Pp. 2-3

In this article, we will attempt to understand what prompted the homiletical exegetes throughout the generations to reconstruct Aaron’s image, blatantly ignoring his ritual role in the realms of sacrifices, purity and impurity, presenting him as figure with a developed moral sense who establishes peace and maintains an exemplary fraternal relationship with his younger brother, who was appointed to a more senior position that he was.

The scholarship has dealt extensively with the evolving development of biblical figures in post-biblical literature and Rabbinic literature, in an attempt to deal with three key questions:

1. What causes those who reinterpret the biblical narrative to deviate from the description before them, to add or omit details, and to sometimes even distort the text’s depiction.

2. To which target audience did the authors of these midrashim direct their words? Did they assume that their audience was familiar with the biblical narrative and would appreciate the midrash’s embellishment, or was the intent to replace the biblical narrative and to mold the historical memory such that it deviated from what had actually transpired?

3. Were the authors of these traditions aware of earlier traditions, and reacting to their predecessors’ interpretations, or did each author go back to the original biblical narrative, ignoring the way in which his predecessor dealt with it, molding it to suit his purposes?

The answers to these questions are obviously interdependent, and there is no definitive answer to any of them. The answers vary in accordance with the particular corpus, and even within the same corpus one can differentiate between exegetical thrusts and didactic educational thrusts, different target audiences, and between intertextual interpretations and pure, independent interpretations. Nonetheless, it would appear that it is possible to identify the dominant characteristics of a given corpus, as we will glimpse below.

This article adopts the historicist approach, according to which the differences in the authors of the traditions’ treatment of the figures derives primarily from their desire to use them as vehicles for teaching lessons to their contemporary audience. Accordingly, we will assume the target audience of the midrashim to be the general public, and that the midrashim do not contain an internal midrashic dialogue which tries to clarify the biblical narrative in depth. In terms of the third question, we will suggest a methodology which partially bridges the gap between the historicist and intertextual approaches. My premise is that there are a number of biblical figures who serve as paradigms for a certain quality which is already innate to the biblical description of that figue. This paradigm is common to all of the traditions relating to that figure. The variable is the way that the figure representing that paradigm is assessed. For example, Hezekiah represents a messianic paradigm. Therefore, the premise that must inform any analysis of the traditions relating to him is that the authors of these traditions use them to express their support for, or opposition to, various elements relating to messianism. Korah serves as a paradigm of negative opposition to priestly leadership. Therefore, the premise that must inform any analysis of the traditions that develop his image is that choosing him to represent the opposition reflects the authors’ opposition to the instigators of opposition to the leadership. The content of the objections attributed to him change in accordance with each era’s acutely controversial topics. There are many further examples of this. On the one hand, this approach is intertextual, insofar as it asserts a relationship between the treatment of a particular trait of the figure found in any of the traditions. On the other hand, it is historicist, as it asserts that each author will deal with the paradigm in accordance with his time period, and that he is only accountable to earlier traditions in terms of the nature of the paradigm of the figure, but not in terms of the ways in which he was developed in those traditions.

P. 6

It follows from this brief survey, that the basis for understanding the traditions concerning Aaron, for analyzing their thrusts, and for deriving the lesson and messages which they contain, is familiarity with the social and religious status of the priesthood and its leadership. The traditions concerning Aaron ostensibly disguises their authors’ view with respect to this class’s roles, its place relative to people in other positions, or their desire to abolish it. We will, therefore, present a brief historical survey of changes which took place in this class over the generations, from the end of the Second Temple period through the Talmudic period, as a basis for an analysis of the traditions relating to Aaron.

Pp. 6-8

**The changing status of the priesthood in the Second Temple period, and in the periods of the Mishna and Talmud**

In the beginning of the Second Temple period, with the return of the Babylonian exiles to the Land of Israel, the prophets of the Second Temple period and the spiritual leadership work hard to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple and to take an active role in its rite. Similarly, it was also necessary to reestablish the status of the priests, whose role was perceived as primarily revolving around the Temple rite, and to see to it that they were supported. The spiritual leadership had to engage in a broad public relations campaign lauding the Temple and the priests, as it was necessary to overcome the memory forged in the prophets’ reproach in which they expressed disgust for the Temple rite, denounced the priests’ behavior, and were excessive in their description of the depravity of their class.

The priests’ status gradually improves as the Temple becomes the religious and social core of the renewed community, a few generations after the return to Zion. One can infer the gradual strengthening of their status, and the early stages of public support for them, from the description by Simeon Ben Sira, who wrote a song of praise about the priesthood, led by the admired priest, Simon the Righteous. In this period, the priests not only served as the rite’s mediators, they also assumed distinguished leadership roles in the field of spiritual administration and leadership. The zenith of this trend is the religious revolution brought about by the patriarch of the Hasmonean dynasty, the High Priest Mattathias, who bequeathed military, national and religious leadership roles to his five sons.

This class’s meteoritic rise, and the prestige that accompanied it, led to a power struggle and to wealthy and influential people among the social and religious classes taking control of the appointments to priestly leadership positions. Control of priestly leadership by the wealthy, a deviation from the traditional succession of this role, led to incidents of corruption and defilement, a religious revolution led by the Sadducee priests, social strife which cast a heavy shadow over the priesthood of the end of the Second Temple period, serious charges concerning its motives and doubts as to the purity of its intentions regarding the Temple rite.

in the wake of the Second Temple’s destruction, the status which the priests enjoyed throughout the Temple period – as a result of their role as the core of the religious rite – diminishes in the absence of a Temple. The priests, as representatives of the religious leadership, fight to retain their status in the spiritual leadership of the community, which serves as a replacement for the Temple rite, and even seek to continue to enjoy the privileges of public servants. The Sages’ dissatisfaction with the priests’ actions dating back to the Second Temple period, led to their opposition to continued religious leadership that was based on pedigree. They pointed to scholarship and ethical character as a replacement for the criteria of pedigree as a parameter of religious leadership. The beginning of the period of the Mishna is, therefore, characterized by an ongoing tension between the status of the Sages and that of the priesthood in terms of their supremacy concerning religious leadership. To be more precise, it is a tension between leadership by virtue of pedigree and leadership by virtue of ethics and scholarship. We can infer the Sages’ victory in this battle over the religious leadership from the written heritage which we possess, which describes a dominant leadership of the Sages in the Land of Israel. However, it is also possible to infer from it, and from external sources, the continued existence of a parallel priestly class, which repeatedly sought to attain influence in the realm of social-religious leadership. The degree of the priests’ involvement in the continuation of the spiritual leadership during the generations lacking a Temple is subject to scholarly debate. There are those who demonstrate increased involvement and argue that the priests continued to fill key positions in the Israeli leadership during the period of the Mishna and Talmud, in contrast to those who argue that the spiritual leadership remained the exclusive domain of Torah scholars.

The nature of the social dynamic which developed between the scholars and the priests during the end of the second Temple period and the period of the Mishna and Talmud is also subject to scholarly debate. Whereas classical scholarship tended to depict a hostile relationship between the classes, modern scholarship tends to doubt the comprehensiveness of this description, and points to ongoing manifestations of cooperation between the two groups.

According to the historical outline presented in this brief survey:

How will Aaron’ image be dealt with in the Pharisaic traditions of the Second Temple period, assuming that it serves as a reflection of the contemporary corrupt priesthood whose representatives appear in the Pharisaic Halachah?

What would be the meaning of the development of the traditions dealing with Aaron in the wake of the Temple’s destruction, at the time when the role of the priests was ostensibly shrinking, along with the dramatic change in their status?

Will these traditions be capable of enlightening us regarding the question of the priestly class’s involvement in leadership roles in the wake of the Temple’s destruction?

What would be the contribution of the traditions dealing with Aaron to an understanding of the social dynamic which developed between the outgoing and incoming classes?

p. 13

And we will clarify the priestly paradigm inserted into his image.

p. 20

According to Hammer’s approach, what would be the meaning of the paradigm inserted into Aaron’s image in works composed in the wake of the Temple’s destruction? Does it continue to serve as a veiled criticism of the priests, despite the fact that the central leadership was now in the hands of the Sages? On the other hand, how would Bamberger account for the continued adherence to Aaron the priest’s image to describe the alternative leadership of the Sages, if the purpose was to forego the pedigree and inheritance, and to replace them with ethics and Torah?

p. 31

(One can thereby understand the parameters of the minority of verses cited by the Sifra which all deal with God’s revelation to Moses when he is separate from Aaron, and receives practical instructions for guiding the people in following the divine commandment, while Aaron is excluded from transmitting the Torah’s laws.)

p. 41

[And they spoke before Moses and before the chieftains, family heads of the Israelites]

p. 59

A benefit of analyzing the *derashot* concerning Aaron is revealing the hidden feelings of those who served as the social-religious heirs of this class. The *derashot* show the justifications which the heirs of this class offered the public for needing to establish an alternative leadership which was based on ethical values; they reflect a struggle with the question of balance of power between the new class and its predecessor in terms of precedence in matters of Halachah and law. In any event, they testify to eternal love and concern, which changes in status and hierarchy could not extinguish. Let's go back then to the three components which are shared by the *derashot* about Aaron, and a theory concerning the historical background which determined their character.

p. 59-60

The story behind the title of this section shows the people’s preference for escorting the popular Shemaiah and Avtalyon rather than the High Priest leaving the Temple in all of his splendor. Shemaiah and Avtalyon’s answer establishes acts of peace as a higher ethical value than an exalted pedigree in the public consciousness. Shemaiah and Avtalyon were active in a fateful period in terms of the stability of the Hasmonean leadership, accompanied by social and class tensions which culminated in civil war.

This affront to the High Priest which took place at the height of the day and the occasion, indicates the social turbulence relating to priestly rule which was based exclusively on class, at the expense of an ethical model. One can surmise that the background for the comparison between these parameters is the reality which developed at the end of the Second Temple period, during the tenure of the Sadducee priests, characterized by a showy lifestyle, adoption of the surrounding Hellenistic culture and reforms which they instituted in the traditional Halachah.

p. 61

The numerous *derashot* ascribing ethical perfection to Aaron (which we discussed in the first section), are not polemical in nature. Nonetheless, recognizing the tension between those leaders whose status emanated from pedigree and those who were devoid of status and nonetheless captivated the masses, allows one to understand that choosing to specifically utilize the patriarch of the lineage of the priesthood to portray ethical perfection is meant to indicate what the proper model for religious leadership is.

It would appear that the development of Aaron’s ethical qualities and the emphasis placed on them as his key trait, presents – in line with Hammer’s approach (above p. ) – a priestly alternative to the hierarchy of values which characterized the Sadducee priests, and emphasizes the superiority of ethics over rite. Aaron is presented in these *derashot* as one who is remembered not for his meticulousness and precision in the Temple rite, but rather thanks to his pursuit of peace and his efforts in bringing people closer to each other and to their Heavenly Father.

The fact that the authors of these traditions selected Aaron to represent the leadership ideal shows us that they did not give up on priestly leadership, rather they wished to point out its deficiencies and suggest ways in which it could be improved – not by further excessive meticulousness in matters of rite, but by focusing on correcting ethical deficiencies.

Slightly more explicit evidence of Sadducee-Pharisee polemic, and of the need to rebuild trust between the echelon of the Sages (who were the heirs of the Pharisee sect) and the priests who were suspected of belonging to the Sadducee sect, can be found in the *derasha* describing the chaos that prevails among the people when they learn of Aaron’s death, and the people’s thinking that Moses was responsible for his death.

p. 62

If so, the persecution of the priests was an isolated episode, which did not include those priests who were meticulous in following the Torah of truth and were free of sin.

p. 62- 63

Rabbi Yohanan needed to render such a ruling at a time of conflict between the two factions of the leadership over their degree of closeness to the prince and the benefits which this closeness afforded. This is a straightforward statement, made without embellishment, made by a member of the public leadership in the beginning of the period of the Talmud. The fact that Rabbi Yohanan needed to render such an unequivocal ruling several generations after the destruction of the Temple, shows that both forms of leadership continued to function side by side, each one claiming supremacy. The degree to which the leadership included a layer composed of priests in the wake of the Temple’s destruction and later in the period of the Talmud is subject to scholarly debate, as is the question of the balance of power between the two layers of the leadership. The analysis of the *derashot* dealing with Moses and Aaron from the perspective of hierarchy and equality – which we discussed in the second unit – contributes by laying out the various aspects of the issue, and primarily by showing that one of the reasons for the scholarly debate concerning the scope of the influence and authority of the priestly leadership in the period of the Mishna and the Talmud is the existence of apparent contradictions found in the traditions describing the hierarchy between the sage and the priest (between Moses and Aaron): The *derashot* which emphasize the hierarchy and Moses’ primacy over Aaron in terms of Torah rulings ostensibly show the aspiration to establish an alternative leadership to that of the priesthood, and to point to Torah scholarship as the determining criteria in determining a leader’s status.

p. 65

We would suggest that the development in the depictions of Moses’ feelings in response to seeing the oil dripping down Aaron’s beard (above p. ), expresses well the process of dissipation of social tension which accompanied the interactions between sages and priests throughout the generations. Moses’ recoil and fear about misappropriation [*mei’lah*] in carrying out his task when he anointed Aaron: “He recoiled and it fell backwards. He said: Woe is to me, as I misappropriated [*ma’alti*] the anointing oil!” (Sifra Shemini 1), which alludes to the ritual anxiety which typifies the dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, disappears entirely in the later *derasha*. Moses’ joy over the oil running off the boundaries of Aaron’s beard (Vayikra Rabba 3), reflects the waning of suspicion, the liberation from adherence to the strict rules of purity, and the attempt to formulate the status of priests independent of the Temple rite.

**Footnotes**

P. 2 nt. 2

A survey of the different approaches can be found in Y. Gafni’s article, "ארץ ישראל בתקופת המשנה והתלמוד: חקר שנות דור הישגים ותהיות", – Katedra 100 (2011) p, 200- 226. See further B. L. Visotzky, *Reading the Book*, Philadelphia 2005, who expands the historicist approach and views the *derashot* as an atemporal pedagogical tool, suited for the changing times. In my opinion, the *derashot* of the Sages contain solutions for the challenges of every generation; and read correctly, they provide wise guidance for solving contemporary problems.

Idem, *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed: C.A Evans; J.N Lohr; D.L. Petersen), Leiden – Boston 2012, pp. 580 – 606. For further study of the progressive method of interpretation (which opposes the historicist approach) see Daniel Boyarin, “**המדרש והמעשה: על החקר ההיסטורי של ספרות חז"**ל" in R. Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume, (ed.) S. Freedman, New York and Jerusalem, 5753, pp. 105-117; idem, מדרש תנאים, אינטרטקסטואליות וקריאת מכילתא, Jerusalem, 5771, pp. 21-46.

P. 3 nt. 3

This assumption is based on the position of many of the midrash scholars, such as: Y. Hynman, דרשות בציבור בתקופת התלמוד, Jerusalem, 1971, p.7,  E.E. Urbach, “המלוכה המקראית בעיני חכמים” in *ספר יצחק אריה זליגמן*  (1983) 439˗51. This is also the implication of his collected studies in מעולמם של חכמים, Magnes, Jerusalem, 2002 under the title 'מדרש והיסטוריה', Visotzky (in the preceding note, above), A. Shinan, “חטאיהם של נדב ואביהוא באגדת לחז"ל,” *Tarbitz* 48, 3.4 (1979) pp.13-14, Aberbach, Moses, and Smolar, Leivy, "Jeroboam and Solomon: Rabbinic Interpretations", JQR 59 (1968) pp. 118 – 132; and, finally, A. Schremer, "The religious Orientation of Non – Rabbis in Second – century Palestine: A Rabbinic Perspective", Z. Weiss et al. (eds), *'follow the Wise': Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of L.I. Levine*, Winona Lake, IN 2010, pp.319 – 341, and many others. On the other hand, there is a broad consensus which limits the Sages’ influence over the general public, and holds that the majority of what they said constituted an internal dialogue which did not impact on the people’s way of life. See e.g.: M. Goodman, State and society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212, London 2000, pp.93 – 111; S. J. D. Cohen, "The Rabbi in Second – Century Jewish Society", *Cambridge History of Judaism III: The early Roman Period*, Cambridge 1998, pp.959 – 971; S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E to 640 C. E*., Princeton 2001.

P. 3 nt. 4

See e.g. M. Bar’s series of articles, חכמי המשנה והתלמוד – הגותם פועלם ומנהיגותם, Ramat Gan, 2011.

P. 3 nt. 5

See e.g. B. Elitzur,"הערצה מול התנגדות לקנאות פינחס ברא הדורות , *Netuim* 17 (2012), pp. 9-39.

P. 6 nt. 16

See the prophet Haggai’s words of encouragement (2:1-9), as well the author of Chronicles’ addendum concerning the Temple service.

P. 7 nt. 17

G.V. Rad, Das Geschichtsbild des Chronistischen Werkes, Stuttgart 1930, pp.88 – 89. Similarly, S, Yefet, אמונות ודעות בספר דברי הימים, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 192-212.

P. 7 nt. 18

See Ben Sira 45,21; ibid. 47; 50,1; 6-8, ed. Segal, Jerusalem, 1959. See further: A. Büchler, Die Priester und der Kultus im letzten Jahrzehnt des Jerusalemischen Tempels, Wien 1895, pp. 16 – 23; D. W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs: The Rise and Development of the High Priesthood,* Oxford 2000.

P. 7 nt. 19

See Smallwood "High Priest and Politics in Roman Palestine", *JTS* E.M.

P. 7 nt. 20

Concerning the lifestyle of the Sadducees who served as High Priest, see A. Regev, הצדוקים והלכתםת, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 323- 331 and its bibliography.

P. 7 nt. 21

See e.g. M. Stern, "Aspects of Jewish Society: The Priesthood and Other Classes", *The Jewish People in the First Century II (*Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad. NT, S. Safrai, M. Stern, eds*),* Van Gorcum, Assen 1976, pp.630 – 561.

P. 7 nt. 22

See e.g. Tosefta Sota 13:7-8 and Lieberman’s commentary, ad loc., p. 745, fn. 31; Tosefta Sota 14:5-6.

P. 7 nt. 23

See Y. Gafni,”שבט ומחוקק - על דפוסי מנהיגות חדשים בתקופת התלמוד בארץ ישראל ובבבל” , *Kehunah U’meluchah* (1987): 79˗91; H. Birenboim, "“A Kingdom of Priests”: Did the Pharisees Try to Live Like Priests?", Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? (ed: D. Schwartz & Z. Weiss), 2012, pp. 59 – 68.

P. 7 nt. 24

Such as in liturgical poetry, in the liturgy of the synagogue, and Motifs in the art of synagogues. See ‘Ir Shai, "עטרת ראשו כהוד המלוכה צנוף צפירת שש לכבוד ולתפארת: למקומה של הכהונה בחברה היהודית של שלהי העת העתיקה", ed. Y. Levin, *Rezef U’Tenura, Yehudim V’Yahadut B’Eretz Yisrael Habizantit Nozrit*, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 67-106; Y. Yahalom, פיוט ומציאות בשלהי הזמן העתיק, Tel Aviv, 1999, pp. 107-116.

Pp. 7-8 nt. 25

See E. E. Urbach, "מעמד והנהגה בעולמם של חכמי ארץ ישראל", *Divrei Haacademia Haleumit Hayisraelit L’Madaim* B, 4 (1969) pp. 31-54; R. Kimelman, "האוליגרכיה הכהנית ותלמידי החכמים בתקופת התלמוד", Zion 48 (1983), pp 135-147; M. Bar “על מנהיגים של יהודי ציפורי במאה השלישית”, *Sinai* 74 (1974): 133˗138; R. L. Kalmin, "Kings, Priests, and Sages in rabbinic literature of late antiquity", נטיעות לדוד, ספר היובל לדוד הלבני (ed.Y. Alman and others), Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 57- 92, English section. As well as: D. Hamidovič, "Au sujet de l'affaiblissement de l’autorité des prêtres en matière de jurisprudence dans le judaïsme ancient", *Judaïsme ancien* 4 (2016) pp. 79- 103, who distinguishes between judicial leadership roles which were transferred to the Sages and religious rulings which remained in the hands of the priests.

P. 8 nt. 26

See D. Schwartz, "היסטוריה והיסטוריוגרפיה: 'ממלכת כהנים' כסיסמה פרושית", Zion 45 (1980), pp. 96- 117. Schwarz lists representatives of the approach which holds that the Pharisees and the Sages tried to take over the priest’s leadership. In contrast to this approach, see the more moderate view in the scholarship: D. Schwartz, 'מכוהנים בימינם לנוצרים בשמאלם', *Tarbitz* 74, (2005) pp.21-41, especially p. 21 fn. 1. See further M. D. Har, "הרצף שבשלשלת מסירת התורה: לבירור ההיסטוריוגראפיה המקראית בהגותם של חז"ל", Zion, 44 (1979), pp. 43-56; Y. Rosen Zvi, "הגוף והמקדש: רשימת מומי הכהנים במשנה ומקומו של המקדש בבית המדרש התנאי", *Mada’ei Hayahdut*, 43 (2005-2006), pp. 49-87, especially pp. 65-67, fn. 65-71.

P. 8 nt. 27

See ‘Ir Shai, "למקומה של הכהונה בחברה היהודית של שלהי העת העתיקה", pp. 76-77; C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 1997; pp 487 – 489.; D. Trifon, הכהנים מחורבן בית שני ועד עליית הנצרות, dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1985, pp. 47-54.

P. 23 nt. 52

Although this formulation ostensibly depicts equality, it actually is more in line with the hierarchal school (as we will see below), as it implies that even in those areas in which Aaron had predominance, since they related to his sphere of responsibility, there was equality between him and Moses. By contrast, no examples are given here of areas of equality in Torah leadership or in the transmission of God’s words to the people.

P. 29 nt. 59

See further G. Stemberger, "Das allgemeine Priestertum im rabbinischen Denken", *Volk Gottes als Tempel* (2008) 107-121, especially pp. 311-313.

P. 31 nt. 66

See further Schäfer’s analysis: P. Schäfer, Rabbis and priests, or: how to do away with the glorious past of the sons of Aaron, Antiquity in Antiquity (2008) pp. 155-172.

P. 36 nt. 75

See further D. S. Fraade, Priests, kings, and patriarchs: Yerushalmi Sanhedrin in its exegetical and cultural settings, *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* III (2002) pp. 315-333, which deals with the gap between the Palestinian Talmud and the Mishna and the Babylonian Talmud in terms of the hierarchy of leadership positions which they set up in their *derashot*.

P. 41 nt. 83

There are two types of leadership labeled ‘family heads,’ however, one of them is definite, ‘the family heads,’ whereas the other is not, ‘family heads.’ The fact that the venerable leadership group to which Moses and the princes belong is not definite, teaches an important lesson concerning the status of shifting leaderships, as described in the continuation of the midrash.

P. 60 nt. 106

See Y. Fientuch,

P. 67 nt. 118

Herman holds that the priests’ status continued to be dominant in terms of leadership roles in Babylonia. Nonetheless, no conflict and rivalry developed there between them and the Sages, as occurred in the Land of Israel.