen. 49:6–7	261 n. 93		
		Samaritan Targum	
Onqelos		Gen. 34:7	259
Gen. 4:7	262	Gen. 49:6–7	261 n. 92
Gen. 34:7	259	Ex. 17:9	258 n. 80
Gen. 49:6–7	261	Ex. 25:34	259 n. 86
		Ex. 37:20	259 n. 86
Origen			
<i>Hexap.</i>		Septuagint	
Gen. 4:7	262	Gen. 2:17	116

Gen. 3:9	271	Isa. 28:7	135 n. 97
Gen. 10:21	241 n. 30	Isa. 29:9	135 n. 97
Gen. 17:13	118–119	Mic. 2:11	135 n. 97
Gen. 25:29	114	2 Chr. 36:9	221
Gen. 34:7	259		
Gen. 47:17–18	69	Symmachus	
Ex. 6:3	284	Gen. 4:7	262
Ex. 13:18	187 n. 57	Gen. 10:21	241
Ex. 17:9	258	Isa. 28:7	135 n. 97
Ex. 19:9	118		
Ex. 21:12	114–115	Targum Jonathan	
Ex. 22:21–22	117	2 Sam. 21:8	218 n. 129
Ex. 25:34	260 n. 88		
Lev. 10:9	135, 137	Targum Ps.–Jonathan	
Lev. 18:6	124	Gen. 4:7	262
Num. 6:2	118	Gen. 10:21	242
Num. 6:3	135, 137	Gen. 34:7	259
Num. 15:31	114 n. 35	Gen. 49:6–7	261 n. 93
Num. 28:7	135 n. 97	Ex. 25:34	260 n. 86
Deut. 14:26	135 n. 97	Ex. 37:20	260 n. 86
Deut. 15:14	114 n. 35		
Deut. 22:1	114 n. 35	Theodotion	
Deut. 22:7	114 n. 35	Gen. 4:7	262
Judg. 13:4	135 n. 97	Isa. 28:7	135 n. 97
Judg. 13:7	135 n. 97		
Judg. 13:14	135 n. 97	Vulgate	
1 Sam. 1:11	135 n. 97, 136 n. 99	Gen. 10:21	241
1 Sam. 1:15	135 n. 97, 136 n. 99		
Isa. 5:11	135 n. 97	4QSam ^a	
Isa. 5:22	135 n. 97	1:21	135 n. 97
Isa. 24:9	135 n. 97		

Rabbinic Literature

Abot d'R. Natan B		<i>b. B. Metzia</i>	
44 62a	254 n. 65	31a	112 n. 25
		31b	122 n. 57
Babylonian Talmud			
<i>b. Arak.</i>		<i>b. Bek.</i>	
3a	122 n. 57	5b	162 n. 180
<i>b. B. Bat.</i>		<i>b. Ber.</i>	
14a	158	10a	233 n. 6
109b	198, n. 78		
<i>b. B. Qam.</i>		<i>b. Erub.</i>	
92a–b	95 n. 185	101a	233 n. 6

<i>b. Hor.</i>		<i>b. Shabb.</i>	
13b	9 n. 31	22a	239 n. 21
		26a	49 n. 29
<i>b. Git.</i>		27a	156 n. 164
41b	122 n. 57		
57a	11	<i>b. Sotah</i>	
		13b	95 n. 184
<i>b. Hul.</i>		29b	233 n. 6
87a	233 n. 6	43a	198, n. 78
90b	228 n. 150		
92a	244 n. 42	<i>b. Sukkah</i>	
		52b	233 n. 6
<i>b. Ker.</i>			
11a	122 n. 57	<i>b. Tamid</i>	
		29a	228 n. 150
<i>b. Ketub.</i>			
67a	95 n. 184	<i>b. Yebam.</i>	
67b	122 n. 57	4b	49 n. 29
104a	95 n. 184	13b	156
<i>b. Menah.</i>		<i>b. Yoma</i>	
29b	145 n. 128	10a	244 n. 42
		52a–b	254 n. 65, 255, 257, 263 n. 102
<i>b. Ned.</i>			
3a	119 n. 50	71b	11
		85b	162 n. 180
<i>b. Nid.</i>			
32b	122 n. 57	<i>b. Zebah.</i>	
44a	122 n. 57	108b	122 n. 57
<i>b. Qidd.</i>			
17a	122 n. 57	Baraita of Melekhet Mishkan 10, pp. 193–194	254 n. 65
32b	254 n. 64		
37b	49 n. 29	Baraita of 32 Middot 31, p. 39	293 n. 62, 299 n. 71
78b	293 n. 62		
<i>b. Sanh.</i>		Ecclesiastes Rabba	
19b	218	9:10, p. 196	293 n. 62
34b	156 n. 164		
51b	151–152	Exodus Rabba	
56a	122 n. 57	7.1	196 n. 73
69b	242	7.5	198, n. 78
82a	198, n. 77		
85b	122 n. 57	Genesis Rabba	
90b	266	1.14, p. 12	163 n. 183
108b	242 n. 35	8.9, p. 63	233 n. 6
<i>b. Shevu.</i>		16.3, p. 145	95 n. 185
26a	163 n. 183	19.1, p. 170	95 n. 184

22.6, p. 209	183 n. 48	1, p. 179	254–255, 257, 264 n.
22.6, pp. 209–210	265 n. 107		104
26.3, pp. 245–246	242	2, p. 182	156 n. 161
33.1, pp. 299–300	293 n. 62, 294 n. 64	1, p. 189	198 n. 77
36.6, p. 340	168	1, p. 192	237 n. 19
37.4, p. 347	244 n. 42	1, p. 193	94 n. 179, 237–238
37.7, p. 349	240–241	1, p. 196	72, 77
39.8, p. 369	195 n. 71		
39.8, p. 370	195 n. 71	<i>Ba-Hodesh</i>	
44.5, p. 428	156 n. 165	2, p. 207	156 n. 160
51.8, p. 538	188–189	2, p. 209–210	76
64.10, p. 712	243 n. 38, 244 n. 42	3, p. 213	74 n. 117, 233 n. 6
70.4, pp. 800–801	296	8, p. 232	292 n. 57
80.6, pp. 957–958	254 n. 65, 255 n. 67	9, p. 238	156 n. 160, 216 n. 124
86.2, p. 1053	156 n. 168	11, p. 243	156 n. 158
		11, p. 244	93 n. 177
Kallah Rabbati			
2:13	95 n. 184	<i>Be-Shalach</i>	
		p. 76	93 n. 177
Leviticus Rabba			
22.1, p. 531	293 n. 62	p. 78	180–181
33.4, pp. 761–762	198, n. 77	p. 82	205 n. 97
		1, pp. 89–90	179
		6, pp. 111–112	272
Mekhilta Deuteronomy			
11:29, 130	180 n. 39	<i>Kaspa</i>	
12:7, p. 192	292 n. 57	19, p. 315	156 n. 158
12:12, p. 58	112 n. 25	20, pp. 335–336	150 n. 138
Mekhilta of R. Shimon b. Yohai			
3:8, p. 2	196 n. 73	<i>Nezigin</i>	
12:14, p. 16	239 n. 21	2, p. 252	112 n. 25
12:16, p. 20	157	6, p. 269	49
12:30, p. 29	48 n. 28	6, p. 271	112 n. 25
12:31, p. 29	164 n. 184	7, p. 274	162 n. 180
13:19, p. 46	181 n. 41	15, p. 302	150 n. 138
14:6, p. 52	179 n. 36	18, p. 311	93
16:15, p. 111	95 n. 182	18, p. 313	117
17:3, p. 117	94	<i>Pischa</i>	
17:9, p. 121	254 n. 65, 258 n. 81	1, p. 1	292
18:7, p. 130	94, 237 n. 19	1, pp. 1–2	292 n. 57
19:8, p. 140	76 n. 122	1, p. 6	156 n. 163
21:5, p. 162	112 n. 25	3, p. 11	96, 148 n. 133
22:22, p. 211	117	4, p. 13	216 n. 124
		5, p. 17	97 n. 193, 148 n. 133
Mekhilta of R. Yishmael			
<i>Amalek</i>		7, p. 22	76 n. 122
1, p. 176	74	8, p. 28	162 n. 180
		9, p. 32	162 n. 180
		11, p. 37	51

14, p. 50	220 n. 133	<i>m. Ber.</i>	
15, p. 53	150 n. 140	1:3	112 n. 26
16, p. 62	268 n. 112	5:5	96
<i>Shabta</i>		<i>m. Hul.</i>	
1, p. 341	162	12:3	112 n. 25
1, p. 343	217 n. 128		
<i>Shira</i>		<i>m. Menah.</i>	
1, p. 116	156 n. 159	8:7	268 n. 112
2, p. 122	188–189		
2, p. 124	217 n. 128	<i>m. Peah</i>	
3, p. 126	156 n. 163	4:10	98
3, p. 127	205 n. 97	8:5	99
4, p. 131	205 n. 97	<i>m. Qidd.</i>	
5, p. 134	217 n. 128	4:14	2
7, p. 139	180		
10, p. 151	187–188	<i>m. Sanh.</i>	
10, p. 152	71 n. 107	1:1	150 n. 138
<i>Va-Yasa</i>		<i>m. Shabb.</i>	
1, p. 155	74 n. 116	8:5	149 n. 134
3, pp. 167–168	95 n. 182		
4, p. 167	290, 298	<i>m. Shev.</i>	
6, p. 174	94 n. 181	3:2	120 n. 53
6, p. 175	95 n. 182	4:6	112 n. 26
Midrash Lekach Tov		<i>m. Sotah</i>	
Yitro 18	238	5:1	151 n. 143
		5:5	242–243
Midrash Psalms		7:4	268 n. 112
18.9 70a	289 n. 52, 293 n. 62		
Midrash Tannaim		Palestinian Talmud	
14:2, p. 73	240 n. 23, 243 n. 38,	<i>y. Avod. Zar.</i>	
14:2, pp. 73–74	244 n. 42	2:5 41c–d	254 n. 65, 255
17:6, p. 101	115 n. 39	<i>y. Ber.</i>	
		9:4 14c	293 n. 62
Mishna		9:5 14b	163
<i>m. Avot</i>			
4:12	75	<i>y. Naz.</i>	
5:22	41	7:2 56b	293 n. 62
<i>m. B. Metzia</i>		<i>y. Ned.</i>	
2:9	112 n. 25	1:1 36c	111 n. 24
		6:1. 39c	111
<i>m. B. Qama</i>		<i>y. Or.</i>	
2:1	112 n. 26	1:2 60d	129 n. 78

<i>y. Rosh. Hash.</i>		<i>Emor</i>	
2:9 58b	293 n. 62	3:2 95c	121 n. 54
3:5 58d	48 n. 28	4:2 97a	121
		7:1 98a	121 n. 54
<i>y. Shabb.</i>		12:3 102c	51 n. 39
19:2 17a	111 n. 24	14:2 104d	121 n. 54
<i>y. Sheqal.</i>		<i>Hova</i>	
1:6 46b	156 n. 163	3:1 17d	51 n. 39
8:2 51b	228 n. 150	6:3 21b	268 n. 112
		10:3 25a	52 n. 41
<i>y. Sotah</i>		<i>Metsora</i>	
5:5 20c	163 n. 183	1:1 70a	149 n. 136
8:2 22b	296 n. 69		
<i>y. Ta'an</i>		<i>Miluim</i>	
4:1 67b	290 n. 53	1:1 41a	294 n. 66
		1:2 43c	237 n. 19
<i>y. Yebam.</i>		1:2 45b	290
8:1 8d	111–112	1:2 46a	289
Pesiqta de Rav Kahana		<i>Nedava</i>	
1, p. 147	293 n. 62	2:1 3c	144
12, p. 236	198 n. 77	2:1 3d	124
		6:1 7c	144 n. 124
Seder Olam Rabba		14:1 12d	148 n. 133
1, p. 221	241	16:4 15a	144 n. 124
17, p. 273	205 n. 97, 220 n. 133		
25, p. 302	220 n. 133	<i>Qedoshim</i>	
25, p. 304	220–221	1:3 87d	98
		3:1 89c	122 n. 57
Sifra		4:1 90b	96
<i>Aharei Mot</i>		4:3 91a	86 n. 152
1:1 80a	48 n. 28	5:1 91b	121 n. 54
3:2 81c	233 n. 6	5:2 92a	121 nn. 54–55
4:3 82b	294–295		
5:1 82b	233 n. 6	<i>Sheratsim</i>	
5:3 83b	294	1:2 46b	130
6:1 83c	121 n. 54	6:1 53a	156 n. 164
6:3 84a–b	121 n. 54, 122 n. 57		
8:2 85d	121 n. 54	<i>Tsav</i>	
8:3 91d	121 nn. 54–5	2:1 30c	149 n. 136
		4:1 32a	149 n. 136
<i>Be-Har</i>		5:1 33c	149 n. 136
5:1 109c	93	6:1 34b	149 n. 136
<i>Be-Huqotai</i>		<i>Zavim</i>	
2:7 112c	145 n. 128	1:1 74d	121 n. 54, 122 n. 57

Sifre Deuteronomy			
6, p. 15	95 n. 185	91, p. 230	239 n. 21
22, p. 33	180	99, p. 246	73 n. 115, 183 n. 44
24, p. 34	95 n. 185	99, pp. 246–247	181
25, p. 35	228	102, p. 253	194
29, p. 47	93 n. 177	103, p. 255	73
32, p. 55	205 n. 97	105, pp. 261–262	73, 77
33, p. 59	93 n. 177	105, p. 263	193
40, p. 81	217 n. 128	107, p. 269	50 n. 34
43, p. 94	188 n. 61	112, p. 310	110
48, p. 113	164 n. 183	113, pp. 313–314	291 n. 56
49, pp. 114–115	204–205	115, p. 322	72 n. 111
54, p. 121	264–265	116, p. 339	95 n. 182
83, p. 149	130	117, p. 351	162 n. 180
96, p. 157	93 n. 177	119, p. 364	95 n. 185
104, p. 163	268 n. 112	123, pp. 391–392	50 n. 34
110, p. 171	98–99	124, pp. 395–396	51 n. 39
116, p. 175	122 n. 57	125, p. 408	129 n. 78
119, p. 178	112 n. 25, 122 n. 57	129, p. 420	51 n. 39
222, p. 256	112 n. 25	133, pp. 444–445	292 n. 57
228, p. 260	112 n. 25	133, p. 445	291
241, p. 271	163	135, p. 457	95
303, p. 321	98 n. 200	142, p. 477	52
312, p. 353	239–240	152, p. 495	146
317, p. 360	205–206	153, p. 506	97 n. 193
332, p. 381	204	154, p. 513	97 n. 193
333, p. 383	239 n. 21	157, p. 523	198
342, p. 393	239 n. 21	157, p. 527	147–148
		158, p. 531	162 n. 180
		159, p. 534	95 n. 182
Sifre Numbers			
1, p. 2	49 n. 31	Sifre Zuta Numbers	
14, p. 42	50 n. 34	5:12, p. 232	121 n. 54
15, p. 45	50 n. 34	5:29, p. 238	149
20, p. 54	149	5:30, p. 238	156 n. 164
23, pp. 62–63	128–129	6:3, p. 240	129 n. 79
25, p. 70	143	6:5, p. 241	143 n. 119
26, p. 75	143	6:13, p. 244	149 n. 136
38, p. 101	149 n. 135	6:21, p. 246	149 n. 136
39, p. 106	288	7:3, p. 251	195 n. 71
42, pp. 112–115	217 n. 128	7:5, p. 251	195 n. 71
42, p. 121	219	7:84, p. 253	239 n. 21
42, pp. 123–124	221	12:1, p. 274	182 n. 46
58, p. 146	216 n. 124	12:5, p. 275	194–195
59, p. 148	93 n. 177	12:12, p. 277	93 n. 177
63, p. 155	219	15:5, p. 281	156 n. 164
68, p. 163	291 n. 56	15:19, p. 283	156 n. 162
73, pp. 174–175	50 n. 34	27:18, p. 321	195
73, p. 174	292 n. 57	30:3, p. 325	148 n. 133
		31:21, p. 329	162 n. 180

Song of Songs Rabba		<i>t. Ber.</i>	
1.2.6	254 n. 65, 255, n. 67	1:14	124 n. 67
		4:1	96 n. 187
Tanhuma			
<i>Re'eh</i>		<i>t. Parah</i>	
11, p. 43		10:3	143 n. 120
	293 n. 62		
<i>Tsav</i>		<i>t. Shabb.</i>	
14, p. 36	293 n. 62	15:9	112 n. 25
		16:17	162 n. 181
Tanhuma (Buber)			
<i>Shemot</i>		<i>t. Sotah</i>	
18, p. 10	195 n. 72	1:17	217–218
		4:6	181 n. 41
<i>Ve-Zot ha-Berakha</i>		6:10–11	292 n. 57
7, pp. 56–57	116 n. 39	12:3	205 n. 97
Tosefta		<i>t. Yoma</i>	
<i>t. B. Qam.</i>		3:3	294 n. 67
9:30	93 n. 177		

Homer

<i>Iliad</i>			
1.8–10	67	4.59	86
1.11	305 n. 93	4.105–109	202
1.15	250 n. 57	4.109	203
1.108	125 n. 69	4.121–124	253 n. 63
1.162	305 n. 93	4.137	44 n. 11
1.169–171	279–280	4.158–159	46
1.361	131	4.187	44 n. 11
1.499	95 n. 185	4.221	190
1.512–3	65	4.216	44 n. 11
2.2	46	4.308	287
2.8	131	4.342	201
2.448	209	4.431	62
2.612–614	186	4.434	106
2.645–649	207–208	4.439–440	234
2.649	211–212	4.512–513	191–192
2.788	113	5.1–7	200
3.2	305 n. 93	5.4	201–202
3.28	106	5.31	124
3.111–112	190	5.118	231–235
3.269–270	47–48	5.137	130–131
4.2	214	5.140	130–131
4.13	237 n. 18	5.265	172
		5.856–857	42

5.902	106	12.1–3	140–141
6.172	106	12.40	250–251
6.191–199	197 n. 76	12.101	197
6.258–261	283	12.316	201
6.264–268	283–284	12.331–334	58
6.416–419	44	12.333–334	249
7.92–95	66	12.352	249
7.125	66	12.442	106
7.226–230	191–192	13.299	233–234
7.266–268	191–192	13.306	153
7.471	134	13.374–382	172
8.179	106	13.673	201–202
8.184–190	281–282	14.14–15	232
8.242	58	14.253	46
8.289	90	15.1–5	160
8.323–327	251	15.3	159–160
8.325–326	251–253	15.119	233–235
8.345–347	60	15.317	204 n. 96
8.435	231, 235–237	15.349–351	91
8.564–9.3	140	15.746–16.2	138
9.1	138–139, 159–160	16.1	138
9.67	106	16.849–850	280–281
9.385	131	16.852–854	176
9.385–390	227	17.350	177
9.394	87	17.366	201
9.465	134	17.719	85 n. 149
10.120	153	18.1	138–139, 141, 201–202
10.222	62–3	18.68–69	247
10.300	174	18.535	286
10.314–315	173	19.415–417	199–200
10.325–326	62–3	20.21	248–249
10.434	174	20.49	106
10.437	227	20.213–243	214
10.446–447	173	20.232–235	214
10.447	174	20.371–371	123–124
10.448	173	21.17	184
10.491–493	174	21.67	184
11.172	305 n. 93	21.67–70	184
11.197–198	59	21.154–156	177–178
11.505–507	302	22.1	60
11.574	204 n. 96	22.149	232
11.596	138–139, 201–202	22.151	232
11.632–637	301–302	22.208	213–214
11.636	302–303, 306	22.251	213–214
11.637	303	22.262	87
11.692	212–213	22.263	89
11.844–846	185	22.406	287
12.1	138–139	22.468–469	57

23.1	138–139	<i>Odyssey</i>	
23.66	88	3.2	233–234, 239
23.281	106	4.49–50	287
23.326–328	270–271	6.1	138–139
23.378	131	6.79	106
23.399–400	175	6.251	106
23.403–406	175	7.1	138–139, 160
23.509	236–237	7.107	106
23.782–783	175	8.239	61
24.128–130	89, 90	9.5–11	86 n. 153
24.257	84	11.281	212–213
24.486–489	177	11.286	212–213
24.495–497	212–213	17.539	131
24.526	88	19.172–174	208
24.527–528	83	19.174	211–212
		22.120–1	236

Homeric Scholia

Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 1.6 Ariston.	106 n. 6	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 3.423a Ariston.	13 n. 48,
Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 1.9 ex.	67, 77		282 n. 29
Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 1.96 Ariston.	106 n. 6	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 4.13 ex.	237 n. 18
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 1.108a Did.	125 n. 69	Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 4.59b ex.	86
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 1.108b Did.	125 n. 69	Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 4.109b ex.	203
Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 1.108	113 n. 28	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 4.159a Ariston.	47
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 1.213 ex. (Porph?)	178 n. 33	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 4.221 ex.	190
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 1.169–171 ex.	280	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 4.308b ex.	287
Sch. <i>Il.</i> bt 1.349b ex.	95 n. 185	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 4.405a1 ex.	95 n. 185
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 1.364b1 Hrd.	44 n. 12	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 4.439–40 Ariston.	86 n. 153
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 1.388 Nic.	246 n. 49	Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 5.31 ex.	124 n. 66
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 1.416 ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 5.31	124
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 1.499b ex.	95 n. 185	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 5.118c ex.	232
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 1.512c ex.	65, 77	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 5.140a1 Ariston.	130–131
Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 1.514	131 n. 85	Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 5.260 ex.	57 n. 55
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 1.553b Did.	125 n. 69	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 5.265 ex.	172
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 2.2b Ariston.	46	Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 5.385	55 n. 47
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 2.8a1 ex.	131	Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 5.422	86 n. 153
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 2.147a Nic.	249 n. 55	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 5.857b Ariston.	43
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 2.450b Nic.	247	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 5.880 ex.	82 n. 138
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 2.612 Ariston.	186 n. 55	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 6.37–65 ex.	141 n. 115
Sch. Ab <i>Il.</i> 2.612–4 ex.	186	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 6.265 Ariston.	283 n. 31
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 2.649 Ariston.	211–212	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 6.394b1 ex.	71 n. 107
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 2.278–282 ex.	197 n. 175	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 6.417a Ariston.	44
Sch. A bT <i>Il.</i> 2.341 Ariston.	48	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 6.459 Ariston.	46 n. 18
Sch. pap. <i>Il.</i> 2.788	113	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 7.94a1 ex.	66
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 3.100a ex.	287 n. 46	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 7.125 ex.	66
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 3.270a Ariston.	48 n. 27	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 7.471 ex.	134 n. 94

Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 7.471	134	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.409a Nic.	246 n. 49
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 8.39a ex.	95 n. 185	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 11.542a1 ex.	88 n. 159
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 8.53b ex.	141 n. 115	Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 11.542a2 ex.	88 n. 159
Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 8.188–90a1 ex.	281	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.559b Ariston.	214 n. 118
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 8.188–90a3 ex.	282 n. 28	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.574 Ariston.	204 n. 96
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 8.189b Did.	282	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.636b Hrd.	302 n. 81
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 8.209 ex.	141 n. 115	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 11.636c1 ex.	302 n. 81,
Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 8.242a1 ex.	58		306 n. 96
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 8.289 ex.	90	Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 11.636c2 ex.	302 n. 81,
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 8.325a1 Nic.	251		306 n. 96
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 8.325a2 Nic.	251	Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 11.636	302 n. 81,
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 8.345–7 ex.	60		306 n. 96
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 8.435b Nic.	236	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.692a Ariston.	212–213
Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 8.435c ex.	236	Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 11.692	212 n. 116
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 8.513b Ariston.	231 n. 5	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.746 Nic.	249 n. 55
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 9.0a ex.	140	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 11.787 ex.	65 n. 89
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 9.131 Ariston.	86 n. 154	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.826a ex.	131 n. 84
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 9.385a1 Ariston.	131	Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 11.846 ex.	185
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 9.394a1 ex.	87	Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 12.1–2a ex.	141
Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 9.465	134	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 12.22a Ariston.	84 n. 146
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 9.571a Ariston.	214 n. 118	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 12.40a1 Nic.	250–251
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 9.678a ex.	88 n. 159	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 12.101 ex.	197
Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 10.10a ex.	88 n. 159	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 12.258a Ariston.	248 n. 54
Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 10.25a ex.	292	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 12.258b Nic.	248 n. 54
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 32a ex.	293	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 13.261a1 Nic.	236 nn. 16–17
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 10.53b Ariston.	248 n. 54	Sch. D <i>Il.</i> 13.261	236 n. 16
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 10.110 Ariston.	248 n. 54	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 12.308a ex.	274 n. 2
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 10.112 Ariston.	248 n. 54	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 12.333–4a Nic.	249
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 10.120b Ariston.	153	Sch. b <i>Il.</i> 12.334a2 ex.	58
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 10.124b ex.	293 n. 60	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 12.388 Nic.	280 n. 22
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 10.187 Ariston.	46 n. 22	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 13.299a Ariston.	46 n. 18,
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 10.218a1 ex.	63 n. 85		234 n. 9
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 10.317b ex.	63 n. 85	Sch. <i>Il.</i> 13.299b ex. (Ariston.)	234 n. 10
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 10.318 ex.	63 n. 85	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 13.306a1 Ariston.	153
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 10.321 ex.	63 n. 85	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 13.348–50 ex.	131 n. 84
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 10.324a ex.	63 n. 85	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 13.365a Ariston.	214 n. 118
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 10.328 ex.	63 n. 85	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 13.374–6a1–2 ex.	174 n. 24
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 10.419–20c ex.	91	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 13.430–3 ex.	57 n. 55
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 10.447a Ariston.	173	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 13.681a Ariston.	248 n. 54
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 10.447b ex.	174, 271	Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 13.689 ex.	287 n. 46
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 10.493 ex.	174	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 14.1b ex.	141 n. 115
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 10.567 ex.	287 n. 46	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 14.14–15 ex.	232
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.6 Ariston.	248 n. 54	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 14.32a Hrd.	86 n. 154
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 11.149 Nic.	141 n. 116	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 14.45a Ariston.	172 n. 20,
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.150 Nic.	141 n. 116		174 n. 24
Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 11.186a ex.	131 n. 84	Sch. A <i>Il.</i> 14.75–76 Nic.	246 n. 49
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 11.197–8 ex.	59	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 14.153b ex.	141 n. 115
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 11.243c1 ex.	287 n. 46	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 14.229a ex.	95 n. 185

Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 14.242 Ariston.	46 n. 22	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 20.21b ex.	249
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 14.354 Ariston.	46 n. 22	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 20.83–5 ex.	57 n. 55
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 14.442 Ariston.	86 n. 154	Sch. AT <i>Il.</i> 21.17a1 Ariston.	184
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 14.473 ex.	174 n. 24	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 21.17b1 Ariston.	184
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 14.500 Ariston.	86 n. 153,	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 21.334–335 Nic.	280 n. 22
	131 n. 84	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 21.379d ex.	57 n. 55
Sch. T <i>Il.</i> 15.1b1 ex.	274 n. 2	Sch. b. <i>Il.</i> 21.469c2 ex.	57
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 15.1b3 ex.	274 n. 2	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 21.471a Ariston.	106 n. 6
Sch. D. <i>Il.</i> 15.53	131 n. 85	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 22.208a2 Ariston.	213
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 15.119 Ariston.	233	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 22.251a2 Ariston.	214
Sch. AT <i>Il.</i> 15.119 Ariston.	86 nn.	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 22.262 ex.	87
	153–154	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 22.263b ex.	89
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 15.128a Nic.	246 n. 49	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 22.318a Ariston.	214 n. 118
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 15.246–7 ex.	178 n. 33	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 22.354a ex.	274 n. 2
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 15.349–51 ex.	91	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 22.406 ex.	287, 298
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 15.449–51a Ariston.	248 n. 54	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 22.428a Nic.	249 n. 55
Sch. b. <i>Il.</i> 15.496–8a2 ex.	286 n. 44	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 23.63a Ariston.	46 n. 22
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 16.1a ex.	138–139	Sch. AbT <i>Il.</i> 23.66 ex.	88
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 16.146b1–2 ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 23.97–8 Nic.	249 n. 55
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 16.161a Ariston.	86 n. 154	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 23.119–120b ex.	287 n. 46
Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 16.175c1 ex.	252 n. 60	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 23.285–6 Nic.	249 n. 55
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 16.261c ex.	131 n. 84	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 23.328 ex.	271
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 16.387a ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 23.378a1 Ariston.	131
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 16.431–61 ex.	141 n. 115	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 23.405–6a Ariston.	175
Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 16.433–8a1 ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 23.405–6b ex.	175
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 16.454 Ariston.	47	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 23.509a1 Ariston.	237
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 16.850a Ariston.	280 n. 25,	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 24.3 ex.	74 n. 116
	281 n. 26	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 24.8a Hrd.	44 n. 12
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 16.850b ex.	281 n. 26	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 24.86 Ariston.	106 n. 6
Sch. AT <i>Il.</i> 16.854a1 ex.	176	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 24.110b1 Did.	252 n. 60
Sch. b. <i>Il.</i> 16.854a2 ex.	176 n. 28	Sch. AT <i>Il.</i> 24.129a1 ex.	90 n. 163
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 17.404–5b ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. b. <i>Il.</i> 24.129a2 ex.	90
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 17.426–8 ex.	141 n. 115	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.192a D	95 n. 185
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 17.522a ex.	274 n. 2	Sch. D. <i>Il.</i> 24.192	95 n. 185
Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 17.542 ex.	274 n. 2	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.223 ex.	287 n. 46
Sch. b. <i>Il.</i> 17.671b ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.257a ex.	84
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 17.719 Ariston.	84 n. 146,	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 24.257b Ariston.	84 n. 147
	85 n. 149	Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 24.262 ex.	89 n. 161
Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 17.755b1 ex.	95 n. 185	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.358–360 ex.	274 n. 2
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 18.1a ex.	141	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.369 ex.	89 n. 161
Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 18.38 ex.	86 n. 153	Sch. b. <i>Il.</i> 24.376–7a1 ex.	88 n. 159
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 18.68–9 Nic.	247	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.446a ex.	287 n. 46
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 18.174 Ariston.	282 n. 29	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.476b ex.	62 n. 77
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 18.314–5 ex.	141 n. 115	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.488–9 ex.	177
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 18.535 ex.	286	Sch. T. <i>Il.</i> 24.526 ex.	88
Sch. bT <i>Il.</i> 18.591–2b ex.	271	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 24.527–8a Ariston.	83
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 19.416–7 Ariston.	200	Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 24.588 Ariston.	287 n. 47
Sch. A. <i>Il.</i> 20.21a Nic.	248		

Sch. <i>Od.</i> 1.268a ex.	233 n. 6	Sch. <i>Od.</i> 5.229a Ariston.	287 n. 46
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 1.361e ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. <i>Od.</i> 8.362b	86 n. 153
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 3.313a Ariston.	185 n. 52	Sch. VHQ <i>Od.</i> 11.286	212 n. 116
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 4.42e ex.	236 n. 16	Sch. Q <i>Od.</i> 14.214	95 n. 185
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 4.50a Ariston.	287	Sch. H <i>Od.</i> 17.501	176 n. 27
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 4.93b ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. Q <i>Od.</i> 18.330	282 n. 29
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 4.364b ex.	57 n. 55	Sch. VHQ <i>Od.</i> 19.174	209 n. 105
Sch. <i>Od.</i> 4.746a	134 n. 94		

Greek and Latin Authors

Aelius Theon		Aristophanes	
<i>Prog.</i>		<i>Ran.</i>	
82	274 n. 5	1030–1035	68 n. 93
86	304 n. 90	1151–1175	103, 106
Aeschilus		Aristotle	
<i>Myrmid.</i>		<i>Et. Nic.</i>	
Fr. 139	303–304	4.3 1124b	68 n. 93
Aesop		<i>Fr.</i>	
<i>Fab.</i>		102 (Rose)	134
149	87 n. 155	146 (Rose)	209
264	87 n. 155	370 (Gigon)	209
Alexander		<i>Phys.</i>	
<i>Fig.</i>		1.2 185b	134
p. 20	123		
p. 29	122–3	<i>Poet.</i>	
		1455a	210
Antimachus		1461a	245, 270
Fr. 37	234	1461b	199
Fr. 94	46 n. 20		
		<i>Rhet.</i>	
Apollonius Dyscolus		3.3.3 1406a	107
<i>Con.</i>		3.8.6 1409a	139 n. 105
p. 180	155	3.11.3 1411b–12a	204 n. 96
p. 186	159–160	3.11.15–16 1413a	227
p. 216	161		
p. 222	161 n. 177	<i>Soph. El.</i>	
		165b	229
[Apollodorus]		166a	245
<i>Epit.</i>		166b	270
6.8–11	209 n. 105		

[Aristotle]		Epicurus	
<i>Rhet. Al.</i>		Rat. Sen. 1	88
30.7	274	Gnom. Vat 1	88
Athenaeus		Euripides	
<i>Deipnosophistae</i>		<i>Tro.</i>	
11.84 493a	302	1127–1129	
11.85 493c–e	302–303		
11.85 494a–b	11 n. 41, 303–304	Eustathius	
Cicero		<i>Ad Il.</i>	
<i>Fam.</i>		vol. 1, p. 252	46 n. 23
3.11.59	307	vol. 1, p. 468	186 n. 54
		vol. 1, p. 545	113
Cocondrius		<i>Ad Od.</i>	
<i>Trop.</i>		vol. 1, p. 110	235 n. 15
5, pp. 784–785	204 n. 96		
Demosthenes		Heraclitus	
25.1.58	123	<i>Quæst. Hom.</i>	
Derveni Papyrus		1.5–7	1–2
4:1	276 n. 10		
8:3–12	276–277	Hermogenes	
13:1	277	<i>Method.</i>	
Dictys of Crete		14	274 n. 6
<i>Ephem.</i>			
6.7–9	178 n. 32	Herodotus	
Dio Chrysostom		1.66	123 n. 64
18.8	1	2.98	177 n. 29
Diogenes Laertius		Hesiod	
<i>Vit. Phil.</i>		<i>Op.</i>	
2.11	68 n. 93	94	83
		456	209
Dionysius Thrax			
<i>Ars</i>		Theog.	
25	155	454–457	86 n. 151
90	161		
Donatus		Hesychius	
<i>De tropis</i>		<i>Lex.</i>	
10	298–299	vol. 3, p. 290	135 n. 98
11	299 n. 72		
12	299 n. 71	Horace	
15	299 n. 73	<i>Ars</i>	
		445–450	229
		Iamblichus	
		<i>Vit. Pyth.</i>	
		42	90 n. 164

109	90 n. 164	<i>Resp.</i>	
		606e	40
Isocrates		Plutarch	
<i>Paneg.</i>		<i>Quæstiones Convivales</i>	
159	59 n. 60	6.9	107
Lesbonax			
<i>Fig.</i>		<i>Quomodo adul.</i>	
31B	250 n. 57	16a	61
		19e	60
[Longinus]		19f–20a	60–61
<i>Subl.</i>		20c	60
22	275	27a	62
23	114	29d–e	62
		29e–f	62–63
Maximus of Tyre			
<i>Diss.</i>		<i>Vit. Mar.</i>	
4	81 n. 131	23.3	63 n. 86
7	81 n. 131		
26	81 n. 131	[Plutarch]	
Menander		<i>Vit. Hom.</i>	
Fr. 781	87	30	275 n. 8, 305 n. 93
		32	123–124
		39	151 n. 145
Michael of Ephesus		71	227
<i>Elen. Comm.</i>		146	62
p. 33	271	150	86 n. 153
		152–160	89 n. 162
Philostratus		153	81 n. 132
<i>Her.</i>		154	90 n. 164
36.4	59 n. 59	218	40
<i>VA</i>		Porphyrius	
4.16	59 n. 59	<i>Quæst. Hom. Il.</i>	
		2.649	208–209
Plato		4.105–11	203
<i>Apol.</i>		4.434	106–107
39c	176	5.7	200–201
		5.20	202 n. 90
<i>Ion</i>		6.265	283
530c–d	305 n. 95	7.229–230	191–192
		8.322–329	252–253
<i>Phdr.</i>		9.90	27 n. 97
241c–d	89	9.682–683	167, 225–226
		10.252–253	225
<i>Prt.</i>		10.276	202 nn. 89–90
339b–c	278	11.637	305–306
343e–344a	278–279	12.127–132	273

16.850 (Schrader)	280–281	Suda	
18.590–593	271 n. 121	OI 123	27 n. 97
20.232–235	214–215	Σ 394	135 n. 98
		Σ 859	302 n. 82
<i>Quaest. Hom. Il.</i> (Sodano)			
56.3–4	43 n. 6, 45	Theophrastus	
Quintilian		<i>Hist. Plant.</i>	
<i>Inst.</i>		5.4.3	271
7.9.7–8	245, 247 n. 52	Tiberius	
7.9.10	235 n. 14	<i>Fig. Dem.</i>	
8.6.62–65	274–275	26	123 n. 62
8.6.65	305 n. 93	Tryphon	
[Rufinus]		i, p. 197	305
<i>Lex.</i>		i, pp. 203–204	231
40	114 n. 34	ii, 2, p. 237	204 n. 96
		ii, 5, p. 239	274 n. 2
<i>Schem.</i>		ii, 21, p. 245	231 n. 4
8	123 n. 61	Vergil	
Satyrus		<i>Aen.</i>	
Fr. 5	145 n. 127	6.247	114 n. 34
		9.427	123 n. 61
Scholia to Euripides		<i>Ecl.</i>	
<i>Sch. Tro.</i> 1128	178	2.69	123 n. 61
Scholia to Hesiod		3.79	123 n. 61
<i>Sch. Op.</i> 94a	83	<i>Geor.</i>	
<i>Sch. Op.</i> 90–94	84 n. 144	4.108	114, n. 34
Sextus Empiricus			
<i>Adv. Gramm.</i>		Vita Sophoclis	
273	88 n. 157	pp. 36–37	145 n. 127
Simonides		Xenophanes	
Fr. 37.1	278	Fr. 10	40
Fr. 94	46 n. 21	Xenophon	
Sophocles		<i>Symp.</i>	
<i>El.</i>		4.6	41
1163–1164	123	Zonaus	
Strabo		<i>Fig.</i>	
<i>Geog.</i>		p. 165	123 n. 61
1.1.10	54–55		
10.4.15	209 n. 105, 210–211		

Second Temple and Christian Authors

Clement of Alexandria		Origen	
<i>Ecl.</i>		<i>Ephes.</i>	
56.1	285 n. 37	9.1–10	285 n. 38
<i>Strom.</i>		<i>Gen.</i>	
1.19.24	72 n. 112	Fr. D9	250 n. 59
2.15.70	72 n. 112	Fr. E199	250 n. 59
Demetrius		<i>Luk.</i>	
vol. 1, p. 76	186–187	20a	285
Eusebius		<i>Reg.</i>	
<i>Comm. Isa.</i>		1.1	18 n. 80
1.92.77–82	135 n. 97	<i>Rom.</i>	
<i>Praep. Evang.</i>		4.1–11	285 n. 38
9.29.1	186–187	Pesher Genesis	
Eusebius of Emesa		2:5–7	167
<i>Comm. Gen.</i>		Pesher Habakkuk	
p. 312	189	1:16–2:10	6 n. 21
p. 396	189 n. 62		
Genesis Apocryphon		Philo	
12:10, p. 56	241 n. 27	<i>Agr.</i>	
Hieronymus		1–2	132
<i>Quaest. Heb.</i>		26	132 n. 87
p. 8.15–19	183 n. 48	27–28	133
p. 24.11–12	170 n. 12	122	70
Josephus		157	136
<i>Ant.</i>		171	116 n. 41
1.143	241	<i>Conf.</i>	
2.132	187 n. 58	142	108 n. 14
<i>Ap.</i>		<i>Cong.</i>	
1.19–27	27 n. 97	73	108 n. 14
2.154–155	27 n. 97	178–179	117
2.255–256	27 n. 97	<i>Det.</i>	
Jubilees		15	108 n. 14
4:33	241	47	116 n. 41
10:14	241	70	116 n. 41
		118	132 n. 87

		<i>Plant.</i>	
<i>Deus</i>			
158	136 n. 102	113	246
		137–171	132
<i>Ebr.</i>		150	132–133
127	136 n. 99	154	134
138	136 n. 99		
143	136 nn. 99–100	<i>Post.</i>	
149	136 nn. 99–100	1–2	72 n. 110
151	136 nn. 99–100		
		<i>QG</i>	
<i>Fug.</i>		1.16	116 n. 40
54–55	115	1.63 (Aucher)	183
		1.63 (Petit)	183 n. 49
<i>Gig.</i>		2.47	206 n. 101
34	108 n. 14, 124–5	2.79	241
40	69 n. 100	4.168 (Aucher)	114 n. 36
54	69 n. 99		
		<i>QE</i>	
<i>Her.</i>		2.4	117 n. 44
182	69 n. 99	2.17	118 n. 48
		2.34	108
<i>Ios.</i>			
10	123 n. 65	<i>Sacr.</i>	
		42	69 n. 100
<i>Leg.</i>			
1.98	136 n. 100	<i>Somn.</i>	
1.105–7	116	1.73	206 n. 101
1.249	136 n. 100	2.23–25	118
3.51	271	2.25	108 n. 14
3.147	108	2.164	136 n. 102
4.39	69 n. 100	2.183	206 n. 101
4.66	69 n. 100	2.190	136
		2.192	136 n. 102
<i>Mig.</i>			
4	206 n. 101	<i>Spec.</i>	
8	69 n. 99	1.8–10	119
14	69 n. 99	1.98	135
48	108 n. 14	1.249	135
<i>Mos.</i>			
1.214–216	187 n. 58	<i>Virt.</i>	
		165	69 n. 100
<i>Mut.</i>			
13	284	[Philo]	
220	69 n. 99	<i>de Sam.</i>	
236	69 n. 99	21	7 n. 21
256	206 n. 101	Temple Scroll	
		21:10, p. 160	130 n. 80

Testament of Reuven
1:10 135 n. 97

Testament of Zebulun
8:3 94 n. 177

Theodoret of Cyrus
Quaest. Oct.
Gen. lviii, p. 118 168 n. 3
Ex. xxxiii, p. 278 187 n. 58

Comm. Isa.
2.570–574 135 n. 97
8.61–65 135 n. 97