Abstract

Chapter One – Introduction

The topic of this thesis is a midrash entitled *Shir HaShirim Zuttah*. The text was available only as a handwritten manuscript until the end of the nineteenth century when it was first printed. Two additional printed editions, also copied from the original manuscript, were published in the same year. These three editions constitute the principal studies on *Shir HaShirim Zuttah* to date.

In 1894, Solomon Buber published an edition of midrashim for four out of the five scrolls (Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations and Ecclesiastes). The scrolls were hand copied for Buber at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, Italy. Buber named this collection *Midrash Zuttah*, to distinguish them from *Midrash Rabbah*. In his introduction, Buber acknowledges employing editorial practices identical to those applied in his previous editions of midrashim: he proofread the manuscript, corrected spelling and grammatical errors, composed an introduction, and wrote commentary and footnotes. The first midrash in *Midrash Zuttah* is *Shir HaShirim Zuttah*. Buber’s edition was reprinted numerous times, including in recent years.

Between 1894-1896, Solomon Schechter published a serialized edition of the handwritten original manuscript of the midrash on *Shir HaShirim* in the Jewish Quarterly Review. In 1896, the segments were consolidated and published in book form. In his edition, which he named *Agaddat Shir HaShirim*, Schechter included notes (in English), corrections and cross references (parallels). Schechter also attempted to date the composition of the original text, and mentions an additional manuscript, also from Parma.

During 1895 and 1896, Schechter published two articles in which he fervently criticized Buber’s *Midrash Zuttah*, particularly *Shir HaShirim Zuttah* from which he drew examples to support his arguments. While Schechter’s claims were scholastically pertinent, insolent undertones in both articles suggested a personal attack on Buber. In a letter, which I discovered in the Buber Archive at the National Library of Israel, Buber responds to Schechter’s contentions; however, considering that the identity of the addressee is unknown, it is not clear whether Schechter received it.

In 1977, Rabinowitz published an article in which he cites an additional manuscript of the midrash: six pages from the St. Petersburg Genizah, approximately one third of the entire midrash. He offers alternative versions to the Parma manuscripts, citing an additional manuscript of the midrash located at the New York Theological Seminary, adding commentary, cross references and a bibliography of relevant studies.

In 1990, Lerner published an article containing four sections from a fourth manuscript, the Cambridge manuscript, including commentary, elucidations and

cross references.

These are the existing editions of the midrash. I was unable to locate studies focusing on the midrash in its entirety, only several references in in encyclopedias and introductory books to the world of Midrash. There are studies addressing aspects of the *Shir HaShirim* midrash, however, these do not relate to the text itself.

To date, and to the best of my knowledge, there is no extensive study on *Shir*

*HaShirim Zuttah*. The existing editions address portions of the midrash, and do not comply with contemporary research standards. This thesis offers an unprecedented, comprehensive study of the midrash in its entirety (using Buber’s *Shir*

*HaShirim Zuttah*).

Like Canticles, the midrash contains eight chapters. *Parashah* *alef* is exceptionally long, constituting half of the midrash, while the other *parashot* are relatively short (with several longer sections); the *simanim* vary in length – *siman alef* and *siman tet”vav* are lengthy, accounting for half of the text’s volume. S*imanim* *alef* and *tet”vav* arealso distinctively homiletical (*darshani’im*), as opposed to the other interpretative simanim (*parshani’im*).

To reveal the midrash’s original homiletical, relatively concise form, as well as meanings ‘hidden’ beneath textual layering, I propose extracting *simanim* *alef* and *tet”vav* from the text. Facilitating interpretation of most *Shir HaShirim* verses in chronological order, while divulging their characteristics and themes, this extraction sustains the premise that these *simanim* are not part of the original midrash. Therefore, this study investigates the midrash without *simanim* *alef* and *tet”vav*, employing an edition from which they are omitted (see appendix 1 and 2 for original version).

Chapter Two – Editions

Chapter Two focuses on edited versions of the midrash. I offer a complete edition of the text, including the manuscripts presently available: two from Parma, one from St. Petersburg, the Cambridge edition, and a hitherto published version of the manuscript located at the New York Theological Seminary (mentioned by Rabinowitz).

I have devised a synoptic version of the text in which the editions are color coded, and set line under line. Although extensive, this layout provides readers with a comprehensive view of the midrash. I did not rely on mechanical reproductions of the manuscripts, but rather copied them. The editions are labelled and appear in the following in order: *nun*=New York, Theological Seminary 5043 (1681 RAB); *pei*2= Parma, Palatina 1/2851, catalogue De Rossi 616; *pei*1=Parma, Palatina 5/2342, catalogue De Rossi 541; Genizah portions: *kuf*=Cambridge, University T-S, C 1.62;

*samekh*=St. Petersburg, the Russian State Library, Antonin Collection 927-928.

At the head of each *parasha*, I noted the editions it includes (page numbers are indicated in manuscripts *nun*, *pei*1, and *pei*2; in manuscripts *kuf* and *samekh*, I refer to Rabinowitz and Lerner’s editions, respectively). The colors used to mark the manuscripts in each edition are as follows: nun-black; *pei*2-green; *pei*1-red; *kuf*-blue; *samekh*-light blue.

My reconstruction of the midrash adheres to the origin sources; however, minor changes were made for more accessible reading, including dividing the text into *simanim*; adding quotation marks at the beginning and end of each verse; adding references to Bible verses; completing partial verse citations; and marking obscure vocabulary with asterisks. In instances where a paragraph appears in only one source text before or after the rest, I relocated it to apply to all the manuscripts, coloring it purple. Footnotes regarding technical issues in the manuscripts appear at the bottom of each page.

Four later additions to the midrash are not included in the manuscript: 1-2. *Simanim* *alef,alef*; *alef*; and *tet.* 3. An addition unique to *pei2*, preceding *simanim* *dalet and tet* copied from *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*; and 4. the section entitled *Agaddot Aylu Niftikhu Mi’tokho* that appears at the end of manuscripts *nun* and *pei*2, and is not part of the midrash sequence. (See appendix 3 and 4).

Chapter Three – the Axes

The third chapter focuses on the midrash’s content and orientations. Like most *Shir HaShirim* midrashim, it does not read the text exegetically, but rather allegorically. Numerous themes are intertwined throughout the midrash. To examine them individually, I separated the various traditions, and identified the midrashim carrying a specific theme. I refer to these themes as axes, which I examined first in isolation, and then together to reveal the full extent of the midrash’s content and the meanings it communicates.

I discovered four axes in the midrash:

1. The historical axis/the ‘past’ axis. This is one of two prominent axes. It deals with key events in biblical history from its beginning (the creation), to its end (Koresh, the Persian king). In my opinion, this is an attempt to encompass biblical history, motivated by a particular objective.
2. The eschatological axis/the ‘future’ axis. As the second prominent axis, the eschatological axis is the opposite of the historical, ‘past’ axis in that it is concerned with the future expected to come at the end of days. As in other *Shir HaShirim* midrashim, these axes underscore the emphasis in this midrash on the exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, the tabernacle and temple, and future redemption.
3. The ‘present’ axis. This axis is unique to this midrash in that it links the historical and eschatological axes to constitute a past-present-future sequence. The ‘present’ axis focuses on the history of the Second Temple and the period following its destruction, Torah and Mitzvot, the people of Israel, life amongst gentiles, reflections on the nature of man, and practical guidelines.
4. The mystical axis. This is the shortest axis – an attribute which, in my opinion, is not coincidental considering that this is not a principle topic in the midrash, and that the text’s key messages are conveyed through the historical axes. (I assume, however, that if analyzed, I will find that this axis contains messages similar to those in the historical axes).

Analysis of the axes shows that the principle themes are embedded in the ‘present’ axis. This axis includes a distinct order for the people of Israel to accept the situation in which they are governed by gentiles, not to revolt against them, and to avoid attempts to expedite the coming of the end of days by taking action, which, as they know from past experiences, may exacerbate the situation. They must accept the present circumstance as justified punishment from above. Still, the midrash also encourages Israel by stating that it is the best of nations, and worthy in the eyes of God who therefore, will not allow its annihilation by other nations, and by stressing the value of studying and abiding by the Torah.

Notwithstanding directives for passivity, the midrash addresses the expectation for redemption. The eschatological axis includes a powerful description of events in the future: redemption, the world to come, the Messiah and Elijah, the resurrection of the dead, Gog and Magog, the punishments that will be inflicted upon the kingdoms and in turn, their acceptance of God and Israel, the assembling of the diasporas, the return of the divine spirit (*Sh’hina*), and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple. While the message is that these promises will be kept, manifest in future events, it is at the same time clear that their realization is indeterminately deferred.

Still, the midrash provides assurances for these prospects. By pointing (on the historical axis) to the manifestations of the providence bestowed upon the chosen people of Israel such as ancestral merit, and historical events verifying the existence of a plan and leader, the midrash stresses that history is not arbitrary, but rather preconceived to accommodate God’s will.

In the midrash, emphases on the enslavement in Egypt, the exodus from Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea function as proof that having experienced hardships in the past from which they were redeemed by God, the people of Israel will be redeemed again in the future. This concept, according to which the exodus from Egypt is a paradigm for future redemption, is discernable in the Sages, and is accentuated repeatedly in the midrash.

The midrash means to educate the people of Israel for a specific way of life by illustrating the bitter consequences of those they should avoid. However, here too, these severe messages are mitigated by reassurances regarding the present, and expressions of hope for the future.

Analysis of the axes elicits the image of the editor, revealing in turn, that while this midrash is interpretative, he applied methods like those employed by homiletical editors of Midrash. The editor not only compiled midrashim on verses from *Shir HaShirim*, but processed and edited the material to comply with his objectives and the messages he wanted to communicate. Hence, the editor plays a decisive role in the midrash, and should not be disregarded.

Chapter Four – Literary Forms

Chapter Four deals with the three prominent literary forms in the midrash: ptirot, legends and stories:

1. *Ptirot*: *Ptirot* are the most common homiletical form in the midrash (albeit the root *pt”r* does not appear). The *ptirot* in my edition are indicated with one of two titles: *milot ptira* or *mishpatei ptira*. I found that the midrash contains an abundance of *ptirot* (including those without these identifying titles). My analysis indicates that *ptira* words in this midrash are comparable to those in Tannaitic literature, as opposed to those in Amoraic literature. While this may support assumptions that the midrash was written during the Tannaitic period, or in the period in which Tannaitic texts were edited, it is also possible that it is a later text, ‘disguised’ as an earlier, Tannaitic text.

1. Legends: The midrash includes six legends, four of which appear in *parasha* *alef*. Based on the assumption that each proverb and moral constitute an independent unit, rather than parts of the entire text, I isolated them from surrounding midrashim, and analyzed each one separately. Only later, did I address their location within the text. The legends are divided according to my modified line division and format, with the name of the manuscript in which they appear indicated at the top, while alternative versions are indicated at the bottom (as a ‘diplomatic’ edition, with N indicating ‘internal version’). I analyzed each proverb and moral on various levels including the meanings of words, linkages between words, literary forms, the reality reflected in the texts, parallels in the Sages (if existing), the contexts in which they are situated, their orientations, and messages.

Although regarded as constituting *Legends of Kings*, I propose that these legends merely seem so, and that in fact, they are unlike the *Legends of Kings* written in the classic form typical of the Sage literature. While in the classic form, the proverb and moral must be precisely compatible, in this midrash there are discrepancies between the two, particularly in instances in which the moral is extremely short (sometimes a mere citation of the verse).

It appears that the editor puts more emphasis on meaning than on form, which he appears to view as less obligating. While the structure and formulaic guidelines are not maintained, the meanings are communicated effectively – the leniency exercised in terms of form does not entail a leniency in terms of content. Thus, it can be concluded that this midrash was written after classic Sage midrashim, at a time when compliance with strict frameworks was moderated by the temporal distancing from conventional terms and devices.

1. Stories. There are four stories in the midrash, two of which are part of a single edited portion that includes three additional parts (of an ‘extended *mikrah* story’). In my analysis, I employed the methodology applied to the legends. Notable for its relatively late authorship (as opposed to earlier versions), evidenced in its modified form, the message in first story (*Sha’aray Nikanor*) is easily discernable. The second story (*Bor Hatamra*) remains obscure in that it is difficult to identify its intentions and concealed significances (it does not include cross references). The third and fourth stories are part of a compilation of five that concludes the midrash. This compilation is edited, and conveys a unified message throughout except for a “surprise ending” that concludes the entire midrash with a sharp, severe message. In this portion of the text, there is no diminution, either in form or in content, and the stories seem compatible with those in ancient and classic midrash.

Two literary forms do not exist in the midrash:

1. *Ptikhtaot* (epigraphs): I assume *ptikhtaot* are not employed in this midrash due to stylistic modifications over time. Given that in ancient midrashim guidelines for the inclusion of this device were strict, their absence in this midrash is yet another indication of its later composition date.
2. *Siyum b’Davar Tov* (end with a positive message): It appears to me that the editor intended to maintain the effect of the severe message at the end of the stories, and therefore relinquished the traditional *Siyum b’Davar Tov*. This too points to the later date of the midrash in which conventions are not binding, and the editor can act as he sees fit.

Chapter Five – When and Where the Midrash was Edited

Several scholars have addressed the dating of the edition; however, it seems that this topic requires further inquiry considering that studies so far have dealt with the text including the two lengthy *simanim* – *alef, alef*; *alef*; and *tet*. As mentioned, it is my belief that these *simanim* were not part of the original text, and therefore obstructed these scholars’ view of the midrash as it was intended, leading them in turn, to inaccurate conclusions. Some scholars argued that this was a Tannaitic text; while others claimed that it was a *Midrash Tanhuma*; but, based on what I demonstrate in this chapter, both claims are not feasible. Regarding the place in which the midrash was edited, scholars agree that it was in Eretz Israel.

This chapter includes two sections that can help determine the date of authorship:

1. *Shemot HaĤakhamim* (the names of the wise). Most of the names are, or can be, considered Tannaitic; however, there are also names unrecognized in the Sage literature. This suggests that to render his later text valuable and valid, the editor not only employed Tannaitic literary features, but also included the greatest and most popular Tannaitic scholars in the *Shemot HaĤakhamim*. The less familiar names, however, may glimpse the possibility that the text is dated even further from the Tannaitic period, because only from such a distance in time can it be disrupted and include fictitious names without consequence.
2. Tannaitic Sources. This section includes an interesting discovery that can link the midrash to the period in which Arabic was the commonly spoken language. Our midrash is written entirely in Hebrew, as opposed to midrashim in the Sage literature that contain some Aramaic and Greek words. The transition from Hebrew and Aramaic, to Hebrew alone is characteristic of later midrashim, written after the Islamic conquest of Eretz Israel; therefore, it seems that the editing of the midrash can be dated in the Early Islamic era (634-1099AD). During this time, many midrashim were authored in Eretz Israel. Resembling Amoraic midrashim written in the Byzantine era, both in content and in form, they exemplify how stylistic imitation can hinder upon attempts to determine the time and place of authorship.

I endeavored to examine the possibility of situating the midrash within a more limited time frame in this era. From analysis of the legends and stories, I found that the midrash was not influenced by the Babylonian Talmud, and that its conventions are unique to Eretz Israel. Scholars agree that during the ninth century, a transition from Eretz Israel to Babylonian traditions occurred, a process that accelerated during the tenth century. Accordingly, our midrash can be dated no later than the beginning of the tenth century, before the dissemination of Babylonian influences in Eretz Israel.

It is possible, although only hypothetically, to narrow this range further. The Early Islamic era in Eretz Israel is divided into three parts: from the conquest to the end of the Umayyad Caliphate (634-750AD); the Abbasid Caliphate (750-969AD); and the Fatimid Caliphate (969-1099AD). The first period was the most advantageous for the Jews in Eretz Israel, particularly in terms of their freedom for spiritual creativity.

It may be that the key message in our midrash, the call for passivity, constituted a response to historical events. At the end of the Byzantine era, the Persians conquered Eretz Israel, who were replaced by the Byzantines for a short period, then followed by the Islamic conquest. These vicissitudes evoked Messianic aspirations amongst the Jews. In addition, because the Jews cooperated with the Persians in acting against the Christians, with the return of Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, they were retaliated against, and many were slaughtered. It is possible that these harrowing events instigated the transition from a perception of reality as heralding redemption and motivating a proactive orientation, to a perception in which redemption is deferred to an unknown time in the far future. From this viewpoint, our midrash can be aligned, in various ways, with both ancient and later midrashim; an indication of its composition during a transitional period, when old conventions had not yet disappeared and the new had not yet spread. If so, in my opinion the midrash can be dated sometime during the Islamic Conquest. But again, this is only an assumption.

There is no way of knowing why the midrash disappeared and why it was not printed until the end of the nineteenth century. Still, one should remember that many midrashim disappeared, and as opposed to them, this midrash was eventually published. Buber and Schechter redeemed this forgotten midrash; and Rabinowitz and Lerner added commentary that contributed to its recognition. This thesis does not address all the topics warranting investigation regarding this midrash; it constitutes a base-study of sorts, and it is my hope that it will contribute to the proliferation of the Sage literature of legends.

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