**‘Superfluous Text’ in the Commentaries of Rabbi Meyuḥas ben Elijah**

1. **Introduction—‘the Way of Scripture’**

Rabbi Meyuḥas ben Elijah (hereafter: R. Meyuḥas) was a biblical commentator who lived in Byzantium in the first half of the previous millennium. Very little is known about him, and few studies have been written about him and his exegetical oeuvre.[[1]](#footnote-1)

One of R. Meyuḥas’s main goals in writing his commentary was to make the difficult and obscure language of Scripture accessible to contemporary readers and learners. He presents the problem explicitly in his preface to the commentary. At the very beginning of the preface, he mentions and gives examples of several methodological principles, such as short [*qaṣzar*] text, misordered [*mesuras*] text; superfluous [*yeter*] text, missing [*ḥaser*] letters and conflicts between the pronunciation of text [*qeri*] and its orthography [*ketiv*]. These principles served him as the foundation of his claim that the Torah’s phrasing is problematic: “It is well and widely known, even to the smallest in Israel, that if any of us would speak this way in his own tongue, he would be mocked and reviled in our midst. If so, was our Torah, given by the Master of Universe, blessed be He, via His servants the holy and pure prophets, worded this way?!” The direct and unapologetic posing of the question is surprising; I do not recall anything resembling it among medieval commentators on the Bible.

One of R. Meyuḥas’ main ways to solve the problem is by defining biblical usages or expressions that seem odd to later readers as common instances of biblical style. For this purpose, R. Meyuḥas uses the phrase *derekh ha-miqra,* ‘the way of Scripture,’ to denote various biblical literary practices.[[2]](#footnote-2) This phrase (or its recurrence in the plural, *derekh ha-miqra’ot*) do not appear in the literature of the Sages.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is mentioned several times by biblical commentators who preceded R. Meyuḥas[[4]](#footnote-4); seven times in Rashi’s commentary on the Torah[[5]](#footnote-5); seven times in Ibn Ezra’s commentaries;[[6]](#footnote-6) and nine times in R. Samuel b. Meir (Rashbam)’s commentary on the Torah.[[7]](#footnote-7) The phrase is also uncommon in the Byzantine commentaries that preceded R. Meyuḥas: one occurrence in R. Tuvia b. Eliezer’s commentary *Leqaḥ Tov*[[8]](#footnote-8) and six in R. Menaḥem b. Shlomo’s commentary *Sekhel Tov*.[[9]](#footnote-9)

With these data in the background, one cannot but be impressed by the fact that the expression *derekh ha-miqra,* the way of Scripture,recurs in R. Meyuḥas’s Torah commentary 141 times.[[10]](#footnote-10) This abundance is indicative of R. Meyuḥas’s systematic praxis and his wish to devise a set of principles that would help to solve stylistic problems in the Bible. Elsewhere, I presented his various uses of ‘the way of Scripture.’ In this article, I elaborate on one of these principles: the *miqra yeter,* ‘superfluous text.’ My examination of this principle will also further our understanding of R. Meyuḥas’s exegetic practice in general and reveal his goals in writing his commentary on the Torah, as I make clear below.

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As noted above, R. Meyuḥas mentions in the preface to his commentary on the Torah the principle of superfluous text, distinguishing between superfluous letters and superfluous words or verses and devoting a separate section to each. In the course of the commentary, he explicitly mentions ‘superfluous letters’ in 60 cases and ‘superfluous text’ in 150. His references to superfluous letters are terse and succinct; nearly all trace to grammatical considerations only.[[11]](#footnote-11) Contrastingly, his references to superfluous text are more diverse and entail painstaking examination. Below I refer only to superfluous text and not to superfluous letters.

The principle is mentioned 94 times (62.6% of all cases) in the context of narrative passages (hereinafter: biblical narrative) and 56 times (37.6%) in the context of halakhic exegesis (hereafter: Biblical law).[[12]](#footnote-12) The remark that appears in some cases—“And in many others like them”)—shows that R. Meyuḥas considers this a very common Biblical phenomenon.[[13]](#footnote-13) In other cases, R. Meyuḥas explicitly defines the superfluous text as belonging to the ‘way of Scripture’: “‘[And God created man] in His own image, in the image of God created He him’—this is a superfluous text and [it is] the way of Scripture […]” (Exod 4:9), like ‘[There is naught left …] but our bodies’ (Gen 47:18), and indeed it is the way of Scripture, like ‘[the water which thou takest out of the river] shall become blood” (Exod 4:9). This is a superfluous text and indeed, it is the way of Scripture […]” (English translation of verses: from *The Complete Hebrew Bible* as found at <https://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0.htm>).[[14]](#footnote-14)

In my examination, I found a difference between biblical narrative and biblical law in the way R. Meyuḥas explains the superfluous text phenomenon. I begin by presenting superfluous text in his comments on biblical narrative and then discuss his treatment of the same in his remarks on biblical law. After pointing out the differences between narrative and law in this context, I will explain why, in R. Meyuḥas’s opinion, the Bible is written this way.

**2. Superfluous text in Biblical Narrative**

R. Meyuḥas defines a word, words, and at times, even an entire verse as superfluous.

1. An example of a superfluous word follows. In response to Moses’ request to see God’s glory, Exod 33:20–21 reports His response: “And God said, Thou canst not see My face […].” The mention of God as the speaker at the beginning of verse 21 is superfluous because this is already known from verse 20. Therefore, R. Meyuḥas comments: ‘And [God] said’ is superfluous text and the way of Scripture, as in ‘And the angel of the LORD said unto her’ (Gen 16:9) (Exod 33:21).
2. An example of an entire superfluous verse is Exod 38:22: “And Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses.” Here R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And Bezalel’—is superfluous text because it was reported above. But it is the way of Scripture to repeat.”

R. Meyuḥas does not always explain why he considers a text superfluous. In his exegesis, he relates to the matter in three ways: simply declaring something superfluous without explaining why he considers it superfluous and proposing the ‘correct’ wording of the verse, omitting its superfluous part.

In about half of the cases (43 cases, 45.7% of all cases in biblical narrative), R. Meyuḥas merely declares a text superfluous without elaborating or explaining. Here are several examples from his commentary on Gen 1: “‘And so it was’ […]—superfluous text (Gen 1:7); ‘and God said unto them’ […] (Gen 1:28); ‘[…] it shall be for food’—this is yet another superfluous text” (Gen 1:29).[[15]](#footnote-15)

In other cases, R. Meyuḥas takes pains to explain why he considers a text superfluous. Several examples follow.

1. At “And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Beth-el” (Gen 35:15), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And Jacob called the name of the place’—It is a superfluous text because we were told above that it is called Beth El.” The toponym need not be mentioned, R. Meyuḥas explains, because the narrative has already done this (see Gen 28:19 and 35:7).
2. In Gen 48:14, we are told, “And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger […].” R. Meyuḥas explains: “‘who was the younger’—This is a superfluous text because we know from the genealogy who is the first-born and who is the younger.” R. Meyuḥas’s argument is that the text above describes the two brothers’ birth and states explicitly that “[…] Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh […] and the name of the second called he Ephraim” (Gen 41:51–52).[[16]](#footnote-16)

In three cases, R. Meyuḥas does not explain why he considers the text superfluous but does spell out how the verse ‘should’ be worded without superfluity:

1. “‘and Abraham built the altar [*ha-mizbe’aḥ*],’ the *heh* is a superfluity **and the correct way—**‘and Abraham built an altar’” (Gen 22:9); “‘Because there were no graves in Egypt’ [*Ha-mi-bli en qevarim be-miṣrayim*]*—*this is a superfluous text and **[the verse]** **should be written** ‘*ha mibli qevarim*’ (Exod 14:11); and ‘and their anointing shall be to them’—it is a superfluous text, and **[the verse]** **should be written** ‘and their anointing shall be’” (Exod 40:15).

In two cases, R. Meyuḥas specifies the alternative wording *and* explains why the original wording is superfluous:

1. In his commentary on the beginning of Exodus, R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And these are the names […].’ These are superfluous texts because **this is already stated** in Portion Va-yigash and in Portion Va-yeḥi. **All that should have been written was ‘**And Joseph died, and all his brethren.’” In his opinion, the five introductory verses of Exodus are superfluous because the names of Jacob’s offspring are already given in Genesis.
2. In his commentary on Exod 1:15—“And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah”—R. Meyuḥas writes:

Of whom the name of the one [*asher shem ha-aḥat*]—this is a superfluous text **because it should have said** ‘The name of the one is Shiphrah’; **after all,** we had not known their names before. **This is because** it is the way of Scripture to say *asher* when it refers to something that it had told us before, as in ‘of whom [*asher*]the name of the one was Gershom’ (Exod 18:3), ‘whose name is called [*asher niqra shemo*] Israel.[[17]](#footnote-17) And in any matter in which [the Bible] has never advised us of its name, it does not say *Asher* and omits the indicative, as in ‘the name of the elder was Leah’ [*Shem ha-gedola Leah*]’(Gen 29:16).”

In this case, after proposing the alternative, R. Meyuḥas offers an especially original explanation for the superfluity. The word *asher* in the verse, he reasons, is superfluous due to a biblical principle by which this word appears only before information already known to the reader. Since the midwives’ names are revealed for the first time here, the word *asher* should not have been used*.*

**3. Superfluous Text in Biblical Law**

In biblical law, much as in biblical narrative, I encountered the same three methods of reference in R. Meyuḥas’s exegesis: merely reporting superfluity without explaining it, explaining why a given text is superfluous, and proposing the ‘correct’ wording of the verse with its superfluity omitted.

In nearly half of the cases (27—48.2% of all cases in biblical law), R. Meyuḥas merely states that a given text is superfluous, neither explaining why it is so nor offering the ‘correct’ alternative. Examples are “‘A sojourner and a hired servant [*toshav ve-sakhir*]’—both are non-Israelites, and this is superfluous text” (Exod 12:45), “‘And is guilty’—this is superfluous text (Lev 4:22), and “‘And thou shalt turn in the morning [‘*U-fanita va-boqer*]—this is superfluous text” (Deut 16:7).

In 21 cases (35% of all cases in biblical law), R. Meyuḥas explains why he considers text superfluous. For example:

1. Commenting on the law pertaining to a goring ox—“The ox shall be surely stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten […]” (Exod 21:28), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And its flesh shall not be eaten’—this is superfluous text **because** onceit has been killed by stoning, it is carrion and forbidden for consumption.” In his opinion, the law of death by stoning accommodates the injunction against consuming the flesh because an ox killed in this manner has not been slaughtered and its flesh is forbidden ipso facto.
2. Ad loc Exod 35:3, “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day,” R. Meyuḥas writes: “Its exegesis, ‘throughout your habitations,’ is superfluous text **because** the Sabbath is a duty of the body and is forbidden everywhere.” In his opinion, the injunction against kindling a fire in a specific place need not be emphasized because the Sabbath prohibitions are contingent not on place but on the individual.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In seven cases (11.6% of all cases in biblical law), R. Meyuḥas does not explain why he considers text superfluous but specifies how, in his opinion, the verse ‘should’ read with the superfluity expunged. For example:

1. At “And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire” (Exod 12:10), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘Until the morning—it is superfluous text, **and thus it should have been written:** “That which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.’” At “And if aught of the flesh of the consecration, or of the bread, remain unto the morning, then thou shalt burn the remainder with fire; it shall not be eaten, because it is holy” (Exod 29:34), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘the remainder’—it is superfluous text, and **it should have said** ‘ye shall burn with fire.’” At “On the twelfth day” [*be-yom shene ‘asar yom*]” (Num 7:78), R. Meyuḥas writes: *be-yom shene ‘asar yom*—it is superfluous text, and **it is correct to write** only ‘*bi-shene ‘asar yom.’”*[[19]](#footnote-19)

In one case, R. Meyuḥas specifies both the alternative wording and the reason for identifying a text as superfluous:

1. Relating to the account of the laying of hands on the *shelamim* sacrifices(Lev. 3:2, 8:13), R. Meyuḥas remarks: “Three hands are written: [on] an ox, [on] a sheep, and [on] a goat, and all three are superfluous because ‘And he shall lay his hand upon it’ **should have been written**, **it already having been stated** ‘And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering’” (Lev. 3:2).

Thus far, a similar tableau emerges in the presentation of superfluous text in biblical narrative and biblical law. Below, however, I demonstrate two important differences in R. Meyuḥas’s use of the principle at both levels.

The first difference concerns the attribution of midrashim of the Sages to the superfluities. In his commentaries on biblical narrative, R. Meyuḥas does this in several cases; referencing biblical law, he does so systematically. The second difference is in explaining why the Bible uses superfluous wording: In reference to biblical narrative, R. Meyuḥas often suggests the purpose of the superfluity; in biblical law, in contrast, he sees no purpose in the superfluities other than being ‘pegs’ on which to suspend midrashim.

In my opinion, the two differences are linked, as I specify below.

**4. Attaching Midrash to Superfluity—Biblical Narrative vs. Biblical Law**

In most cases of superfluous text in the biblical narrative (87 cases, 92.6% of the total), R. Meyuḥas does not use the superfluity as a ‘peg’ for rabbinical derash. I found only seven cases (7.4% of all cases in biblical narrative) in which he mentions a midrash as adduced from the superfluity.[[20]](#footnote-20) Here are two examples:

1. At “And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed” (Gen 14:12), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘who dwelt in Sodom’—that is, he had settled in Sodom, and this is superfluous text because we were told [about it] above. The Sages interpreted—‘What caused this to happen? His having settled in Sodom.’ The knowledge that Lot dwelt in Sodom at the time he was captured by the four kings is superfluous because Lot’s place of residence is known from previous verses (Gen 12:10–12).” R. Meyuḥas notes that, on the basis of the midrash, the superfluity may teach a lesson associated with the current text: Lot was taken captive as a punishment for living among the vile Sodomites.
2. At the account of Abraham’s conduct—“[…] and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed down to the earth” (Gen 18:2), R. Meyuḥas writes: ‘he saw, he ran’—this is superfluous text. He left his place and went to receive the guests. On this basis, our rabbis said that receiving guests is greater than receiving the divine presence. The word ‘he saw’ [*va-yar*] in this verse is superfluous because at the beginning of the verse we already read ‘and he lifted up his eyes and looked [va-yar].’” The Sages adduced from the superfluity that seeing the guests caused Abraham to leave the divine presence waiting and to receive them, from which the educational lesson about the importance of receiving guests is taught.

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In contrast to the small number of specific examples of *derash* adduced from superfluous text in biblical narrative, in biblical law R. Meyuḥas takes pains to specify the halakhic derash that is learned from the superfluities and does so in a large majority of cases: 53 (94.6% of all cases in biblical law). I found only three cases in biblical law (5.4%) in which R. Meyuḥas does not present halakhic midrash adduced from the superfluity.[[21]](#footnote-21) I content myself with one example of this kind.

1. At the instruction to a person who offers a *shelamim* (‘whole’) sacrifice, “And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering” (Lev. 3:2), R. Meyuḥas writes: ‘And he shall lay his hand’—three hands are written: on an ox (verse 3:2), on a sheep (verse 3:8), and on a goat (verse 3:13). And all three are superfluous, for it should have been written, ‘And he shall lay upon,’ since ‘he shall lay his hand upon’ has already been written in regard to the burnt-offering (verse 1:4). These were stated in order to be interpreted: *yado* [his hand] as opposed to *yad beno* [his son’s hand], *yad ‘avdo* [his servant’s hand], or *yad sheluḥo* [his agent’s hand].’” Further into the verse, R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘*Rosh* [head]—is written three times here (verses 3:2, 8, 13), and all are meant for exegesis, for in reference to the *‘olat nedava* (verse 1:4) it is already written: *‘al rosh* [on the head]—and not on the neck, *‘al rosh*—and not on the back and the chest and *a fortiori* not on other organs that are not proximate to the head, ‘*al rosh*—and not on the back of his hand.’” In both cases, R. Meyuḥas begins his commentary by explaining why the words *yado* [his hand] and *rosh* [head] are superfluous and concludes by presenting the halakhic exegesis that these superfluities yield.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The division between the surface level (*peshat*) and the midrashic level (*derash*) in Biblical *law* finds salient expression in R. Meyuḥas’s discussion of one of the laws concerning the ox that is killed by stoning: “and its flesh shall not be eaten [*ve-lo ye’akhel et besaro*]: (Exod 21:28). Here R. Meyuḥas remarks: “*et*—is superfluous, as in *higamel et Yi*ṣ*ḥak* (Gen 21:8). *This is its surface meaning* [peshat]*. And its midrashic meaning* [derash]*—*including its skin and its hair, so that they should be forbidden for benefit as is the flesh.” At the peshat level, R. Meyuḥas merely states that a superfluous word is at hand and does not bother to explain why it was written. At the derash level, he presents the halakhic exegesis adduced from the superfluous word. R. Meyuḥas suggests a similar usage in regard to the sacrifices of the *nesi’im* (princes) in the desert: “*Ze qorban*—**its surface meaning is superfluous. And its exegetic meaning**—This [individual] is allowed to do so, and no other individual may do so” (Num 7:17).

Thus, in his commentaries on superfluous text in biblical narrative,R. Meyuḥas usually leaves learners at the surface level only, whereas in his commentaries on superfluous text in Biblical **law** he systematically presents, along with the peshat, the derash that is adduced from the superfluity. The reason for the difference between the levels in presenting derash is explained in the next section.

**5. Why Does Superfluous text Appear in Biblical Law?**

Why was the Torah written with the strange property of superfluous text? What interest is served by the insertion of superfluous letters, words, and verses? As noted at the beginning of this article, R. Meyuḥas takes up this question in the preface to his commentary on the Torah. Farther into the preface, he offers two explanations for this uniqueness in biblical style. For our purposes, the more important explanation is the first that he proposes: the principle of multiple meanings: “But know and understand that the Creator, blessed be He, gave us the Torah and the Prophets and the Writings by His servants the prophets, and they are explained in seventy facets. For He wrote to us a language in which all interpretations will be understood.” In his opinion, phenomena such as superfluous text allowed the Sages to predicate their exegeses on the verses themselves.

In his preface, R. Meyuḥas makes no distinction between biblical narrative and biblical law. Therefore, one may ostensibly infer that, in his opinion, superfluous text is given—in both narrative and law—in order to adduce midrashim from the superfluities.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The foregoing examination of the phenomenon throughout the commentary, however, shows that R. Meyuḥas specifies the derash adduced from the superfluities in biblical law but does not offer this midrashic reasoning when faced with superfluities in biblical narrative. If so, there is reason to assume that a distinction should be made between biblical narrative and biblical law as to the reason for the appearance of superfluous text in Scripture.

In biblical law, evidently, R. Meyuḥas reasons that superfluities exist for one purpose only: to serve as ‘pegs’ for midrashim. Two methodological statements relating to superfluous text in biblical law clarify his stance tellingly:

1. At the end of the description of the Passover sacrifices, we read, “Ye shall offer these beside the burnt-offering of the morning, which is for a continual burnt-offering” (Num 28:23). Here R. Meyuḥas writes: ‘the burnt-offering of the morning, which is for a continual burnt-offering’—that is, it is made for the regular burnt-offering*;* this is its surface meaning. And its midrashic meaning—it teaches that the one that is more frequent than its counterpart precedes its counterpart, as we taught: the one that is more frequent than its counterpart precedes its counterpart: *Tamid* [regular] sacrifices precede *musaf* [additional] sacrifices, Shabbat *musaf* sacrifices precede Rosh Ḥodesh *musaf* sacrifices, Rosh Ḥodesh *musaf* sacrifices precede Rosh Hashana *musaf* sacrifices. It means that this is superfluous text, **and it was written for this [purpose] only.’**
2. R. Meyuḥas uses similar wording to explain the injunction against ritual defilement by a nazirite: “For his father and for his mother—this is superfluous text, for it is stated, ‘He shall not come near to a dead body’ (Num 6:6), **and they were written only for exegesis:** [The nazirite] does not defile himself for his father but does defile himself for a *met miṣva* who has no one to attend to his burial” (Num 6:7).[[24]](#footnote-24)

The methodological emphasis in these two cases appears to illuminate R. Meyuḥas’s general approach to the superfluous verses in Biblical law: their sole purpose is to serve as ‘pegs’ for midrashim. This approach fits well with the attitude he expresses in the preface to his commentary on the Torah. In not even one case does R. Meyuḥas attempt to explain the superfluous verses in biblical law in any other way.

**6. Why Does Superfluous text Appear in Biblical Narrative?**

The picture is totally different in regard to R. Meyuḥas’ treatment of superfluous verses in biblical narrative. In nearly one-third of cases (28 cases, 29.8% of all superfluous texts in biblical narrative), R. Meyuḥas explains why the Bible opts for superfluity. The explanations are diverse. In some cases, he explains that the text is in no way superfluous; in others, he explains the superfluity as one of the accepted phenomena in biblical style that comes under the umbrella of “the way of Scripture,”i.e., conventional Biblical rhetorical devices such as ‘redundant speech,’ ‘redundant language,’ ‘reversion to first topic,’ ‘re-interpreted below,’ and others, as I explain in detail presently.[[25]](#footnote-25)

R. Meyuḥas elucidates nine superfluous texts by invoking the principle of ‘redundant speech’ or ‘redundant language’ (tautology) as detailed in Sections q–s:

1. Sometimes R. Meyuḥas calls attention to identical words, one of which is superfluous: On Esau’s instruction “Let me swallow, I pray thee, some of this red, red pottage […]” (Gen 25:30), R. Meyuḥas writes: “This red, red is a superfluous text, redundant language.” At “the life of Sarah […] the years of the life of Sarah” (Gen 23:1), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘the years of the life of Sarah’ is a superfluous text, redundant speech.”
2. Occasionally R. Meyuḥas presents entire verse fragments that recur several times in similar wording. Thus, when the purchase of the Cave of the Machpelah is culminated, we read: “So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah […] the field, and the cave which was therein […] were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth […]” (Gen 23:17–18). Afterwards, we read again: “And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the children of Heth” (Gen 23:20). Commenting on the latter verse, R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And the field […] was made […] [*va-yaqom ha-sade*]’—it is a superfluous text and indeed it is the way of Scripture to be repetitive.’ Describing the making of the ark, the biblical account states: “And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee” (Exod 25:16). Then the instruction is repeated: “And in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee” (Exod 25:21). Addressing himself to the latter verse, R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And you shall put the testimony’—indeed, it is the way of Scripture to repeat itself, as I have told you in many places, and it is a superfluous text.”
3. R. Meyuḥas points out synonyms now and then. Commenting on Abraham’s statement, “Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me […]” (Gen 14:24), he writes: “‘Save only that [*bil’adai raq*]’—this, too, is superfluous; it should have said ‘*bil’adai* *asher akhelu,*’ and it is a tautology.’ In his opinion, *bil’adai* and *raq* are synonymous. In Gen 18:3, quoting Sarah—“After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure […]?”—Meyuḥas writes: “The words *ha-af umnam* [with which Sarah’s question begins] are akin to *ha-umnam* and are tautologies and superfluous text.” In his opinion, *ha-af* and *umnam* are synonyms.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In five cases, R. Meyuḥas explains superfluous text by invoking the principle of ‘reversion to first topic.’ Three of these cases are associated with the phrase “These are the generations of…” [*ele toledot*].

1. Noah and the list of his descendants are mentioned twice in Genesis: “And Noah was five hundred years old; and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Gen 5:32); “These are the generations [*ele toledot*] of Noah. […] Noah begot three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Gen 7:9–10). The passage that separates them describes the sins of man and ends thus: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen 6:8). R. Meyuḥas reasons that due to the intervening text the Bible believes it necessary to specify Noah’s progeny once again:

“These are the generations of Noah”—These, too, are superfluous texts; it should have begun only with “Noah begot three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” But it is a redoubling of topic. […] “These are the generations of Noah” are stated for the topic, but [the Bible] interrupted the topic to speak in praise [of Noah] and then reverted to the first topic. Indeed, it is the way of Scripture to interrupt in speaking of one topic, to begin another, and then revert to the first topic.”

1. The birth of Ishmael by Hagar is mentioned twice in Genesis: “And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael” (Gen 16:15) and “Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bore unto Abraham” (Gen 25:12). The latter mention seems superfluous and R. Meyuḥas comments on it as follows: “‘Whom Hagar bore [*asher yaleda Hagar*]’ is a superfluous text that interrupts the topic with other matters, and indeed it is the way of Scripture.” In R. Meyuḥas’ opinion, the Bible found it correct to repeat the topic due to the lengthy interruption.
2. The birth of Isaac to Abraham is also recounted twice in Genesis: “And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac” (Gen 21:3) and “And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begot Isaac” (Gen 25:19). The second mention seems superfluous and R. Meyuḥas remarks on it as follows: “‘And Abraham begot [*Avraham holid*]’—this is a superfluous text; it interrupts the topic to speak of other matters and then returns to the matter at hand. Such is the way of Scripture*,* as I told you above in [regard to] the descendants of Noah and Ishmael and others like them.” Again R. Meyuḥas traces the reason for recounting Abraham’s relationship with Isaac to the lengthy interruption.[[27]](#footnote-27)

In five cases, R. Meyuḥas calls attention to information presented twice and separates the principal mention with the other, which is given for secondary reasons. Three examples follow:

1. The account in Genesis of Adam’s placement in the Garden of Eden appears twice: “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed” (Gen 2:8), and “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen 2:15). Commenting on the first verse, R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And there He put [*va-yasem sham*]’—it is a superfluous text because ‘and put him into the garden of Eden’ is stated below it (Gen 2:15). However, the text that relates to man’s creation mentions it briefly and elaborates on it below.” In R. Meyuḥas’s opinion, incidental to the account of the creation of man, the Bible mentions man’s placement in the Garden of Eden tersely and locally; the second mention one is the main and more detailed one.
2. In the account of Joseph’s reunion with his brothers, the Bible notes twice that Joseph identifies the brothers: “And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them […]” (Gen 42:7) and “And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not” (Gen 42:8). The latter reference seems superfluous and R. Meyuḥas comments on it as follows: “'‘And Joseph saw his brethren’—it is a superfluous text and because it has to say, ‘but they knew him not,’ it repeated it for this reason.” In R. Meyuḥas’s opinion, the first mention is the main one and the second one is literary, meant to emphasize the contrast between Joseph’s recognition of his brothers and their failure to reciprocate.
3. At the beginning of Exodus, the names of the offspring of Jacob who go down to Egypt are listed even though the list already appears in Genesis (46:8–27). Here R. Meyuḥas writes: “And these are the names’ [Exod 1:6]—these are superfluous texts; this already having been said in Portion Va-yigash and Portion Va-yeḥi. All that should have been written is ‘And Joseph died, and all his brethren’ (Exod 1:6) so that we should know that the enslavement began after all of them died. And since [the Bible] had to advise of their death, it also mentioned their names concisely.’ In R. Meyuḥas’s opinion, the list of the brothers in Genesis is the main one. In Exodus, incidental to the brothers’ death, the Bible saw fit briefly to mention their names again despite the redundancy.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In nine additional cases, R. Meyuḥas offers other explanations for the presence of superfluous text. Two examples follow:

1. Commenting on the account of Abraham and his family reaching Canaan, “[…] and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (Gen 12:5), R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘And into the land of Canaan they came—it is a superfluous text, like ‘And God blessed them; and God said unto them’ (Gen 1:28), and so with ‘unto the land that I will show thee’ (Gen 12:5). Since ‘they came unto Haran’ is written upon at the first departure (Gen 11:31), you need to be told here that [Abraham] reached the land of Canaan.” Ostensibly, the recurrence of the word ‘Canaan’ in the verse is superfluous (as is the dual mention of ‘God’ in the added verse that is cited as an example). Against the background of the verses that describe the departure of Teraḥ and his family in order to reach Canaan but stopped on the way, however, R. Meyuḥas reasons that the redundancy is not superfluous; instead, it is meant to distinguish between Teraḥ’s failure and Abraham’s success.
2. At the end of the passage that describes the princes’ sacrifices for the dedication of the tabernacle, the Biblical account tallies all the gifts made (Num 7:84–88). Here R. Meyuḥas writes: “‘All the oxen for the burnt-offering’—Although [the text] specifies each and every one for you, it repeats them inclusively and are superfluous texts” (Num 7:87). After all the gifts are described in detail, the tally appears to be superfluous, but R. Meyuḥas finds that it is ‘the way of Scripture’ to list the details and then go back and present the total.[[29]](#footnote-29)

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The examples presented above show that, in R. Meyuḥas’s opinion, superfluous text in biblical narrative only seems superfluous in certain cases. In some, R. Meyuḥas explains a superfluity by charging it to an accepted biblical stylistic phenomenon (examples q–s); in others, he explains that the text is by no means superfluous (examples t–aa). The question is how he would interpret the other 66 cases in which he describes text in biblical narrative as superfluous but does not explain why.

One possibility is that R. Meyuḥas sees these cases, like the others noted, as free of superfluity but does not go to the trouble of explaining in detail why the superfluous text was written in each case. Another possibility is that, in his view, some superfluous texts in biblical narrative are only seemingly superfluous and others are in fact superfluous, their sole purpose being to serve as anchors for midrashim.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Both possibilities offer a totally different perspective on R. Meyuḥas’s attitude toward the difference between the narrative parts of the Bible and the halakhic parts. According to the first possibility, there is a difference of principle between narrative and law: In narrative, one finds purpose and meaning in the superfluous text; in law, the superfluous text has no meaning per se; it appears only to as a peg for derash.

According to the second possibility, there is no difference of principle between narrative and law: superfluous text that has no meaning of its own and is meant solely as a ‘peg’ for rabbinical exegesis appears many times in both. In his commentaries on biblical narrative, however, R. Meyuḥas does not specify the exegesis derived from the superfluity whereas in his remarks on biblical law he acts stringently to provide these details. I tend to accept the first possibility, as I explain presently.

**7. R. Meyuḥas’s Goal in Writing His Commentary on the Torah**

Above I noted two differences in references to superfluous text in R. Meyuḥas’s commentaries on biblical narrative as against those on biblical law.

First, in nearly all of his remarks on biblical narrative (92.6% of the total) R. Meyuḥas does not specify rabbinical midrashim that are adduced from the superfluity. In his interpretations of biblical law, in contrast, he nearly always (in 94.6% of all cases) takes pains to explain in detail what the Sages learned from the superfluity and how superfluous text may serve as a basis for halakhic exegesis.

Second, in his comments on biblical narrative, R. Meyuḥas often (in 29.8% of all cases) suggests the reason for the superfluity at the simple verbal level (the peshat) of the biblical text. In biblical law, in contrast, he proposes no reason whatsoever for superfluity at the peshat level.

These differences appear to be interrelated and associated with R. Meyuḥas’s position on, and attitude toward, the various parts of the Torah:

R. Meyuḥas intended his commentary on biblical law to be a practical guide to the essentials of halakha for the observant Jew. Within this framework, he utilizes the superfluities that he finds and explains them as needed for halakhic exegesis. Given that his main goal in these passages is to present what amounts to a book of halakha, he does make the effort to explain the reasons for the superfluities at the literal peshat level and notes that, in his judgment, these superfluities may have no purpose at the peshat level other than their function as ‘pegs’ for midrashim.

R. Meyuḥas meant his commentary on biblical narrative to satisfy other exigencies—to explain difficult biblical texts and build bridges between them and the reader. In his commentary on these parts of the Torah, he does not settle for presenting the superfluities as ‘pegs’ for rabbinical midrashim only; instead, he strives to explain the superfluous texts in a way that will appease readers who find the difficult verses puzzling.

The distinction between R. Meyuḥas’s comments on the narrative parts of the Torah and those on the halakhic parts is manifested in additional fields. R. Meyuḥas notes this explicitly in an important methodological statement in his commentary on the beginning of Exod 12: “Thus far, we have had to reconcile the texts in accordance with their literal meaning; from here on we must seek exegetic meaning in accordance with the teachings given to Moses at Sinai” (Exod 12:2). This remark rests at the point of transition between the narrative and the halakhic sections of the Torah, given that Exod 12 is the first chapter in the Torah that deals entirely with law and not with narrative. R. Meyuḥas’s comment indicates a clear awareness of the difference of principle between the narrative passages and the halakhic ones.

R. Meyuḥas’s strength as an interpreter of peshat emerges most saliently in the narrative segments of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus 1–11, and Numbers 22–24 *inter alia*), in which he offers abundant peshat interpretations and few at the level of derash. The few midrashim mentioned in these portions appear in addition to peshat interpretations, yielding a ‘double meaning.’ R. Meyuḥas’s approach to these segments at the level of principle is manifested in methodological statements such as “[…]I have interpreted all of this in accordance with the literal level of Scripture. In many aggadic midrashim and in another topic, I need to reconcile the text in its literal manner” (Gen 49:27).

In the halakhic parts of the Torah, in contrast, R. Meyuḥas offers much less peshat interpretation and tends to adhere to derash. In these passages, R. Meyuḥas usually presents halakhic midrashim associated with the explicit verse.

I find no similar division between the narrative and halakhic parts of the Torah in Byzantine commentaries that predated R. Meyuḥas (R. Tuvia b. Eliezer [*Leqaḥ Tov*], R. Shmuel Rushaina, R. Menaḥem b. Shlomo [*Sekhel Tov*]), or in Rashi’s commentaries on the Torah.[[31]](#footnote-31)

1. For a survey of research on his place and time and to determine that the work discussed was written in the middle of the thirteenth century, see Jonathan Jacobs, “Rabbi Meyuḥas ben Elijah: His Geographical Provenance, Works, and Chronology,” *Review des études Juives* (forthcoming). His commentary on the Torah has survived in only one manuscript: The British Library London England Add. 19970 (F5015). His commentary on Genesis was printed by Albert William Greenup and Charles Henry Titterton, London 1909; on Exodus by Albert William Greenup, Budapest, 1929; on Leviticus twice, by Michael Katz, New York 1996, and by Yitzchak Har-Shoshanim, Benei Brak 2005; on Numbers by Shlomo Freilich, Jerusalem 1977; and on Deuteronomy by Michael Katz, Jerusalem 1968. I intend soon to publish a new critical edition of his commentaries on Genesis and Exodus. The quotations from R. Meyuḥas in this article accord with the contents of the manuscript; the punctuation marks and references to verses are mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Several researchers devote attention to biblical literary principles generally and to R. Meyuḥas’s use of *derekh ha-miqra* in particular, but without describing and classifying them precisely. See Michael Katz, “Introduction,” in *Commentary on Deuteronomy, Rabbenu Meyuḥas ben Elijah*, ed. Michael Katz (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1968): 23 [Hebrew]; Eliezer Schlossberg, “Studies in the Exegetical Methodology of Rabbi Meyuḥas ben Eliyahu,” *Megadim* 23 (1995): 89–90, 93–95 [Hebrew]; Eliezer Schlossberg, “Dictionary Rules in Rabbi Meyuḥas ben Eliyahu Commentaries to the Bible,” *Sinai* 115 (1995): 42–56 [Hebrew]; Gershon Brin, “Commentary on Leviticus by Rabbi Meyuḥas ben Eliyahu,” *Sinai* 140 (2007): 127–128 [Hebrew]; Gershon Brin, “The Usage of R. Meyuḥas son of R. Eliyahu of the Forms of the Usage of the Bible,” *Beit Mikra* 58 (2013): 117–129. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. There are, however, places where the Sages lay down biblical literary principles, as in “The Torah spoke in the language of people” (b. Bava Meṣia 31b) and “Scripture spoke in the present” (m. Bava Qama 5:7) *inter alia.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The data presented below are based on systematic study of the commentators and on searches conducted with the help of the Responsa Project and the Miqra’ot Gedolot Haketer site. Importantly, even commentators who mention the expression *derekh ha-miqra* make numerous additional refererences to biblical literary principles without using this particular wording. (See references in footnotes below.) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gen 18:3, 19:24, 31:13; 35:27, Exod 14:28, 15:5, 26:3; and four additional locations in his commentary on the Prophets and the Writings: Jer 6:19, 51:12; Hosea 11:2; Dan 10:8. In several studies, partial lists of Rashi’s interpretive principles appear without any sorting or typology: Menahem Brayer, “Principles and Definitions in Rashi’s Commentary,” in *Rashi—His Teaching and Personality*, ed. Simon Federbush (New York: Hadar Publishing, 1958), 113–146 [Hebrew]; Ezra Zion Melamed, *Bible Commentators* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 415–419 [Hebrew]. For semantic principles in his commentaries, see Jair Haas, “Rashi’s Criticism of Maḥberet Menaḥem,” in *Zer Rimonim: Studies in Biblical Literature and Jewish Exegesis Presented to Professor Rimon Kasher,* eds. Michael Avioz, Elie Assis, Yael Shemesh (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 449–463 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Genesis, Long Commentary 6:6, 11:32; Exodus, Short Commentary 12:14; Num 7:13, 8:18, 10:29; 18:3, and six places in his commentary on the Prophets and Writings: Is 56:6, Ps 74:16; Prov 8:32, Job 5:19; Song 1:2; Eccl 12:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gen 1:1, 1:14, 18:5, 24:25, 33:18; 49:3; Exod 23:10–11, Deut 9:25, 32:23. On darkhe ha-miqra’ot in the commentaries of R. Samuel ben Meir, see Elazar Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion—Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 135–139 [Hebrew]; Meir I. Lockshin, *Rashbam on the Torah* (Jerusalem: Horev Press, 2009), 18–20 [Hebrew]. It should be borne in mind that R. Samuel b. Meir’s commentary neither reached Byzantium nor was accessible to R. Meyuḥas. On the small dissemination of his commentary and possible reasons for it, see Jonathan Jacobs, “Why was Rashbam’s Commentary Not Widely Disseminated?—A Re-Examination,” *Beit Mikra* 62 (2017): 41–79 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At Gen 1:1 and once more with the expression *derekh ha-pasuq, ‘*the way of the verse’ (Deut 29:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gen 21:29, 30:21, 35:28, 37:24; 49:27; Exod 14:10. On the Biblical principles in the ancient Byzantine exegesis of Reuel and his friends (with no mention of *derekh ha-miqra*), see Gershon Brin, *Reuel and His Friends: Jewish Byzantine Exegetes from around the Tenth Century C.E.* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2012), 45–49 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Fifty-nine times in Genesis, 33 in Exodus, 8 in Leviticus, 23 in Numbers, and 18 in Deuteronomy. It also appears ten times in his commentary on Job and six times in his commentary on Chronicles. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. An example of a ‘superfluous letter’: On Jacob’s words to Joseph—“Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee, and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee […]” (Gen 49:25, here and hereafter from *The Complete Hebrew Bible* as found at <https://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0.htm>)—R. Meyuḥas writes: *me-’el ’avikha* [Even by the God of thy father]—the *mem* is superfluous, and also in *vi-v’arekhekha* [shall bless thee] the *vav* is superfluous, as it also is in *ve-ya‘azrekha* [who shall help thee], and these are among the superfluous letters.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In fact, the number of ‘superfluous texts’ that R. Meyuḥas points out is larger because in some cases he presents further examples from elsewhere in the Bible alongside the verse being interpreted. In his commentary on Job, he mentions ‘superfluous text’ only once (verse 2:1) and in that on Chronicles he does so four times (I Chron 4:42, 8:8, 29:26; II Chron 3:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. R. Meyuḥas uses the expression ‘and many like them’ or ‘and many such’ in reference to ‘superfluous text’ in his preface to the commentary and in his remarks on Gen 2:4, 19:23; Exod 1:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Additional mentions of ‘the way of Scripture’ in the context of ‘superfluous text’: Exod 14:11, 33:21, 38:22; Num 12:2, 16:2, 16:16; 32:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Here is the full list of unexplained ‘superfluous texts’: Gen 1:7, 1:28, 1:29, 1:30, 2:4, 4:2, 4:18, 9:11, 14:23, 17:5, 19:4, 21:1, 21:3, 21:5, 21:8, 21:10, 22:7, 24:4, 25:7, 25:16, 25:20, 26:28, 27:1, 27:42, 29:10, 29:30, 30:20, 31:53, 32:12, 37:2, 44:10, 49:25, 49:28; Exod 1:5, 1:16, 7:29, 10:8; Num 7:84, 10:32, 22:33, 26:55, 26:60. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Additional examples of explaining superfluity in the biblical narrative: Gen 3:24, 11:30; 14:24, 37:8, 41:10, 46:8; Exod 11:3, 38:22; Num 7:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The reference, apparently, is to Dan. 10:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See also R. Meyuḥas’s comments on Exod 21:31, Lev. 3:7, 4:12, 4:20, 4:25, 5:2, 5:6 (twice), 5:8, 15:12; Num 6:7, 15:5, 19:8, 19:14, 19:16, 19:20; Deut 14:6, 14:24, 16:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See also his commentaries on Exod 28:17 and Lev. 3:2 (beginning with *rosh*), 7:28, 19:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In five of the cases, R. Meyuḥas proposes a homiletic (aggadic) midrash. In addition to the two examples above, see Gen 22:9; Exod 15:1; Num 13:22. In two cases, he offers a halakhic midrash; see Gen 37:35; Num 7:1. In another case of specifying the midrash, see his commentary on II Chron. 3:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. R. Meyuḥas’s commentaries on Exod 27:19, 28:17; Num 10:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Here is the full list of cases in which R. Meyuḥas presents superfluous text and accompanies it with the halakhic exegesis that flows from it: Exod 12:10, 12:22, 12:45, 21:15, 21:25, 21:28 (twice), 21:31, 29:34, 35:3; Lev 2:1, 3:2 (twice), 3:7, 4:12, 4:20, 4:22, 4:25, 5:2, 5:6 (twice), 5:8, 5:11, 6:3, 7:15, 7:18, 10:6, 11:8, 12:4, 13:11, 14:21, 15:12, 16:3, 19:24, 20:27, 23:22; Num 6:7, 7:17, 7:78, 15:5, 19:8, 19:14, 19:16, 19:19, 19:20, 28:8, 28:23; Deut 14:6, 14:24, 16:7, 16:15, 17:6, 24:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Admittedly, it should be noted that all examples of ‘superfluous text’ in the preface are harvested from the field of biblical narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. R. Meyuḥas uses similar expressions to explain superfluous text in biblical law: “It is superfluous text **and** is therefore stated to teach an analogy” (Exod 12:45); ‘It is a superfluous text […] **meant only** to teach” (Exod 21:28); “And all three are superfluous […] **and are stated for exegesis”** (Lev. 3:2); “And its exegesis is a superfluous text […] **but** **only** for exegesis” (Num 15:5), etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In other words, R. Meyuḥas explains the ‘way of Scripture’ of superfluous text in biblical narrative with the help of other ‘ways of Scripture.’ In some cases, specified below, R. Meyuḥas explicitly uses the phrase ‘way of Scripture’ not as part of the definition of the superfluous text itself but to define other biblical phenomena that explain the superfluity at hand. See, for example, his remarks on Gen 6:9, 25:12, 25:19, 28:6–8; Exod 25:21, 27:19; Num 7:2, 16:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For similar treatment, see his commentaries on Gen 19:23, Gen 29:15, and Exod 15:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For two additional cases, see his commentary on Lev 16:2 and Num 7:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See also Gen 14:3 and Exod 11:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. One may find additional rationales for ‘superfluous text’ in R. Meyuḥas’s commentaries on Gen 1:28, 28:6–8, 31:35; Exod 12:51; Num 13:22, 16:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Support for the second possibility may be summoned from the seven cases in which R. Meyuḥas specifies a midrash adduced from a superfluous text in biblical narrative; see examples l and n above and Note 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. On the assumption that no difference of principle between the narrative and the halakhic portions of the Torah can be found in Rashi’s and Rashbam’s commentaries (in contrast to those of Bekhor Shor), see Jonathan Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro Hadar Lo—R. Joseph Bekhor Shor between Continuity and Innovation* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2017), 18–21 [Hebrew]. Here is the place to recall that Ibn Ezra also made several separate references to the existence of a difference of principle between narrative and law in the Torah. Although one may find exceptions to this rule, Ibn Ezra is generally true to his statement. See, for example, Miriam Sklarz, “Contending with the Disparity between *Peshat* and *Derash*: Nachmanides in the Footsteps of Ibn Ezra,” *Shnaton* 22 (2013): 191 [Hebrew]. I hope to elaborate elsewhere on the relation between R. Meyuḥas’s commentaries on the Torah and Ibn Ezra’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)