**The Death of the Redactor**

**The Haunting Tales of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch & His Ghostly Return**

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1. **Introduction**

While Francis Fukuyama famously marked the fall of the Soviet Union and concomitant rise of liberal democracy and free market capitalism as the “End of History” (i.e. its final achievement), Jacques Derrida countered that “Specters of Marx” continue to *haunt* Europe and the world.[[2]](#footnote-1) A communist regime may have collapsed, but even in its absence the spirit of Marxism continues to structure the present and condition hopes for the future. To help capture this specific notion of haunting, Derrida coined the neologism “hauntology,” a French pun and near homophone to “ontology.” If ontology is the study of *being*, hauntology investigates that which is not quite *being,* but rather there but not there, “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive.” To sense the presence of absence of something is, metaphorically speaking, to see a ghost or a specter. “A specter is both visible and invisible, both phenomenal and nonphenomenal: a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance.”[[3]](#footnote-2) For Derrida, that was Marxism in a post-Soviet world.[[4]](#footnote-3)

To be haunted, he claimed, is to feel (like Hamlet) like “time is out of joint.” It is to see the *trace* of something from the past, return to the present where it doesn’t properly belong, and then make a demand about the future. For it isn’t only the past that haunts the present but the promises of a “lost future” that were once expected to come but haven’t yet arrived.[[5]](#footnote-4) Derrida’s hauntology has since generated significant amounts of scholarship in a variety of fields including literary theory, film studies, art, photography, music theory, post-colonial studies, deconstruction,[[6]](#footnote-5) and psychoanalysis.[[7]](#footnote-6)

In this chapter, I use hauntology as a lens to read two parallel narratives, one from the Yerushalmi and the other the Bavli, on the death and burial of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (hereafter: Rabbi). This lens may prove useful to other rabbinic stories, but these two death stories contain a constellation of elements which taken together offer a particularly rich set of texts to experiment with such a hauntological lens. These include: deathbed scenes, burials, cemeteries, suicide,[[8]](#footnote-7) resurrection, heavenly voices, ghosts, liminal places and time, and even more abstract concepts/phenomena that have been fruitfully interpreted hauntologically like messianism, the construction of space and collective memory, and colonization.[[9]](#footnote-8) In the foregoing, I will use the word *haunting* to denote liminal phenomena between being and non-being and *the* *conjuring of something from the past into the present which conditions hopes for the future.*

This framework helps isolate shared textual dynamics between the two stories and helps facilitate comparison between them. This is so on two different planes. One, I suggest the theme of haunting liminality between presence and absence, life and death, helps structure both of these stories compositionally in interesting ways. Of course they both center on Rabbi on his deathbed in between life and death. But they also employ imagery, wordplay, and recurring motifs that play on this same haunting theme, showing the literary coherence of each redacted narrative and the creative artistry of its redactors.

Second, Derrida’s hauntology helps focus our attention on what may have haunted its tradents/redactors. Each story appears haunted by a specific lost past that structures the present and conditions hopes for the future. By attending to these lost pasts and the ways the redactors conjure them and employ them towards specific aims, we can better appreciate the very different kinds of cultural work each story performs.

This however requires situating both stories in their respective historical contexts. As I hope to show, the Yerushalmi’s story is haunted by the losses and degradations experienced by a provincial population colonized by imperial Rome. Its performative telling not only constructs a counter-imperial glorious rabbinic and patriarchal past (which is not to say an historical one), but also allows that “past” to be hauntingly felt (in its absence) in the present time of its storytellers. The story serves as an authorizing strategy for the 4th/ 5th century rabbis to claim (or rather “re-claim” if we indulge our storytellers) power and prestige in the gaze of the empire.

The Bavli’s story, far removed from concerns of Roman provincialism, is haunted by the loss of a very different mythic “past”, a past embodied by Rabbi in which the Oral Law is securely grounded and authorized with certainty. In this version, the traces of this past endure in the present in the form of the Mishnah and in the activities of the Babylonian academies although the death of the redactor occasions a haunting “hermeneutical anxiety” as to whether their rabbinic interpretation stands on terra firma. As such, the Bavli storytellers aim to establish and authorize the Babylonian academies, certifying their ability, institutionally and hermeneutically, to produce a faithful commentary to Rabbi’s Mishnah. If the Yerushalmi is haunted by the specter of Rome, the Bavli is haunted by the specter that Torah (written and oral) might be forgotten.

1. **The Yerushalmi (Y. Ketubot 12:3 /Y. Kilayim 9:3)**

Editor's Note: Translation is largely adapted from Koren-Steinsaltz translation

P= Palestinian Talmud

*A/B/C =* Three parts, Part A, Part B, Part C

*Italics = Rabbi’s direct speech*

(c) = Commentary

**Background**

Ketubot 12:3 Kilayim 9:4

| Mishnah  If a widow said [to her husband’s heirs], “I do not wish to move from my husband’s house,” the heirs may not say to her, “ Go to your father’s house and we will support you there.” Rather they must support her and they must provide her with lodging according to her status.[[10]](#footnote-9)  Talmud: “If a widow said to her husband’s heirs, “I do not wish to move from my husband's house,” etc” | Mishnah  Shrouds for the dead and the saddle of a donkey are not subject to the restriction of admixtures.  Talmud: “Shrouds for the dead” |
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0. It is written, “[I am counted] among the dead who are free” [Psalms 88:6]. Once a person dies, he becomes freed [from the obligation to perform] commandments.

**Part A: Rabbi’s Three Deathbed Wishes**

**Narrative**

**P.A.** Rabbi issued three orders at the time of his passing:

***P.A.(1)*** *My widow should not budge from my house*

***P.A.(2)*** *Do not eulogize me in the towns*

***P.A.(3)*** *And whoever has attended to me in my lifetime will attend to me after my death.*

**Commentary**

***P.A.(1)(c)*** *“My widow should not budge from my house.”* But is that not an [explicit] Mishnah:“If a widow said to her husband’s heirs, “I do not wish to move from my husband's house,” etc”. Rav Dosa[[11]](#footnote-10) said: So they should not tell her: This is the House of the Patriarch set aside for the Patriarch.[[12]](#footnote-11)

**P.A.(1)(c)(i)** R' Lazar ben Yose said: as the following Baraita teaches: She dwells in the home in the same manner as she would have dwelled there if her husband were overseas. She uses the silver and gold vessels in the same manner as she would have used them if her husband were overseas. And she is supported in the same manner as she would have been supported if her husband were overseas.[[13]](#footnote-12)

***P.A. (2)(c)*** *“Do not eulogize me in the towns.”* Because of the quarrels.

***P.A. (3)(c)*** *“And whoever has attended to me in my lifetime will attend to me after my*

*death.”*  Rav Chaninah of Sepphoris said: His directive was referring to Yosef of Ephras and Yosah of Haifa.[[14]](#footnote-13)

**Part B: Two More Deathbed Wishes**

**Narrative**

P.B. Rav Chizkiyah adds:

*P.B. (1) Do not put many burial shrouds upon me*

*P.B. (2) And my coffin should be punctured into the ground.*

**Commentary**

**P.B. (1) (c) (i)** Some say Rabbi was buried in a single sheet.

**P.B. (1) (c) (ii)** For Rabbi said: The way that a person leaves will not be the way when he comes back. But the Rabbis say: In the way that a person leaves, thus he will be when he comes back.[[15]](#footnote-14)

**P.B. (1) (c) (iii)** A Baraita was taught that in the name of Rabbi Natan: The garment that descends with a person to the grave, it comes back with him. What is the source? “The human form is transformed and becomes similar to clay, and then will stand up like clothing” (Job 38:14).

**P.B. (1) (c) (iv)** Antoninus asked Rabbi: What is the meaning of that which is written, “The human form is transformed and becomes similar to clay”? Rabbi said to him: He Who brings the generation, will clothe it.[[16]](#footnote-15)

**P.B. (1) (c) (v)** Rabbi Yohanan instructed: Dress me in gray, neither in white nor black. If I rise among the righteous I will not be embarrassed and if I arise among the wicked I will not appear haughty.[[17]](#footnote-16)

**P.B. (1) (c) (vi)** Rav Yoshiya instructed: Dress me in pressed white [shrouds].They said to him: How are you better than your teacher? He said to them: why should I be embarrassed about my deeds?

**P.B. (1) (c) (vii)** Rav Yirmiyah instructed: Dress me in pressed white [shrouds]. Dress me in my fine frock, place shoes on my feet, and a staff in my hand, and position me on my side. If the Messiah comes, I will be ready.

**Part C: Rabbi’s Death: From Sepphoris to Beth Shearim**

**P.C. (1)** The residents of Sepphoris proclaimed: Whoever says to us that Rabbi has died, we will kill him. Bar Kappara looked at them, his head covered, his clothes ripped. He said to them: “Mortals and angels were both grasping the Tablets of the Covenant, the angels gained the upper hand, and snatched the Tablets away.” The residents of Sepphoris to him, “Rabbi has passed away?” He said to them, “You said it.” They tore their garments and the sound of their tearing reached Goffata[[18]](#footnote-17), a distance of three mil.

**P.C. (2)** Rav Nahman said in the name of Rav Mana: Miraculous events occurred that day. It was Shabbat Eve, and all the towns gathered to eulogize him. **They put it down at eighteen gatherings[[19]](#footnote-18) and they brought him down to Beit Shearim.[[20]](#footnote-19) The daytime (miraculously) extended** until every person was able to reach his home, fill a barrel of water, and light the [Sabbath] lamp. As soon as the sun set, the rooster crowed.  **People began to be distressed saying perhaps we have desecrated the Sabbath.** A Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed: whoever was not lazy in eulogizing Rabbi is heralded into the World to Come, **excluding the laundryman. Once he heard this, he went up to the roof, threw himself off and died. Another Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed: “And even the laundryman.”**

**Some Notes on the Literary & Structural Features of the Yerushalmi**

The story appears in the Yerushalmi in both P. Kilayim and P. Ketubot with only minor variations. The story is the first of a collection of anecdotes about Rabbi but since this collection is not unified by chronology (the anecdotes which follow Rabbi’s death are stories of his life and his relationships with various rabbinic colleagues in no discerning order), it is challenging to identify whether the text we identified above as *the* Yerushalmi’s account of Rabbi’s death is meant to be read as a unified story or whether we have two or maybe three stories simply juxtaposed to one another. Still a strong case can be made to treat the story of Rabbi’s death, at least in its final redacted form, as a unified (at least by rabbinic standards) three-part story organized around a chronological frame: Rabbi’s deathbed wishes (P.A and P.B) followed by his death and burial (P.C).

As far as the history of its composition, four discrete textual units can be identified: P.A, P.B, P.C(1) and P.C (2). P.A is directly tied to the Mishnah in Ketubot. Rabbi’s deathbed wish that his widow remain in his house conforms with (and parallels the language of) the Mishnaic law.[[21]](#footnote-20) P.B is directly tied to the Mishnah in Kilayim. Concerning the Mishnaic topic of burial shrouds, the story is told that Rabbi wished to be buried in a simple shroud. The Yerushalmi explains the reason is that Rabbi, contrary to the opinion of his colleagues,[[22]](#footnote-21) did not believe that one is resurrected with one’s burial clothing and as such he required nothing but a single linen sheet.[[23]](#footnote-22) This may also be offered as the reasoning underlying the Mishnah. Since one will not be resurrected in one’s burial clothing, one need not be careful to avoid being buried in shatnez (biblically prohibited admixture of wool and linen).[[24]](#footnote-23) At some point, these two traditions of Rabbi’s final requests (P.A and P.B) are collected together.

The structure of both parts is the same: a narrative detailing Rabbi’s deathbed wishes and a commentary about them.[[25]](#footnote-24) This layering of narrative and commentary within the story allows the redactor not only to clarify the story but to imbue it with new layers of meaning. Rabbi is not just caring for the welfare of his wife, but he is addressing any misunderstandings that might arise due to his position as patriarch. He isn’t just preparing for death, he is also preparing for his resurrection.

Part C is not directly related to either mishnah but by appending it to Parts A and B, the redactors weave a chronological narrative, beginning with Rabbi’s deathbed wishes and concluding with his ultimate demise and burial.[[26]](#footnote-25) It contains two discrete textual units (P.C (1) and P.C (2)) woven together, in part, by deixis. Phrases like ‘on *that* day’ (‘באותו היום’) or ‘to eulogize *him’* (‘להספידו’) in P.C (2) depend on P.C (1) to supply the referents. In general, part of what holds the entire story together is the juxtaposition of the parts and the way earlier parts of the story provide important contextual information to understand later parts.[[27]](#footnote-26) For example, the Sepphoreans are anxious about the prospect of hearing news of Rabbi’s death (P.C. (1)) because we already know Rabbi was on his deathbed (P.A, P.B). The townsfolk gather for a funerary procession (P.C (2)) because Rabbi had died (P.C (1)).

The throniest connection between sections to pin down is the eulogies of the townsmen. In P.A.(2), Rabbi requests that no eulogies be delivered in the towns. But in P.C. (2), “all the towns gathered to eulogize him.” There are at least three ways to read this, given that it is not clear where the townsmen gathered. One, all the townsmen gathered in the large cities in deference to Rabbi’s request. Two, all the townsmen gathered individually in their respective towns in violation of Rabbi’s request. Three all the townsmen gathered somewhere along the main road where the funeral procession was headed, between Sepphoris and Beth Shearim, which may very well not have violated the intentions of Rabbi.[[28]](#footnote-27) Regardless of which interpretation one chooses, P. A and P.C are connected *in some way* and help lend coherence to the narrative.[[29]](#footnote-28) Taken together, the story highlights the saintliness of Rabbi (a caring husband who wants to ease the burdens of those around him) and the communal loss suffered upon his death. While Rabbi readily confronts his own mortality and prepares for death, the community around him appears much less prepared to navigate their new reality without him.

In addition, hauntological themes lend literary coherence to the redacted narrative as a whole. For example, the Mishnah in Kilayim, which is one textual site upon which the story is attached, states that a corpse can be buried in *shatnez.* The Yerushalmi explains the reason is because once a person dies, he is freed from the obligations of performing the commandments (mitzvot). For the rabbis, no statement could greater signify the ontological difference between the living and the dead. However, in each of three parts of the Yerushalmi’s story, this solid distinction between the living and the dead is explored, negotiated, and resisted in interesting ways.

In Part A, the story begins with Rabbi finding himself in this liminal, twilight moment *between* life and death. His three deathbed wishes are attempts to navigate his own death and in some sense transcend it by insisting on some form of *continuity* beyond the grave. He wants his wife to live in the same house as if he were still there or at the very least as if he were simply “overseas” (P.A.(1)(c)(i)), a state of affairs that marks that spectral in-betweenness of presence and absence.[[30]](#footnote-29) Rabbi doesn’t want to be eulogized in the towns and he wants the same people to attend him in his life and at his burial.

In Part B, the entire *commentary* section revolves around the resurrection of the dead, a spectral discourse that explores the relationship between the living and the dead.[[31]](#footnote-30) As a future eventuality, resurrection *haunts* “as a virtuality that already impinges on the present,”[[32]](#footnote-31) and the way one envisions it (clothed anew or not) impacts the way one is to be buried. Clothing, and the burial shroud in particular, is theorized as material that mediates the boundary between the living and the dead, this world and the next. In fact, thematically, clothing features prominently in all three sections: Rabbi specifies his desire to be buried in simple shrouds, Bar Kappara and later the Sepphoreans tear their garments as an expression of their grief (P.C (1)), and then there is the curious sub-narrative of the laundry man, who of course, launders clothing for a living (P.C (2)). If upon death clothing is torn, upon resurrection it is remade.

In Part C, we again encounter Rabbi in a liminal state *between* life and death, caught in this cosmic tug of war between the angels above and the righteous mortals below (P.C (1)). And even after he ultimately passes, the funerary procession (with all eighteen starts and stops) marks a different liminal state, the time between death and burial. P. Moed Katan 3:5 directly references the practice of transporting bodies for burial in Beth Shearim and cites a tananitic dispute:

In a case where one carries him [a corpse] from place to place, as those who bury in Beth Shearim. There are Tannaim who state, those here count from when the deceased left; those there count from when the cover plate was laid.There are Tannim who state, these and those count from when the cover plate was laid. Rebbi Simon in the name of Rebbi Joshua ben Levi: Everything goes after the head of the family.

Transporting a body for non-local burial (“from place to place”) raises the question of the onset of mourning (time of death or burial?) halakhically expressing the transitional quality of the funerary processional.

Moreover in Part C, the finality of death is resisted as well. Aside for deathbed wishes (P.A-B) and the discourse of resurrection (P.B), we also find a different kind of resistance: tactics of suppression and delay. For example, in an attempt to resist learning what they know to be imminent, the Sepphoreans forbid upon pain of death the announcement of Rabbi’s death (P.C(1)). They simply prefer living in this “twilight” between knowledge and ignorance than confront the reality of a world without Rabbi.[[33]](#footnote-32) Their suppression of an official death announcement recalls Rabbi’s desire not to be eulogized in the towns. In both cases, *talking* of death is regulated. The Sepphorean delayin hearing the news also anticipates the delay in later burying the body after making eighteen stops. In both cases, the delay is an act of grief, even resistance, a desire to keep Rabbi in the company of the living, but in the former case the delay is due to the *silencing* of speech while in the latter it’s due to *excessive* speech. While the delay in burial was a result of the great honor given to Rabbi, Shabbat is almost violated, although ultimately Shabbat too is delayed.

Interestingly, resisting the finality of death is not simply an act of *human* denial. Even a proclamation of death from Heaven (i.e. the Bat Kol’s proclamation that the laundryman lost his place in the World to Come) is not final. The very moment he dies, the decree is reversed and he is awarded eternal life. This playful/haunting exploration of life and death, this world and the next, can also be seen in the fact that Rabbi’s *death* in this world offers those who mourn him an opportunity for eternal life in the next while on the flipside, the laundryman’s suicide suggests that without hope in the world to come, life in this world is no longer tenable. In both cases, we see how the future world to come is a condition for present life in this world.

This same resistance to death’s finality is even *performed* by the redactor of the story: it is never said explicitly that Rabbi died. Of course, the audience understands that he dies. But just as the townsmen were reluctant to bury Rabbi, the storyteller it seems was reluctant to pen the usual words “and he died” that conclude a deathbed story.

In the next section, we move beyond the literary artistry of the redactor and ask a different question: Why might this story be told *here and now* in late 4th/early 5th century Lower Galilee? If we situate the story of Rabbi’s death in its local historical context, the possibility emerges that Rabbi is as much an individual sage as he is a metonym for the institutions he has come to represent: the rabbinate and patriarchate. It’s worth noting in this respect that the whole narrative is made up of two overlapping themes: (1) the story of Rabbi’s death and interment and (2) the nature of resurrection and its implications for the ritual preparations needed for burial. This delicate layering and intertwining of subject matter, of law and narrative, of ritual practice and hagiography, is highly suggestive. The story of Rabbi’s preparations for death -- but also his preparations for a resurrected life-- construct for the reader/listener not only a glorious past, but an anticipated future, when the rabbinate/patriarchate will be centralized authorities “once more.” But like Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, our story is haunted by the *delay* of the arrival of that promised messianic time.[[34]](#footnote-33)

**Hauntology & Counter-Imperialism**

In 1954, three graves bearing the names Rabbi Gamliel, R. Shim’on, and R. Anionis were found in Catacomb 14 in the necropolis of Beth She'arim. To many scholars, these names appear to parallel the three successors to Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (Rabbi) as described in B. Ketubot 104.[[35]](#footnote-34) In that Bavli text and its earlier Yerushalmi parallels, a tradition is recorded that Rabbi himself was buried in Beth Shearim. While no grave was found bearing his name (though some speculation remains regarding a nearby double grave), the so-called “patriarchal catacomb” was seen as offering rare material evidence supporting a Talmudic tale that substantiated an ancient rabbinic-political presence in the land of Israel.[[36]](#footnote-35) This discovery tantalized the Israeli public and transformed the excavation site into a national Israeli spectacle.[[37]](#footnote-36) As Professor Nahman Avigad recounts:

This was an excavation season replete with astounding events and exciting discoveries, which aroused great interest among the general public as well. Catacomb 14 was the center of interest, since it was suggested that members of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi's family were buried there. This possibility fired everyone's imagination. The place bustled with visitors from all sections of the community: the President of Israel ... the Prime Minister, the late David ben Gurion; Mrs Golda Meir (then Minister of Labour); Cabinet Ministers; the Chairman and Members of the Knesseth; the Chairman of the Jewish Agency; the heads of the Hebrew University; teachers and students; citizens and tourists. All wished to view the inscriptions of R. Shim'on and R. Gamaliel, vivid evidence of so important a chapter in Jewish history and a tangible reminder of two outstanding personalities among the spiritual leaders of the people.

Tessa Rejak cites this anecdote in order to flag some of the nationalist/Zionist biases and assumptions that have since influenced and skewed academic interpretation and historiography.[[38]](#footnote-37) For example, the archaeological evidence suggests that the rabbis and patriarchs were only one of many sub-elites to occupy the site, but by no means the most central or powerful.[[39]](#footnote-38) Scholarly attention to Catacomb 14, she argues, has much less to do with its particular impressiveness or centrality within the necropolis (it’s actually rather marginal) and more to do with the nationalist interests that such a discovery served.[[40]](#footnote-39)

I would suggest that Rejak’s point applies not only to modern scholars of antiquity, but also to the fourth and fifth century redactors of the Yerushalmi who narrate the story of Rabbi’s death and burial. That is to say, if we attend to the rhetorical and ideological dimensions of their storytelling, we can observe a rabbinic textual strategy that Joshua Levinson has called “counter-cartography,”[[41]](#footnote-40) in this case, mapping the geography of Lower Galilee as a distinctively Jewish and rabbinic space. This, I shall argue, is an effort to resist the haunting Roman/Christian imperial presence (again haunting in the sense that it conjures a fantasized lost past of rabbinic power, prestige, and control).

This claim requires situating the story in its local historical context, an academic exercise that is necessarily provisional and perspectival, dependent as it is on the choices of what historical facts might be relevant to the interpretation of the story. The Yerushalmi is mainly produced in the Galilee and this particular story is set first in Sepphoris with Rabbi on his deathbed and then ends with his body interred in Beth Shearim. The story features fifth generation Amoraim (350-375 CE) and along with its organizing anonymous textual frame, is clearly a product of late redaction, in the late fourth/early fifth century. Thus while the story is set around 200 CE, its final form is produced sometime after the Gallus revolt (351-352) and the political unrest that lay in its wake.

Historians debate precisely how devastating and disruptive this revolt was for the Jews in the Galilee. Scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggested that many of the Galilean urban centers with Jewish populations (including Tiberias and Lydda) were devastated, Sepphoris was razed to the ground by Gallus' general Ursicinus, and thousands were slaughtered, after an unsuccessful Jewish revolt. Working within this historical narrative, the first excavators of Beth Shearim concluded that the Gallus revolt led to the necropolis being set ablaze causing all burials to cease.[[42]](#footnote-41) This adds a new haunting dimension to this burial site. For if burial sites in general are sites of haunting -- places where the living encounter (traces/monuments of) the dead in the present-- here we have a burial site defaced and abandoned, its dead disturbed, which has effectively become a monument to its own dead past, haunted by the violence of the empire.[[43]](#footnote-42)

More recently, however, Zev Weiss has re-examined both the textual and material evidence and suggested that the Gallus revolt was not nearly as disruptive as previous historians have made it out to be. Jewish life continued in the urban centers, the patriarchate continued its activities, and the necropolis continued to function as a burial site.[[44]](#footnote-43) More devastating perhaps, was the earthquake of 363 which wrought damage to the necropolis and urban centers throughout Lower Galilee. Of course, the mixed evidence of both political tumult and tranquility likely reflects the contradictions and ambivalences felt by a colonized people, the privileges enjoyed and indignities suffered under imperial rule.

Either way, it is clear that both the rabbis and patriarchs in the late fourth century certainly felt a strong imperial presence which left its mark on the history, economy, and landscape of the Galilee.[[45]](#footnote-44) While at this time rabbis were gaining power and prestige and the patriarch enjoyed perhaps its greatest power and imperial recognition (including high senatorial rank), evidence suggests that their power was still contested and circumscribed and any actual influence they wielded required their own efforts of persuasion. Imperial recognition of the patriarchate and its primates (including rabbis) permitted at times certain activities like the collection of the Aurum Coronarium and jurisdiction over religious matters (not civil!), but in practice this recognition could not be assumed to entail imperial enforcement.[[46]](#footnote-45) We also find that as Rome granted more power to the patriarchate, populations of Jews were less than enthralled. The influence of the patriarchate, even in the fourth century, was unevenly felt across temporal and geographic lines, and it may have been more impactful in the diaspora than locally. Moreover, the material evidence (architectural and numismatic) suggests that the Jewish cities of Lower Galilee, including Tiberias and Sepphoris, and neighboring large villages like Beth Shearim, were not controlled by the rabbis but largely by Jews who embraced Greco-Roman culture. Greco-Roman iconography can be found on the coins, statuary, mosaics, synagogues, and burial sites (including the Beth Shearim necropolis) at this time.

The Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century created more opportunities for imperial authorities and christian leaders to contest the power of the rabbis and patriarchs. The final form of the Yerushalmi’s story post-dates Constatine’s conversion. The Land of Israel -- including the Galilee-- has already become a hub for Christian pilgrims and its geography has already been overwritten with Christian shrines and holy places. As Joshua Levinson notes:

The Christianization of the Holy Land as an imperial project and as a result of the “practice of everyday life”...was a long and gradual process…Nevertheless, the conceptual and physical conversion of Palestine into a Christian Holy Land, the localizing of Christian myths, and the monumentalization of its landscape were already under way in the latter half of the fourth and the early fifth century in Palestine, and it appears to have proceeded at a pace “unmatched in either scope or dynamics in any other part of the Roman empire.” From this perspective only, we could hazard to say, following Fergus Millar, that “the Christianization, and the Christian monumentalization, of the landscape of Palestine may have begun immediately after Constantine’s conversion.[[47]](#footnote-46)

Citing Bar, “within just a few decades of Constantine’s decision to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, dozens of holy sites connected to Jesus, his disciples and to the events of the Old Testament were identified within the boundaries of Palestine.”

Levinson described how this appropriation of land and history was accomplished in part by “rhetorical and ideological violence.” It was an “interpretational imperialism [that] lent itself to both a textual and a literal usurpation of the Jews’ history and holy sites.”[[48]](#footnote-47) Jonathan Z. Smith describes how this new Christian map was “laid palimpsest-like over the old and interacting with it in complex ways.”[[49]](#footnote-48)

With regard to Lower Galilee in particular, we find a story related by Epiphanius (315-403 C.E) “of a Tiberian patriarch named Hillel whose clandestine deathbed conversion to Christianity is furtively witnessed by his assistant Joseph, who, after undergoing conversion himself, builds churches all over the Galilee, particularly in towns such as Sepphoris/Diocaesarea.”[[50]](#footnote-49)

Joseph asked nothing of the emperor but this very great favor—permission by imperial rescript to build Christ’s churches in the Jewish towns and villages where no one had ever been able to found churches, since there are no Greeks, Samaritans or Christians among the population. (10) This < rule > of having no gentiles among them is observed especially at Tiberias, Diocaesarea, Sepphoris, Nazareth and Capernaum.12,1 After receiving the letter and the authorization along with his title, Josephus came to Tiberias. Besides, he had a draft on the imperial treasury, and he himself had been honored with a salary from the emperor. 12,2 And so he began to build in Tiberias….Though they [crowds of Jews] harmed the man on many occasions, he eventually restored part of the temple at Tiberias and finished a small church. He left then and came to Scythopolis and made his home. However, he completed buildings in Diocaesarea and certain other towns.[[51]](#footnote-50)

Regardless of the historicity of the account, we find here an example around the same time and place as our Yerushalmi stor, of precisely this kind of textual violence in the service of the imperial project of Christianizing the land.

What was the rabbinic response? Reading several Palestinian midrashim, Levinson shows how the rabbis “reappropriated” and “recolonized” their land by the (textual) construction of sacred graves. “Just as Christian discourses transformed the newly acquired Holy Land into a recognizable neighborhood by populating it with familiar faces, so the rabbis created a counter-cartography by populating the land with familiar ghosts from their own past, in an attempt to reclaim it for themselves.”[[52]](#footnote-51)

Our Yerushalmi storytellers are engaged in this same counter-cartographical enterprise, “redrawing the map of relations between the dead and the living”[[53]](#footnote-52) in order to lay political and historical claim to a land -- and especially now, when “they were on the way to becoming strangers in their own land.’[[54]](#footnote-53) Given this backdrop of contested, circumscribed, and unofficial power of the rabbis and patriarchs in the gaze of Christian Rome, they produce a kind of “counter-memory” (not a historical memory), but a memory of a past time, embodied by the figure of Rabbi, in which rabbis were the center of the empire, not on the fringes.

And it is particularly a “ghost-like” memory, for it is meant to be spatially encountered in the present, in places like Sepphoris (where Rabbi lived) and in Beth Shearim (where Rabbi was buried), where his memory can be accessed in what otherwise might not feel in the fourth-century, to be rabbinically controlled or dominated spaces. Counter-cartography is thus a form of “ghost-writing” or hauntology, a way to access a past in the present to lay claim to a different future.[[55]](#footnote-54)

The ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present, and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events…To write from a perspective other than the authorized one and “to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities” is, to quote Avery Gordon, “to write ghost stories” (17).[[56]](#footnote-55)

We see this textual strategy for constructing Jewish (rabbinic) space and mobilizing power in Part C. Sepphoris is marked as the site where Rabbi lived and Beth Shearim where he was laid to rest. The funerary procession puts Rabbi’s celebrity on full display. There is an outpouring of grief from all the townspeople. Eighteen stops were made to eulogize him but exactly where is unclear. It hinges on whether we render כנישן as synagogues or assemblies. Was Rabbi’s coffin brought to eighteen synagogues or eighteen (ad hoc) gatherings of assembled villagers (on the way)? Stuart Miller shows why historically only the latter is plausible, but if we read it literarily/rhetorically, the former could be sustained as a textual strategy to overwrite the Lower Galilee with synagogues (not unlike Epiphanius overwriting the same land with churches). Either way, the story populates the funerary procession with large gatherings of mournful Jews paying their respects to their revered rabbi and patriarch. And while a rabbinic geography is not quite mapped *between* Sepphoris and Beth Shearim (no other place names on route are mentioned), what’s important to the editors is establishing Sepphoris and Beth Shearim as sites with deep rabbinic historical significance.

Part of what bolsters not only the saintliness of Rabbi but the significance of his final resting place, is the collective memory of the divine miracle performed on the day of his burial (P.C. (2)). Indeed, there may be significance to the fact that the stopping of the sun invokes the memory of Joshua 10, a historic moment marking the beginning of Jewish (re)colonization of the holy land. Either way, so mournful was that day that the grieving townsmen lost all track of time, including the near onset of Shabbat. All the stops and eulogies caused delay. But the refusal of the sun to set allowed every last townsman to return home and ready himself for Shabbat. Only then did the sun set only to rise almost immediately once more. The sun was apparently suspended almost the entire night. Beth Shearim is not only a resting place for a holy man, but a site for the miraculous that this holiness commanded.

The implication of the story is that the sanctity of Rabbi occasioned the miracle perhaps coupled with the devotion of the people to eulogize him properly. But it’s also interesting that the townsmen lost all sense of time in the process. The sun stops, the day is extended, Shabbat is delayed, but the passage of time continues strangely on. Like Derrida, we return to the words of Hamlet, *the time is out of joint*. When the sun rises soon after setting, it only causes more temporal disorientation. The people worry that they violated Shabbat until a heavenly voice comes down to reassure them.

One wonders whether this example of “disjointed time” - of time not passing as it should- is not only a plot device but suggestive of something more. Perhaps telling the story of Rabbi’s death in the late fourth/early fifth century is meant to be disorientating and haunting to the audience at that time. Rhetorically, it’s meant to highlight a “lost future”[[57]](#footnote-56) that Rabbi once embodied and promised, but which never fully materialized. (Again, whether this is actually the case historically is not the point. In fact, it’s likely not. As mentioned above, rabbis and patriarchs in the fourth/fifth-century had more authority than their third-century predecessors, not less).[[58]](#footnote-57) But still the Yerushalmi editors *use* the saintly memory of Rabbi in an attempt to bolster their own authority claims.

This reading is supported in Part B. Here we find a debate between Rabbi and his colleagues as to whether a person is resurrected in the same clothing he is buried in (P.B. (1) (c) (ii)).[[59]](#footnote-58) In the middle, the editor includes a conversation on this topic between Rabbi and Antoninus which, while on theme, interrupts the flow of the sugya. Antoninus asks Rabbi the meaning of a particular verse in Job and Rabbi responds with a teaching that when God resurrects a person, He will fashion for him new clothing. In context here, we find that Rabbi followed this view in practice, instructing on his deathbed that he should only be buried in a single, simple, shroud.

While we find Rabbi-Antoninus material (often anthologized as discrete collections) elsewhere in the Yerushalmi, in the Mekhilta DeRabbi Ishmael, and Genesis Rabba (as well as later in the Bavli, B. Sanhedrin 91a-b), curiously we do not have any earlier parallels of the story here.[[60]](#footnote-59) While in these other contexts, Rabbi and Antoninus learn from one another, the anecdote here describes only one side of that dynamic: the Roman Emperor seeks out and learns from Rabbi. While the anthological impulse of the editor is obvious in context, the brief anecdote is not simply an off-handed remark that happens to be “on topic” and therefore integrated, but a strategic composition (possibly citation from an unknown source) performing important cultural work in this story. It explicitly introduces *empire* into the narrative, which in my view, haunts the entire story.

The rabbinic fantasy of a Roman Emperor seeking the Torah wisdom of a rabbi/patriarch, centers an otherwise peripheral, marginalized group of provincials and makes the bold claim that Roman imperial power *really* depends upon rabbinic wisdom.[[61]](#footnote-60) The claim takes on even more force in another striking passage in the Yerushalmi, where it is suggested that Antoninus ultimately converts to Judaism. (Again this parallels Epiphanius’ narrative of Hillel the patriarch who converts to Christianity). Shaye Cohen demonstrates that this tradition first appears only in the fourth century after Constantine and he speculates that the text daringly asks the question of counter-history: *what if* the Roman Empire converted to Judaism instead of Christianity?[[62]](#footnote-61)

In fourth/fifth century Lower Galilee, this is a haunting question indeed. While we cannot be certain whether the editor of our story meant to subtly evoke that tradition or not, certainly by including the tradition of Rabbi tutoring the Roman Emperor on the topics of death, burial, and resurrection, he not only constructs a glorified past of rabbinic power and prestige, but also rhetorically laments the loss of that power and prestige in his day, of the failed future that never happened, a lament that translates into a claim in the present for that same power and prestige of Rabbi.

This is a rabbinic (subaltern) fantasy of power historically situated in its time and place. While it may map neatly onto certain traditional historiographies of the city in which rabbinic-Roman relations in the third century appear more peaceful[[63]](#footnote-62) but change and intensify after imperial administrative changes in the late fourth/early fifth centuries, my argument does not depend on it. On the contrary, my point is to highlight the *construction* of a glorious past symbolized by Rabbi’s tutelage of Antoninus as an important detail to his burial story, a rhetorical argument for the power that has been lost. Still the setting of the Greco-Roman Jewish city of Sepphoris certainly helps highlight what is at stake for the storyteller. Once a Herodian seat of power, it had for centuries been a “contact zone”[[64]](#footnote-63) between Jews, Christians, and Romans, and symbolized in so many ways, the historically-fluctuating negotiations of Roman and Jewish power. The memory of Rabbi there helps rabbinize a multicultural capital city.

The same could be said for his burial site at Beth Shearim. Like the city of Sepphoris, the necropolis at Beth Shearim was a site of colonial interaction between Jews and Imperial Rome. As Rajak describes,

In this world of the dead, Jews from the land of Israel meet those of the diaspora, urban Jews meet rural residents, users of Greek meet users of Hebrew, rabbis meet synagogue heads, Jewish ritual meets Greek myth….It is a familiar fact, though it startled the first discoverers, that at Beth She'arim the rabbinic dead were surrounded by iconic representations, not excluding human bodies, by classical imagery, and by depictions of less than salubrious mythological themes, such as the well-known depiction of Leda and the swan. Living in a pagan world, and within the Roman empire, the Palestinian rab-bis were naturally used to being surrounded by such material; yet we should not imagine that this kind ofJewish environment is precisely the one they would have chosen for the deposition of their venerated leaders, even if we credit them with a blind eye or an attitude of detached acceptance. It is fairly clear that their own style was markedly different and their own dead are not commemorated by Greek epigrams. It looks, therefore, as though the rabbis were not in control: the necropolis was not theirs. Resulting from the simple realities of the situation, if nothing else, they probably had little say in the operations by which space was allocated or sold there. We may suppose that rabbis had the know-how and the means to acquire catacombs, chambers or sections for their own use; and that they left it at that.[[65]](#footnote-64)

Narrating the burial of Rabbi at Beth Shearim as a crowds-attracting, miraculous spectacle was a way of rabbinizing an important regionally significant burial site.[[66]](#footnote-65) From a literary perspective, it may be suggested that the material “earthiness” of this counter-cartography is highlighted by Rabbi’s request in Part B that his coffin be perforated with holes on the bottom.[[67]](#footnote-66) That is, it is important that his holy body be physically attached to the holy land, signaling perhaps not only a messianically-inflected religious rite, but a political mapping of the land.

This reading can be situated within an emerging late fourth/early fifth century Jewish-Christian polemical discourse concerning who are the rightful inheritors of the “House of David.” Not only were there rabbinic claims to the patriarch's davidic dynasty, but as Miller writes, “already by the fourth century, a good many church fathers had become aware of the rabbinic claim that the patriarch was a descendant of the House of David” and sought to counter such claims.[[68]](#footnote-67) Cyril of Jerusalem attacks the lineage of the patriarch, while Epiphanius (as we saw above) and Lucian of Caphar Gamla both narratively transfigure various patriarchs “as cryptic believers in Christ admitting his supreme and genuine power and authority.”[[69]](#footnote-68) The Christian counter-claim was that Jesus was a maternal descendant from the House of David. While, to be sure, not all competing claims to the Davidic dynasty were necessarily “messianic,” my point is simply that using the story of Rabbi’s death to reflect on the nature of resurrection, is suggestive in light of the imperial Christianizing of the land. It suggests a haunting non-arrival of the kind of centralized rabbinic-patriachal authority in fourth/fifth century Lower Galilee that the rabbinic/patriarchal elite imagined for themselves.[[70]](#footnote-69) While this may seem odd given this time marks the height of patriarchal authority in Roman Palestine (although again the picture is complex), it must be emphasized that the rabbis/patriarchs certainly did not have unfettered power; they competed with many urban sub-elites and needed to negotiate their power within the Roman provincial context.

Thus, the Yerushalmi tells the counter-story of Sepphoris and Beth Shearim, where the rabbis/patriarchs lie at its center. It is as much a hagiography as it is a textual-political strategy of colonial resistance, marshaling rabbinic power and authority, by rabbinizing Greco-Roman urban centers and landmarks with rabbinic/patriarchal history. Of course, we can see how ambivalent and hybridized resistance can be. Narratively, the prestige and power of the patriarch can be seen not only by miraculous and heavenly voices, but by Rabbi’s friendship and tutelage of the Roman Emperor. Moreover, the necropolis of Beth Shearim was very much architecturally and artistically a diverse, imperial space servicing many different groups of people. But that’s precisely why the rabbis wanted to rabbinize it. The Israeli reaction to the discovery of catacomb 14 in 1954, in a sense, illustrates the success of the Yerushalmi editor, in narrating such a glorious Jewish past onto the land and inside the necropolis.[[71]](#footnote-70)

1. **The Bavli**

If the final composition of the Yerushalmi narrative is firmly situated within its local provincial context, what are we to make of the Bavli’s preservation and adaptation of the story hundreds of years later in a very different historical context in Sasanian Babylonia? While the collective memory of Beth Shearim continues to be preserved in Bavli sources, surely it did not have the same cultural significance for the 6th-7th century Bablyonian redactors.[[72]](#footnote-71) Even with burial at Beth Shearim continuing into the fifth and sixth centuries if not later (with twenty percent of those buried there coming from the diaspora), burial there was still a “highly regional phenomenon” in that most bodies came from adjacent areas in the “Greco-Roman diaspora” not Babylonia.[[73]](#footnote-72) Moreover, on the basis of certain Geniza materials, Miller concludes that by the tenth century (if not earlier), the former glory of Beth Shearim and its necropolis had already been lost on its Babylonian audience. He posits that this loss of prestige and name recognition may help explain a popular medieval local tradition that, notwithstanding the Yerushalmi and Bavli, Rabbi’s burial place was in Sepphoris, not Beth Shearim.[[74]](#footnote-73)

Here’s the text of the Bavli narrative.

**Bavli (B. Ketubot 103-4)**

Editor's Note: Translation is largely adapted from Koren-Steinsaltz translation

B= Babylonian Talmud

*A/B/C =* Three parts, Part A, Part B, Part C

*Italics = Rabbi’s direct speech*

(c) = Commentary

**Part A: Rabbi’s Three Deathbed Wishes**

**Narrative**

***B.A***The Sages taught: At the time of the passing of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, he said, “*I need my sons*.” His sons entered his room. He said to them:

***B.A. (1)*** *“Be careful with the honor of your mother.*

***B.A. (2)*** *[My] lamp should be lit in its usual place. My table should be set in its usual place, and the bed should be arranged in its place.*

***B.A. (3)*** *Yosef Heifani and Shimon Efrati - they served me during my lifetime and they will serve me in my death.”*

**Commentary**

***B.A. (1)(c)*** *“Be careful with the honor of your mother.”* [But this is required by] Torah law, as it is written: "Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:1)? She was their father's wife.

***B.A. (1)(c)(i)*** Honoring a father's wife is also [required] by Torah law, as it is taught [in a baraita]: “Honor your Father [**et** avikha] and your mother [**ve’et** immekha.] [The preposition] **et** avikha [comes to include] your father's wife. **Ve’et** immekha [comes to include] your mother's husband. And the extra letter vav [**ve**'et immekha, comes to include] ’your older brother.' ?! This applies only during [his father's] lifetime. However, following his death, no

***B.A. (2)(c)*** *“My lamp should be lit in its place, my table should be set in its place, and the bed should be arranged in its place.”* What is the reason? Every [Friday evening at] twilight he would come to his house. A certain [Shabbat[[75]](#footnote-74)] eve, a neighbor came and knocked at the door. His maidservant said: Be quiet for Rabbi is sitting. When he heard, he did not come again, so as not to cast aspersions on earlier righteous men.

***B.A. (3)(c)*** *“Yosef Ḥeifani and Shimon Efrati, they served me during my lifetime and they will serve me in my death.”* It was understood from this that he was speaking of this world but when they saw that their biers preceded his bier, they said: Conclude from here that he was speaking of that world.

***B.A. (3)(c)(i)*** And the reason he said this was so that people should not say: There was something [wrong] with them, and until now, too, it was the merit of Rabbi that benefited them

**Part B: Three More Deathbed Wishes**

**Narrative**

***B.B.*** *He said to them: I need the Sages of Israel. The Sages of Israel came to him. He said to them:*

***B.B. (1)*** *Do not eulogize me in the towns*

***B.B. (2)*** *Reconvene the academy after thirty days.*

***B.B. (3)*** *My son Shimon is a Sage. My son Gamliel, Nasi. Ḥanina bar Ḥama will sit at the head of the academy.*

**Commentary**

***B.B. (1) (c)*** *“Do not eulogize me in the towns.”* They understood from this that he said this due to the trouble. When they saw that they were eulogizing him in the cities and everyone came, they said: Conclude from here that he said this due to honor.

***B.B. (2) (c)***“*Reconvene the academy after thirty days*.” Because I am not better than Moses, our teacher, as it is written: “And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days” (Deuteronomy 34:8), thirty days they eulogized him by day and night. From this point forward they eulogized him by day and they studied by night, or they eulogized him by night and studied by day, until they eulogized him for twelve months of the year.

***B.B. (2) (c) (i)***On the day of Rabbi’s funeral, a Divine Voice emerged and said: Whoever was present at the funeral of Rabbi is destined for life in the World-to-Come. A certain launderer would come before [Rabbi] every day. On that day, he did not come. When he heard this, he ascended to the roof and fell to the ground and died. A Divine Voice emerged and said: That launderer too is destined for life in the World-to-Come.

***B.B. (3) (c)***“*My son Shimon is a Sage.”* What was he saying? This is what he was saying: Although my son Shimon is a Sage, my son Gamliel Nasi.

***B.B. (3) (c) (i)***Levi said: Need this be said? Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi said: It is necessary for you and for your limp.

***B.B. (3) (c) (ii)*** What did [Rabbi Shimon] find difficult? Doesn’t the verse state: “But the kingdom he gave to Jehoram because he was the firstborn.” He [Jehoram] filled the place of his fathers. Rabban Gamliel did not fill the place of his fathers.

***B.B. (3) (c) (iii)*** And what is the reason Rabbi did this? Although he did not fill the place of his fathers with regard to wisdom, he did fill the place of his fathers with regard to fear of sin.

***B.B. (3’) (c)*** *“Ḥanina bar Ḥama will sit at the head of the academy.”* Rabbi Ḥanina did not accept because Rabbi Afes was older than him by two and a half years.[[76]](#footnote-75) Rabbi Afes died, and Rabbi Ḥanina sat at the head. And Levi did not have anyone to sit with, and so he came to Babylonia.

***B.B. (3’) (c) (i)*** And this is [the background for when] they said to Rav: A great man came to Neharde’a, and he limps, and he taught: A tiara is permitted [to wear in the public domain on Shabbat. He said: Conclude from this that Rabbi Afes died and Rabbi Ḥanina, sat at the head, and Levi did not have anyone to sit with, and so he came [to Babylonia].[[77]](#footnote-76)

***B.B. (3’) (c) (ii)*** But say Rabbi Ḥanina died, and Rabbi Afes sat as he had sat and Levi did not have anyone to sit with, and so he came? If you wish, say that Levi was subordinate to Rabbi Afes.And if you wish, say that since Rabbi said: Ḥanina bar Ḥama will sit at the head, it is not possible that he will not rule, as it is written about the righteous: “You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto you” (Job 22:28).

***B.B. (3’) (c) (iii)*** But there was Rabbi Ḥiyya? He died.

***B.B. (3’) (c) (iv)*** But didn’t Rabbi Ḥiyya say: I saw the grave site of Rabbi and I shed tears over it? Reverse [the names].

***B.B. (3’) (c) (v)***But didn’t Rabbi Ḥiyya say: On that day that Rabbi died, sanctity ceased? Reverse [the names].

***B.B. (3’) (c) (vi)*** But isn’t it taught[[78]](#footnote-77): When Rabbi fell ill, Rabbi Ḥiyya came to him and found him crying. He said to him: My teacher, for what are you crying? Isn’t it taught:

***B.B. (3’) (c) (vii)*** If one dies while laughing, it is a good sign for him; while crying, it is a bad sign for him. His face upward, it is a good sign for him; his face downward, it is a bad sign for him. His face facing the people, it is a good sign for him; his face facing the wall, it is a bad sign for him. If one’s face is sallow, it is a bad sign for him; if his face is yellow or ruddy, it is a good sign for him. If one dies on the Shabbat eve it is a good sign for him, at the conclusion of Shabbat it is a bad sign for him.If one dies on the eve of Yom Kippur, it is a bad sign for him, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur it is a good sign for him. If one dies due to an intestinal disease, it is a good sign for him, because most of the righteous die due to intestinal disease.

***B.B. (3’) (c) (viii)*** Rabbi said to him: I am crying for the Torah and the mitzvot.[[79]](#footnote-78) If you wish to say, reverse the names. And if you wish, actually do not reverse the names.[[80]](#footnote-79) Rabbi Ḥiyya was occupied with mitzvot and Rabbi thought: I will not hold him back.

***B.B. (3’) (c) (ix)*** And this is [the background for] when Rabbi Ḥanina and Rabbi Ḥiyya argued.[[81]](#footnote-80) Rabbi Ḥanina said to Rabbi Ḥiyya: You are arguing with me? If, Heaven forfend, the Torah would be forgotten from the Jewish people, I would restore it through my analyses. Rabbi Ḥiyya said to Rabbi Ḥanina: I am working to ensure that the Torah will not be forgotten from the Jewish people. For I bring flax and I plant it, and I weave nets. I then trap deer, and I feed the meat to orphans, and I form scrolls from the skins of the deer. And I go to a town that has no teachers of children in it and I write the five books for five children. And I teach the six orders to six children. To each and every one I say: Teach your order to your friends.

***B.B. (3’) (c) (x)*** And this is what Rabbi [referred to when] he said: How great are the actions of Ḥiyya. Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi, said to him: Even greater than yours? He said to him: Yes. Rabbi Yishmael, son of Rabbi Yosei, said: Even greater than my father? He said to him: Heaven forfend. Such should not be said among the Jewish people.[[82]](#footnote-81)

**Narrative**

***B.B. (4)*** *He said to them: I need my younger son. Rabbi Shimon entered his presence. He transmitted to him the orders of wisdom. He said to them: I need my older son. Rabban Gamliel entered his presence and Rabbi transmitted to him the procedures of the patriarchate. He said to him: My son, conduct your patriarchate with assertiveness and cast fear upon your students:*

**Commentary**

***B.B. (4)(c)*** Is that so? But isn’t it written: “But he honors those that fear the Lord” (Psalms 15:4), and the Master said: This is Jehoshaphat, king of Judea. When he would see a Torah scholar he would rise from his throne and hug him and kiss him and call to him: My teacher, my teacher, my master, my master.[[83]](#footnote-82) This is not difficult. This is private, the other public.

**Part C: Rabbi’s Death & Burial**

***B.C.(1)*** It is taught: Rabbi was lying (Rashi: ill) in Sepphoris and a [burial] site was ready for him in Beth She’arim.

***B.C.(1) (i)*** But isn’t it taught: “Justice, justice shall you follow” (Deuteronomy 16:20); follow Rabbi to Beit She’arim? Rabbi was in Beit She’arim, but when he became ill they transferred him to Tzippori, which is at a high altitude and whose air is scented.[[84]](#footnote-83)

***B.C.(2)*** On the day that Rabbi died, the Sages decreed a fast, and begged for divine mercy. And they said: Anyone who says that Rabbi has died will be stabbed with a sword.[[85]](#footnote-84)

***B.C.(3)*** The maidservant of Rabbi ascended to the roof and said: The upper realms are requesting Rabbi and the lower realms are requesting Rabbi. May it be the will [of God] that the lower worlds should impose their will upon the upper worlds. However, when she saw how many times he would enter the bathroom and remove his phylacteries, and put them back on, and how he was suffering, she said: May it be the will [of God] that the upper worlds should impose their will upon the lower worlds.

***B.C.(4)*** And the Sages would not be silent from begging for mercy. So she took a jug and threw it from the roof to the ground. [The Sages] became silent and refrained from begging for mercy, and Rabbi died.

***B.C.(5)*** The Sages said to bar Kappara: Go and ascertain. He went and found that [Rabbi] had died. He tore his clothing and reversed them so that the tear would be behind him. He opened and said: The angels and righteous both clutched the sacred ark. The angels triumphed over the righteous, and the sacred ark was captured. They said to him: Has he died? He said to them: You have said it and I did not say it.[[86]](#footnote-85)

***B.C.(6)*** At the time of the death of Rabbi he raised his ten fingers toward Heaven and said: Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that I toiled with my ten fingers in the Torah, and I have not derived any benefit even with my small finger. May it be Your will that there be peace in my repose. A Divine Voice emerged and said: “He enters in peace, they rest in their beds” (Isaiah 57:2).

***B.C.(6) (i)*** It should have said: In your bed. This supports Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Gamda, as Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Gamda said that Rabbi Yosei ben Shaul said: At the time when a righteous individual departs from the world, the ministering angels say before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, the righteous individual so-and-so is coming. He then says to them: The righteous should come forth and they should go out toward him. And [the righteous] say to him: He enters in peace. [Then the righteous] rest in their beds.

***B.C.(6) (ii)*** Rabbi Elazar said: At the time when a righteous individual departs from the world, three contingents of ministering angels go out toward him. One says to him: Enter in peace; and one says to him: Each one that walks in his uprightness; and one says to him: He enters in peace, they rest in their beds. At the time when a wicked person perishes from the world, three contingents of angels of destruction go out toward him. One says to him: “There is no peace, says the Lord concerning the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22); and one says to him: “You shall lie down in sorrow” (Isaiah 50:11); and one says to him: “Go down, and be laid with the uncircumcised” (Ezekiel 32:19).

**Some Notes on the Literary & Structural Features of the Bavli**

While there are significant omissions and additions, the Bavli retains the same basic three part structure as the Yerushalmi. The first two parts (B.A, B.B) each contain a series of deathbed wishes (Hebrew narrative) along with an appended (mostly Aramaic) commentary.[[87]](#footnote-86) The commentary sections of the Bavli are longer, more developed, and function in a more expansive way. The editor presents new legal exegesis and law (*B.A. (1)(c)*) and narrates many other sub-narratives, including the story of Rabbi’s ghost (*B.A. (2)(c)*), the dispute between Levi & R. Simeon (*B.B. (3) (c) (i-iii)*) and between R. Hanina and R. Hiyya (*B.B. (3’) (c))*, the story of R. Hiyya who finds Rabbi crying on his deathbed (*B.B. (3’) (c) (vi))*, and the story of the maidservant hastening Rabbi’s death out of compassion (*B.C.(3)*). Signs of rupture or dissonance between Rabbi’s wishes and what actually happened is a recurring motif in the commentary sections. This is true both in terms of Rabbi’s succession plans but also in terms of his personal plans to return home posthumously, which is disrupted after some unspecified amount of time because of a maidservant and neighbor who ruin it (*B.A. (2)(c))*.

There is a significant number of intertexts which our editor cites secondarily (often marked in our text as secondary, with the phrase “And this is [the background for]...” *B.B. (3’) (c) (ix)* ), evidence for the story’s late redaction. (See appendix). One effect of this highly intertextually woven commentary is the construction of a more globalizing narrative rabbinic history in which various isolated Bavli anecdotes become synthesized into a single story which connect in some way to Rabbi’s life (and/or death).

The Bavli redactor had at his disposal P.A and P.C of the Yerushalmi *at least in some form* (including the Yerushalmi commentary section). Two of the six requests in the Bavli come directly from the Yerushalmi and a third strongly echoes another.[[88]](#footnote-87) See chart below.

| ***P.A.(1)*** *My widow should not budge from my house*  ***P.A.(2)*** *Do not eulogize me in the towns*  ***P.A.(3)*** *And whoever has attended to me in my lifetime will attend to me after my death.* | ***B.A. (1)*** *“Be careful with the honor of your mother.*  ***B.B. (1)*** *Do not eulogize me in the towns*  ***B.A. (3)*** *Yosef Heifani and Shimon Efrati - they served me during my lifetime and they will serve me in my death.”* |
| --- | --- |

The Bavli editor incorporates, revises, and updates both the narrative and commentary sections of P.A . He also includes the story of the laundryman and the story of Bar Kappara (P.C). Noteworthy is that the narrative and the commentary in P.B is missing in the Bavli. Bavli-specific deathbed requests include preparations for what would be his ghostly return and succession plans for the patriarchate and the academy. Moreover, the Bavli’s conclusion, B.C.(6), is unparalleled in the Yerushalmi. While the Yerushalmi ends with the Bat Kol’s promise of eternal life for the townsmen and laundryman, the Bavli ends with a Bat Kol announcing that Rabbi rests in peace.

Finally, many of the spectral themes from the Yerushalmi appear in the Bavli but are also extended. Rabbi is not only caught in that cosmic tug of war between mortals and angels (life and death, B.C.(5)), but he is also caught between the rabbis praying for his life and his maidservant praying for his merciful death (B.C. (4)-(5)). Similarly Rabbi is caught between the privy and his home, his phylacteries repeatedly on and off. Perhaps most strikingly, after his death, Rabbi returns as a ghost.

**A Hauntological Analysis**

I would argue that part of the creativity of the Bavli’s redactor is precisely in de-localizing the Yerushalmi’s narrative. Consider some of the key differences between the stories. Part C in the Yerushalmi is significantly abbreviated in the Bavli (P.C. (1) = *B.C.(1),(5)* ; P.C (2)= *B.B. (2) (c) (i)*). A baraita concisely records a tradition that Rabbi was ill in Sepphoris and was buried in Beth Shearim, but no narrative is attached to that statement, only a contradicting baraita that Rabbi lived in Beth Shearim not Sepphoris, which required the Bavli to offer a harmonizing explanation (*B.C.(1) (i))*.[[89]](#footnote-88) There is no mention of a funerary procession with eighteen stops nor any mention of a sun suspended miraculously in the sky (P.C(1)), although the laundryman anecdote is preserved in abbreviated form (*B.C.(1) (i)*). While the Yerushalmi has *Sepphoreans* threaten anyone who announces Rabbi’s death, in the Bavli, their local identity is erased (and rabbinized) and they are simply referred to as *rabbis* (P.C (1) - B.C (2)).[[90]](#footnote-89)

As noted above, the Bavli also does not include any material from the Yerushalmi’s Part B including burial shrouds, resurrection, or Rabbi’s tutelage of Antoninus. Of course, the Bavli’s story is in Ketubot, not Kilyaim, so there wouldn’t have been a Mishnaic “hook” but we do nonetheless find this material included in Yerushalmi Ketubot. While it is hard to know if the Bavli editors had the Yerushalmi Ketubot story as we have it today (with Part B) and then proceeded to cut it or they didn’t have that material to begin with, either way it’s noteworthy that no mention is made of either resurrection or Rome.[[91]](#footnote-90)

Moreover, the Bavli adds material which also disassociates the story from its Roman Palestinian context. Instead of following the processional from Sepphoris to Beth Shearim, we follow Levi’s (a native of Tiberias and member of Rabbi’s court) relocation to Babylonia. As will be elaborated upon below, the story of Rabbi’s death is used to trace a line of continuity between Rabbi and the established Babylonian academies. In addition, even the “ghost” of Rabbi that we (briefly) meet only in the Bavli effectively dislodges his (embodied) presence from his resting place in the Beth Shearim necropolis.

If the Bavli editors weren’t interested in the story for its meditations on resurrection or rituals of burial, for its counter-cartography or imperial resistance, then what may their purposes and concerns have been? It seems to me that they were concerned about the status of the rabbinic Babylonian academy and its ability (politically perhaps, but also scholastically and hermeneutically) to produce a faithful talmudic commentary to Rabbi’s Mishnah in the hopes that Torah never be forgotten.

Such concerns can be detected by the Bavli’s inclusion of B.B. (3) which is without parallel in the Yerushalmi. On his deathbed, Rabbi takes care to ensure a smooth institutional succession.[[92]](#footnote-91) He appoints his eldest son Gamliel as patriarch and Hanina as head of the academy. (His son Shimon, appears to be appointed to the position “Hakham” although the Bavli redactor interprets this not as a leadership position, but as an adjective describing his scholastic mastery of Torah).[[93]](#footnote-92) It is noteworthy that the Bavli uses Rabbi’s death to reflect upon the continuity of the patriarchate, given the institution was non-native and long dissolved; the discussion is missing in the Yerushalmi when the office was still extant and active. But perhaps that is precisely the point. In 6th/7th century Babylonia, interest in Rabbi and the institutional legacy of the patriarchate wasn’t simply a matter of antiquarian interest but an important part of the authorizing genealogy and self-identity of the Babylonian rabbinic academies. In 4th/5th century Lower Galilee, tracing the contours of patriarchal succession was perhaps less pressing to the Yerushalmi editors considering it was a lived reality for them and patriarchs were making succession/authority claims for themselves.

Either way, from the Bavli’s commentary we learn that something is amiss with regards to Rabbi’s plans for succession. His death marks a double loss as his joint patriarchal-academic position (at least as imagined) dissolves into two. The new head of the academy no longer has the same political standing *and* the new patriarch no longer has the same scholastic mastery of Torah.[[94]](#footnote-93) *Rabban Gamliel did not fill the place of his fathers* (*B.B. (3) (c) (iii)*)*.* One might suspect that the Bavli’s description is a projection of their own Babylonian academies (including the institutional split between the Babylonian Academy and Exilarch), and that beneath the textual surface lies a haunting feeling that their own academies cannot match either the political or scholastic achievements of the past. The Bavli often reads the patriarchate on the model of its own Babylonian academy.[[95]](#footnote-94)

Moreover the Bavli makes clear that Rabbi’s succession plan doesn’t appear to proceed as he desired. Rabbi Hanina does not accept the appointment, instead deferring to Rabbi Afes (which parallels Gamliel’s appointment for reasons of seniority rather than scholarship). This ultimately leads to a cascading effect in which Levi leaves for Babylonia. But then after Rabbi Hanina ultimately does, if belatedly, accept the position years later, the Bavli immediately questions whether Rabbi Hanina was the right choice; perhaps Rabbi Hiyya should have been Rabbi’s successor (*B.B. (3’) (c) (iii)*). The Bavli’s initial answer that “he was [too] occupied in mitzvot” is not particularly reassuring (*B.B. (3’) (c) (viii)*).The upshot is that at the same time we find the Bavli claiming continuity with the past, we also find unexpected delays, fissures, and breaks in Rabbi’s vision for institutional continuity.

Nevertheless after questioning Rabbi Hanina’s fitness as successor, the Bavli proceeds to justify Rabbi’s choice by distinguishing the way he and Rabbi Hiyya each went about ensuring that Torah not be forgotten. Rabbi Hiyya was involved in the *material* production of scrolls and the education of children. It is said that he would do it all, from planting the flax, weaving the nets, trapping the deer, and making scrolls from its hides, all to ensure the children of every town had written copies of Torah and oral knowledge of the six orders of Mishnah. It is a stunning sequence of painstaking labor and a wonderful Bavli fantasy which fashions Rabbi Hiyya as the preeminent *transmitter* of Rabbi’s magnum opus, reaching the next generation of children in even the most remote cities and villages. But what distinguished Rabbi Hanina however was his ability to recover and reconstitute Torah *theoretically,* analytically, and orally for the rabbinic elites.

The Bavli’s preference for Rabbi Hanina is another example of what has now become quite familiar: its editors encoding their own distinctive scholastic values and retrojecting it back onto sources from or about earlier times.[[96]](#footnote-95) But this retrojection is not simply anachronism. Justifying the choice of Rabbi Hanina is a strategy to affirm and bolster the scholasticism of the Babylonian academy and to claim it as a fulfillment of Rabbi’s legacy.[[97]](#footnote-96) But if we are to apply here a hauntological hermeneutic, in which we read not only that which is asserted, but that which is repressed by the very assertion (the negative image to borrow a metaphor from photography), then perhaps we can uncover here something troubling the Bavli editors: is the Babylonian academy indeed up to the task of preserving and producing rabbinic tradition?[[98]](#footnote-97) Can it reasonably counter the haunting fear that Torah might be forgotten, a fear explicitly named in our text and which I would suggest permeates the entire narrative.

For the Bavli, the choice of Rabbi’s successor depends on this question. And while it motivates the lifework of both Rabbis Hiyya and Hanina, it also highlights the stark contrast between them. In the end, the Bavli’s narrative suggests that talmudic knowledge, as dialectically practiced and institutionally situated in the Babylonian academy (embodied by Rabbi Hanina, Rabbi’s choice), is produced and conditioned by the haunting specter that Torah (written and oral) might be forgotten. But as it justifies Babylonian scholasticism it also simultaneously raises the possibility (embodied by the figure of Rabbi Hiyya[[99]](#footnote-98)) that it might not be enough.

But Rabbi’s death causes more than a crisis of succession. It literally disrupts the normal functioning of the academy. In another passage found only in the Bavli, Rabbi requests before he dies that the academy reconvene after thirty days after his passing (3.2). The Bavli (4.2) notices in his plea, a tacit acknowledgement that disruption would come and explains that for thirty days the academy shut its doors because of the eulogies offered day and night for Rabbi. The disruption would continue to a lesser extent for an entire year. (*Would it ever be the same again?*) With Rabbi’s death, not only would he of course no longer be found in the academy, but for some time thereafter, no one could be.

His absence from the academy is perhaps alluded to elsewhere as well. When he returns as a ghost (a textual unit also unique to the Bavli),[[100]](#footnote-99) he returns home to his family, but never to the academy (B.A. (2)(c)). Read in this way, the ghost story highlights not only his ghostly *presence* at home, but his haunting *absence* from the academy, from his patriarchal court, from his public life of rabbinic leadership and scholarship. A vacancy has been left in the wake of his passing.

This vacancy finds beautiful literary expression in the recurring use of the word “makom”(“place”).

[My] lamp should be lit in its usual **place**. My table should be set in its usual **place**, and the bed should be arranged in its **place**. ***B.A. (2)(c)***

What did [Rabbi Shimon] find difficult? Doesn’t the verse state: “But the kingdom he gave to Jehoram because he was the firstborn.” He [Jehoram] **filled the place of his fathers**. Rabban Gamliel **did not fill the place of his fathers**. ***B.B. (3) (c) (ii)***

And what is the reason Rabbi did this? Although he did **not fill the place of his fathers** with regard to wisdom, he **did fill the place of his fathers** with regard to fear of sin. ***B.B. (3) (c) (iii)***

Just like Rabbi’s *makom* (place) at home -- his lamp, his table, his bed -- is prepared yet hauntingly empty (except when he visits), so too his public *makom* is haunted - it’s filled but not quite filled. Gamliel “filled the place of his father” with regard to his piety, but not with regard to his mastery of Torah. Here again Rabbi’s death is used by the Bavli to narrate a hagiography that effectively draws a sharp break between past and present, implicitly questioning the current and future leadership of the academy and the Torah scholarship it produces.[[101]](#footnote-100)

Rabbi’s ghostly return is one of the most glaring differences between the Yerushalmi and Bavli and yet as far as the history of scholarship is concerned, it is perhaps the most neglected. Not surprisingly, historians do not include the incident in their historiographies, but more surprisingly, even literary critics like Ofra Meir, completely gloss over Rabbi’s ghost.[[102]](#footnote-101) The neglect may in part be due to the widespread marginalization of demons, angels, and magic that lie at the very foundations of the post-Enlightenment nineteenth century Wissenschaft des Judentums which sought to rationalize Judaism, assumptions which continue to shape scholarship today. Recently, scholars of rabbinics have begun correcting this, reinscribing “intermediate beings” into the ontologies and cosmologies of late antique rabbinic culture.[[103]](#footnote-102)

But part of the neglect in our case surely arises from the fact that the word “ghost” is not actually present in the original Bavli text. In some other Bavli stories, spirits of the dead are referred to as “ruhot”[[104]](#footnote-103) but here (and elsewhere) the text simply states that after Rabbi died, he would come (back) to his house every (Friday) evening at twilight. Nothing but context points us to anything ghostly about his return. If anything, what is so interesting and calls for further analysis is why Rabbi’s appearance pre- and post-mortem is textually so smoothed over.

The truth is that the ghost of Rabbi is perhaps the *least* haunting aspect of the story and I mean this in two senses.[[105]](#footnote-104) First, from a plot perspective, the *character* of Rabbi’s ghost never spooks anyone. The only one spooked is the ghost himself when he learns that the neighbor knows he’s returned. Rabbi’s ghost doesn’t fit the standard motifs common from antiquity till today.[[106]](#footnote-105) There is no evidence of restlessness or any “unfinished business.” There is no need for proper re-burial or vengeance for an unsolved murder.[[107]](#footnote-106) There isn’t even any magic or necromancy involved in his summoning.[[108]](#footnote-107) Rabbi’s return was self-initiated, soberly planned while he was still alive, and his family was prepared accordingly. This is not a ghost story that would entertain or scare anyone around a campfire at night.[[109]](#footnote-108)

But there is another sense in which Rabbi’s ghost is not haunting. While today, in our post-Enlightenment rationalist world, non-observable intermediate beings have been emptied from the cosmos and belief in or encounter with them would be considered to exceed the rational and scientific, for Jews in late antiquity this was not the case. Demons, angels, and spirits populated their world, above and below.[[110]](#footnote-109) Jewish Babylonian necromancy practices are well documented. Several skulls with Aramaic incantation writing (sharing language similar to the Aramaic magic bowls) appear to be used for that purpose.[[111]](#footnote-110) In Sefer HaRazim, we find the following magical rite:

If you wish to question a ghost (lish’ol ba-’ov); stand facing a tomb and repeat the names of the angels of the fifth encampment (while holding) in your hand a new flask (containing) oil and honey mixed together and say thus: ‘I adjure you . . .’ When he [i.e., the dead] appears set the flask before him and after this speak your words while holding a twig of myrtle in your hand.[[112]](#footnote-111)

But we do not have to look any farther than the Bavli itself. While there is a biblical injunction against the *performance* of necromancy which is recognized, adopted, and regulated by the Bavli,[[113]](#footnote-112) never does the Bavli question its efficacy; on the contrary the Bavli describes its practice as efficacious.[[114]](#footnote-113) Indeed in B. Sanhedrin 65, we find necromancy to be assimilated as a rabbinic science and in which the sanctity of Shabbat even becomes part of its systematicity:

The Sages taught: A necromancer includes both one who raises the dead by naming, and one who inquires from a skull. What is the difference between this and that? When one raises the dead by naming, the dead does not rise in its usual manner, and it does not rise on Shabbat. When one inquires from a skull, the dead rises in its usual manner, and it rises even on Shabbat. Rises? To where does it rise? Isn’t [the skull] lying before him? Rather, say The dead answers in its usual manner, and it answers even on Shabbat.

In the text which follows, Rabbi Akiva teaches this necromantic knowledge to Turnus Rufus.

It is for this reason (the reminder of historical situatedness), that my usage of the English word “ghost” is problematic and needs to be flagged. It’s not simply that there isn’t a Hebrew correlative. It’s that the word conjures associations for us not shared by them and vice versa. It’s also the reason why we must tread very cautiously here with any “application” to Derrida’s hauntology. For him, a specter or ghost is employed metaphorically, while for our storytellers ghosts were also real. For him, ghosts are used to deconstruct modern Western ontologies and systems of knowledge, while in antiquity ghosts were very much a constitutive part of them. To uncritically apply Derridean hauntology to the character of Rabbi’s ghost risks flattening the historical specificity of ghosts for Babylonian Jews.[[115]](#footnote-114)

Sara Ronis makes a similar comment in her study on demons in the Bavli.

What did the rabbis think it meant to be a demon at all? The demon cannot be only a metaphor, psychological manifestation, or symbol. Within the parameters of the story, the demon is real and embodied….The ancient world was teeming with demons.[[116]](#footnote-115)

Within our story, Rabbi’s ghost is embodied as well.[[117]](#footnote-116) He requires a lamp, a seat at the table, a made bed. But beyond corporeality, there was a “realness” about ghosts for late antique Babylonian Jews. They were not only literary fictions but participants of their world and this must be registered even when we are engaged in literary analysis of a story.[[118]](#footnote-117)

At the same time, I do contend this story is hauntological and Rabbi’s ghost contributes to its themes. But in what way precisely? Above, I suggested that it was his absence from the academy. This is bolstered by if we compare our ghost story with another Bavli one found in B. Shabbat 152a:

The diggers were digging in Rav Naḥman’s land and Rav Aḥai bar Yoshiya [who was buried there], rebuked them. They came and said to Rav Naḥman: A [deceased] person rebuked us. He [Rav Naḥman] came and said to him: Who is the Master? He said to him: I am Aḥai bar Yoshiya. He said to him: [How has your body been preserved?] Didn’t Rav Mari say that the righteous will turn to dust? He said to him: And who is Mari, whom I do not know? He said to him: There is an explicit verse which is written: “And the dust will return to the earth as it was” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). He said to him: Whoever taught you Ecclesiastes did not teach you Proverbs, for it is written: “[A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh], but envy is the rotting of the bones” (Proverbs 14:30). Anyone who has envy in his heart, his bones rot, and anyone who does not have envy in his heart, his bones do not rot. He [Rav Naḥman] touched him and saw that he had substance. He said to him: Let the Master arise and come into my house. Rav Aḥai said to him: You have revealed that you have not even studied Prophets, for it is written: “And you shall know that I am the Lord when I open up your graves” (Ezekiel 37:13).[ As long as the dead have not been instructed to leave their graves, leaving of their own accord is prohibited]. He [Rav Nachman] said: But it is written: “For you are dust and you shall return to dust” (Genesis 3:19)? He said to him: That [verse applies only] one hour before the resurrection of the dead.

This story deserves its own treatment, but for now, a few observations will suffice. First, here too, there is no word in the original text for spirit or ghost. It isn’t linguistically marked. That this is a ghost story is only gleaned from contextual clues, like the digging, and the conversation between them. Second, the ghost of Rav Ahai, like Rabbi’s ghost, takes on material form. He can literally be touched. Third, there is an important contrast in that Rabbi returns on his own to his family, while here Rav Ahai was disturbed from his grave by the diggers.

But most instructive for us is another difference. Rav Ahai’s ghost “schools” the great Rav Nachman (both teaching and taunting him) in matters of Torah, in biblical exegesis, and on the nature of resurrection. That story feels (at least to me) less haunting than humorous, a dark comedy, a cultural critique. But in our story, Rabbi’s ghost does not teach Torah at all (does not speak directly at all) and *that* is what haunts our Bavli storyteller. Rabbi may have returned as a ghost, but he didn’t return to the academy, and he didn’t teach Torah. No ghost, no angel, no intermediary being, can come back to clarify matters any further.[[119]](#footnote-118) All that is left from Rabbi, the presence of his absence, is the collection of his teachings, the Mishnah, which is left to human (rabbinic) interpretation.[[120]](#footnote-119) This point is strengthened by the fact that in the Bavli, ghosts/spirits of the dead are viewed as repositories of various kinds of knowledge.[[121]](#footnote-120) Rav Ahai’s ghost is the rule; Rabbi’s ghost the exception.

This returns us to our haunting theme above: how can it be ensured that Torah not be forgotten? How can Rabbi’s Mishnah not only be disseminated (Rabbi Hiyya) but *analyzed and interpreted* (Rabbi Hanina) without him? In a sense, the Bavli editors are not only haunted by the leadership, credentials, and political standing of the academy, but also by its hermeneutical method.

The irony is that while the death of Rabbi precipitates a crisis of meaning, it is precisely this crisis, this feeling of “absence” or “distance” which is a condition for the production of meaning. The death of Rabbi symbolically marks the closing of the Mishnah and with that comes the possibility of Talmudic commentary. What I’m suggesting is that for the Bavli, the story of Rabbi’s death, the death of the redactor, is the story of the beginnings of Talmud.

But this isn’t just *narrativized* by our Bavli storyteller, it is *performed* in its very telling. Consider the following. One of the most striking compositional features of our story is its diglossia; it is told in two registers. There is a running narrative and a running commentary in parallel and these two registers are linguistically marked. The narrative, generally speaking, is Hebrew and the commentary Aramaic.[[122]](#footnote-121) To be fair, this structure is already present in the Yerushalmi version and in general, it is fairly common for stories to have interspersed, appended commentary. But here we find one of the most developed and extended examples of this diglossic form, managing and controlling a sprawling number of intertexts through this overarching system of first order narrative and second-order commentary. In this way, the story of Rabbi’s death becomes “textualized.” In particular, it is analyzed and commented on as if it were a text of Mishnah.[[123]](#footnote-122) Every deathbed wish is interrogated as if it were a Mishnaic law.[[124]](#footnote-123) Not only is the identity between Rabbi and the Mishnah performed but so is the very act of Talmudic interpretation which is conditioned upon it.[[125]](#footnote-124)

And indeed this diglossic narrative-commentary structure, which frames and controls a significant number of earlier traditions and intertexts, is a wonderful example of a “distancing” strategy employed by the Bavli redactors. As Moulie Vidas has shown, the Bavli editors employ a “variety of compositional techniques to create a distance between themselves and the traditions they quote.”[[126]](#footnote-125) One example is the act of quotation which by fossilizing a tradition and rendering it an object of the past to be analyzed, can “signify a break rather than continuity, alienation rather than identification.”[[127]](#footnote-126) A second, I would add, is the diglossic commentary structure in our story (and elsewhere where it appears) which achieves a similar kind of distanciation and which marks and amplifies the distinct voice of the redactor.[[128]](#footnote-127)

As Vidas emphasizes, distancing strategies (citation, commentary) help produce past “tradition” but also makes space for the independent creativity of the redactors.

Far from “hiding” themselves behind tradition or voicing their agenda through it, the authors of the stam become a presence in their own creation…By rendering traditions archaic, fixed Hebrew “quotations” and “artifacts” subordinated to a live, all-knowing Aramaic narrating layer, it enabled the scholars who presented sugyot in the academy to create a space for their own self-expression and to justify their necessity.[[129]](#footnote-128)

If, as we saw, Babylonian scholasticism and dialectics is theorized by the Bavli as a mode of “restoration,” a way to preserve and reconstruct traditions of the past, then there needs to be a past to reconstruct, a closed text to interpret. Textualizing (mishnaicizing) the story of Rabbi’s death suggests that with his death comes the end of the Mishnah and the beginning of the Talmud. The diglossic narrative-commentary structure highlights two distinctive voices: the voice of Rabbi and the voice of his interpreters.[[130]](#footnote-129)

Vidas illustrates ways in which the production of distance, of “discontinuity with tradition and the past is central to the Talmud's literary design and to the self-conception of its creators,”[[131]](#footnote-130) and in particular he highlights the ways in which this expresses their bold creativity. In our story too, we observe the creativity of the Bavli editors, particularly the complex processes and mechanics they employed in anthologizing significant amounts of earlier material and imposing order upon it. As David Stern reminds us, “there is no anthological organization devoid of an ideological orientation” and here the Bavli editor clearly emerges “as a literary agent and persona in his own right.”[[132]](#footnote-131)

But at the same time, we can locate the hitherside of that boldness, a concomitant anxiety, a haunting, caused by the hermeneutic position of being caught in the deferral of meaning (not that there is no originary meaning by the author, but that it can be so difficult to ascertain[[133]](#footnote-132)). Consider the below:

*Yosef Ḥeifani and Shimon Efrati, they served me during my lifetime and they will serve me in my death.”* It was understood from this that he was speaking of this world but when they saw that their biers preceded his bier, they said: Conclude from here that he was speaking of that world. ***B.A. (3)(c)***

*“Do not eulogize me in the towns.”* They understood from this that he said this due to the trouble. When they saw that they were eulogizing him in the cities and everyone came, they said: Conclude from here that he said this due to honor.[[134]](#footnote-133) ***B.B. (1) (c)***

The meaning of Rabbi’s words weren’t immediately understood. It took the passage of time. This isn’t the Bavli reinterpreting and retrojecting back, but the Bavli confessing to have misunderstood Rabbi’s statements. This deferral at once both stabilizes and de-stabilizes rabbinic interpretation.[[135]](#footnote-134) Meaning can be arrived at, but it can also surprise and be different than what was once expected. To be clear, I am certainly not claiming that the Bavli editors anticipated Derrida and late twentieth-century deconstruction, historically or theoretically. They did not.[[136]](#footnote-135) But they did confront this fundamental question of hermeneutics, the grounds of interpretation.[[137]](#footnote-136)

In this regard, I respectfully disagree with David Stern, or perhaps more fairly, have found a counter-example to his theory from a different rabbinic corpus than the one he was primarily considering. Stern writes:

The distinguishing feature of rabbinic midrash is indeed, the Rabbis' very lack of anxiety over their self-acknowledged belatedness. Unintimidated by that awesome tradition at whose conclusion they stand, and unabashed in its presence, the Rabbis show perfect, paradoxical contentment in their role as "mere" interpreters of Torah. To be sure, the expense at which they achieved this happy satisfaction is not a complete mystery: it was bought at the cost of relinquishing any claim to rivaling the biblical tradition in their own compositions, by disowning the ambition for their writing to be anything more than commentary, elaboration, extension. By choosing not to compose Scripture or anything approximating or pretending to be Scripture, the Rabbis won for themselves the unburdened liberty to interpret the Bible nearly however they wished, and as many ways as they could. Yet more than anything else, the freedom from hermeneutical anxiety that the Rabbis thus achieved for themselves also points to the difference between them and us; at the least, it suggests the unsettling possibility that there may be much less in common between rabbinic exegesis and contemporary criticism than at first appears.

In a footnote, he cites one example, the famed story of the Oven of Ahani (b. Baba Mezia 59b), in which God laughs proudly when the rabbis rule against Him and defeat him. “With so benign a father,” writes Stern, “we can imagine how unthreatened the Rabbis may have felt about their position in tradition.”[[138]](#footnote-137)

But in our story, one can detect the “hermeneutical anxiety” of the Bavli editors. It is precisely within the form of Talmudic commentary where the rabbis negotiate and wrestle with their “self-acknowledged belatedness.”[[139]](#footnote-138) In other words, what haunts the Bavli editors is precisely what enables their very activity: the responsibility of interpreting Rabbi’s Mishnah correctly without him present.

\* \* \*

The Bavli’s version of the story shares a significant amount of material with the Yerushalmi but diverges in important ways. By offering a hauntological analysis of both stories, I offer a way of reading and comparing both stories. From geography to text, from necropolis to academy, I suggest that while the editors of the Yerushalmi are haunted by the imperial project of Christianizing the land of Israel, the editors of the Bavli --stripping the Yerushalmi of this local-historical specificity -- reshaped the story to address a different set of hauntological concerns, namely, how the Bablyonian rabbinic academies will be able to produce faithful commentaries to Rabbi’s Mishnah.

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**Appendix I: Some Further Notes on the Literary & Structural Features of the Yerushalmi & It’s Parallels**

Despite the coherence of the story on the redacted level, the story may be a composite of at least two stories. Notwithstanding what was said above about chronology and some recurring motifs, on the whole there is little evidence to suggest that P.A and P.B are necessary for the telling of P.C. We find a later parallel to P.A and P.B preserved in Gen Rabba 101 (without P.C) and a later parallel toP.C without P.A or P.B in Koh Rabba 7 (It is clear that the midrashim are later). The Yerushalmi redactor either loosely collected two independent stories about Rabbi’s death in accordance with his anthologizing tendencies or he crafted a single story which later redactors of Genesis and Kohelet Rabba saw fit to divide.

Either way, we can observe that the redactor of Koh Rabba reworked P.C of the Yerushalmi because it omitted the context it provided in P.A and P.B.

| **תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כתובות פרק יא דף לד טור ד /ה"ז** | **תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כלאים פרק ט דף לב טור א /ה"א** | **קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ז** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ר' ציוה שלשה דברים בשעת פטירתו מן העולם ... | רבי ציוה שלשה דברים בשעת פטירתו ... |  |
| ציפורייא אמרין מאן דמר לן דמית רבי אנן קטלין ליה | ציפריא אמרין מאן דאמר לן רבי דמך אנן קטלי' ליה | **ר' הוה דמיך** בציפורין ואמרין ציפוראי כל דאתא ואמר דמך ר' אנן קטלין ליה, |

In the Yerushalmi, the statement of the Sepphoreans makes sense because we know Rabbi is on his deathbed from Part A. Since that is not the case in Koh Rabba, the redactor adds the introductory phrase ‘ר' הוה דמיך’ to begin the story and set the scene. Alternatively, the PT redactor removed this brief phrase since he juxtaposed it with the previous source. Regardless, the story though has consequently changed. In the Yerushalmi, it is ambiguous whether Rabbi has already died when the Sepphoreans make their threat. In Koh Rabba, he had already died. The news of Rabbi’s death comes from the narrator in the beginning, whereas in the Yerushalmi, the audience learns it only later from Bar Kappara.

**The chart below shows various other non-direct parallels, echoes, inversions.**

| **Yerushalmi**  The redactor of the story never explicitly says that Rabbi has died. Just as the villagers were reluctant to bury Rabbi, the storyteller it seems was reluctant to pen the usual words “nach nafshei” that conclude a deathbed story.  It is written, “[I am counted] among the dead who are free” [Psalms 88:6]. Once a person dies, he becomes freed [from the obligation to perform] commandments. **P.0.**  Eulogies continue through Friday eve, which is miraculously extended to prevent violation of Shabbat. It's a liminal and miraculous time.  **P.C.(2)**  Rabbi makes sure his wife remains in his house after he dies **P.A.(1)** | **Bavli**  Rabbi returns as a ghost ***B.A. (2)(c)***  But isn’t it taught: When Rabbi fell ill, Rabbi Ḥiyya came to him and found him crying… Rabbi said to him: I am crying for the Torah and the mitzvot. ***B.B. (3’) (c) (viii)***  Rabbi’s ghost returns during twilight on Friday eve. ***B.A. (2)(c)***  In order to eulogize Rabbi each day, for one year, the academy would be open during the day but not night, or at night but not day. ***B.B. (2) (c)***  Rabbi makes sure to come back to visit his wife in his house. ***B.A. (2)(c)*** |
| --- | --- |

Appendix: Sources of the Bavli Story (Other than the Yerushalmi)

| ***B.B. (3) (c) (ii)***  ***B.B. (3’) (c) (i)***  ***B.B. (3’) (c) (ix)***  ***B.B. (4)(c)***  ***B.C.(1) (i)***  ***B.B. (1) (c)*** | * 1. B. Keritut 5b/B. Horayot 11b ⇛ ואת הממלכה נתן ליהורם כי הוא הבכור   ואת יהואחז מפני יהויקים, שהיה גדול ממנו שתי שנים…. ומי מלכי זוטרי מקמי קשישי? והא כתיב**:ואת הממלכה נתן ליהורם כי הוא הבכור! יהורם ממלא מקום אבותיו הוה, יהויקים לאו ממלא מקום אבותיו הוה.**  ‘And Jehoahaz on account of Jehoiakim who was older than he by two years.’ ... Do, however, younger sons succeed to kingship before the older ones? **Surely, it is written, But the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn! — Jehoram was worthily filling the place of his ancestors; Jehoiakim was not worthily filling the place of his ancestors.**   * 1. B. Shabbat 59b ⇛ והיינו דאמרי ליה לרב: גברא רבה...ותגזר אומר ויקם לך   אמרו ליה לרב: אתא גברא רבה אריכא לנהרדעא ומטלע, ודרש: כלילא שרי. אמר: מאן גברא רבה אריכא [דאיטלע] - לוי. שמע מינה: נח נפשיה דרבי אפס, ויתיב רבי חנינא ברישא, ולא הוה ליה איניש ללוי למיתב גביה, וקאתי להכא. ודילמא נח נפשיה דרבי חנינא, ורבי אפס כדקאי קאי, ולא הוה ליה איניש ללוי למיתב גביה, וקאתי להכא? אם איתא דרבי חנינא שכיב - לוי לרבי אפס מיכף הוה כייף ליה. ותו, דרבי חנינא לא סגי דלא מליך. דכי הוה קא ניחא נפשיה דרבי, אמר: חנינא ברבי חמא יתיב בראש. וכתיב בהו בצדיקים ותגזר אמר ויקם לך וגו'  Rab was told: A great, tall, and lame man has come to Nehardea, and has lectured: A coronet is permitted. Said he: Who is a great tall man who is lame? Levi. This proves that R. Afes is dead and R. Hanina [now] sits at the head [of the Academy], so that Levi has none for a companion, and therefore he has come hither. But perhaps R. Hanina had died, R. Afes remaining as before, and since Levi [now] had no companion he had come hither? — Had R. Hanina died, Levi would indeed have subordinated himself to R. Afes. Moreover, it could not be that R. Hanina should not rule. For when Rabbi was dying he ordered, 'Let Hanina son of R. Hama sit at the head.' And of the righteous men it is written, Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee.  In its original context, B. Shabbat 59b, the text discusses the permissibility of wearing crowns on shabbat. The relevant passage is cited because Levi issues a ruling on the matter in Nehardea.   * 1. B. Bava Metsia 85b[[140]](#footnote-139) ⇛ דכי הוו מינצו ר' חנינא ור' חייא...לא תהא כזאת בישראל.   כי הוו מינצו רבי חנינא ורבי חייא, אמר ליה רבי חנינא לרבי חייא: בהדי דידי קא מינצית? חס ושלום, אי משתכח אתורה מישראל מהדרנא לה מפילפולי! - אמר ליה רבי חייא לרבי חנינא: בהדי דידי קא מינצית? דעבדי לתורה דלא תשתכח מישראל? מאי עבידנא, אזלינא ושדינא כיתנא, וגדילנא נישבי, וציידנא טבי ומאכילנא בשרייהו ליתמי, ואריכנא מגילתא וכתבנא חמשה חומשי, וסליקנא למתא ומקרינא חמשה ינוקי בחמשה חומשי,ומתנינא שיתא ינוקי שיתא סדרי, ואמרנא להו: עד דהדרנא ואתינא - אקרו אהדדי ואתנו אהדדי, ועבדי לה לתורה דלא תשתכח מישראל. היינו דאמר רבי: כמה גדולים מעשי חייא! אמר ליה רבי ישמעאל ברבי יוסי:אפילו ממר? - אמר ליה: אין. - אפילו מאבא? - אמר ליה: חס ושלום, לא תהא כזאת בישראל  [Resh Lakish was marking the burial vaults of the Rabbis. But when he came to the grave of R. Hiyya, it was hidden from him, whereat he experienced a sense of humiliation. 'Sovereign of the Universe!' he exclaimed, 'did I not debate on the Torah as he did?' Thereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out in reply: 'You did indeed debate on the Torah as he did, but did not spread the Torah as he did.'] Whenever R. Hanina and R. Hiyya were in a dispute, R. Hanina said to R. Hiyya: 'Would you dispute with me? If, Heaven forfend! the Torah were forgotten in Israel, I would restore it by my argumentative powers.' To which R. Hiyya rejoined: 'Would you dispute with me, who achieved that the Torah should not be forgotten in Israel? What did I do? I went and sowed flax, made nets [from the flax cords], trapped deers, whose flesh I gave to orphans, and prepared scrolls [from their skins], upon which I wrote the five books [of Moses]. Then I went to a town [which contained no teachers] and taught the five books to five children, and the six orders to six children And I bade them: "Until I return, teach each other the Pentateuch and the Mishnah;" and thus I preserved the Torah from being forgotten in Israel.' This is what Rabbi [meant when he] said, 'How great are the works of Hiyya!' Said R. Ishmael son of R. Jose to him, '[Are they] even [greater] than yours?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'And even than my father's.' 'Heaven forfend!' he rejoined, 'Let not such a thing be [heard] in Israel!'  In Baba Metzia, the text is cited to demonstrate what the bat kol asserted, i.e. that R. Hiyya went well beyond Resh Lakish (and likely R. Hanina by implication) in his efforts to propagate the Torah. The redactor of our story incorporates this text for a different reason-- to explain why Rabbi did not appoint R. Hiyya as head of the academy as well as to introduce the theme of forgetting/recovering Torah.   * 1. B. Makkot 24 ⇛ ואת יראי ה' יכבד... רבי, רבי, מרי, מרי   **ואת יראי ה' יכבד - זה יהושפט מלך יהודה, שבשעה שהיה רואה תלמיד חכם, היה עומד מכסאו ומחבקו ומנשקו וקורא לו: (אבי אבי) רבי רבי, מרי מרי.**  **‘He honoureth them that fear the Lord;’ that was Jehoshaphat king of Judah, who every time he beheld a scholar-disciple rose from his throne, and embraced and kissed him, calling him Father, Father; Rabbi, Rabbi; Mari, Mari!** ‘  The redactor of our story imported a small excerpt from this much more extended passage. Here the redactor imports Bavli material to question the words of Rabbi, only to offer a novel resolution.   * 1. B. Sanhedrin 32b ⇛ תנו רבנן: צדק צדק תרדף   **צדק צדק תרדף, הלך אחר חכמים לישיבה:** אחר רבי אליעזר ללוד, אחר רבן יוחנן בן זכאי לברור חיל, אחר רבי יהושע לפקיעין, אחר רבן גמליאל ליבנא, אחר רבי עקיבא לבני ברק, אחר רבי מתיא לרומי, אחר רביחנניה בן תרדיון לסיכני, אחר רבי יוסי לציפורי, אחר רבי יהודה בן בתירה לנציבין, אחר רבי יהושע לגולה**,אחר רבי לבית שערים**, אחר חכמים ללשכת הגזית.  **Our Rabbis taught: justice, justice shalt thou follow,**' this means, Follow the scholars to their academies. e.g.. R. Eliezer to Lydda, R. Johanan b. Zakkai to Beror Hail, R. Joshua to Peki'in, Rabban Gamaliel [II] to Jabneh, R. Akiba to Benai Berak, R. Mathia to Rome, R. Hanania b. Teradion to Sikni, R. Jose [b. Halafta] to Sepphoris. R. Judah b. Bathyra to Nisibis,R. Joshua to the Exile,  **Rabbi to Beth She'arim**, or the Sages to the chamber of hewn stones.  Like the example above, the redactor cites only the relevant selection of the baraita in order to question why a different baraita cited in our story states that Rabbi was living in Sepphoris. The answer given is that he moved to Sepphoris due to health reasons, but he had been living in Bet Shearin.   * 1. B. Sanhedrin 47a ⇛ סבור מינה, משום טרחא הוא דקאמר, כיון דחזי דקספדי בכרכים וקאתו כולי עלמא, אמרו: שמע מינה, משום יקרא הוא דקאמר   תא שמע: אמר להן אל תספדוני בעיירות. ואי אמרת יקרא דחיי - מאי נפקא ליה מינה? - קסבר: ליתי יקרו ביה ישראל טפי  Come and hear! He said to them: Do not hold funeral orations over me in the [small] towns Now, should you maintain that it is in honour of the living, what did it matter to him? — He wished that Israel might be honoured through him, in greater measure.  In our story, Rabbi wishes to curtail lamentations in the small villages to bring greater honor to Israel. This deviates from the first explanation offered (tircha) as well as the Yerushalmi’s (machloket). The change appears to be a result of the influence of B. Sanhedrin 47a, which discusses whether lamentations are offered for the honor of the living or dead. Do not think that Rabbi curtailed lamentations for his own personal preference. The lamentations are of no concern to the dead. Rather, Rabbi expressed his wishes to honor the living whom he’s left behind. |
| --- | --- |

**תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כתובות פרק יא דף לד טור ד /ה"ז**

Ketubot 12:3 Kilayim 9:4

| Mishnah  אלמנה שאמרה אי אפשי לזוז מבית בעלי אין היורשין יכולין לומר לה לכי לבית אביך ואנו זנין אותך אלא זנין אותה ונותנין לה מדור לפי כבודה  Talmud  אַלְמָנָה שֶׁאָֽמְרָה אֵי אֶפְשִׁי לָזוּז מִבֵּית בַּעֲלִי כול׳. | Mishnah  תכריכי המת ומרדעת של חמור אין בהן משום כלאים.  Talmud  <תכריכי המת כו'>[[141]](#footnote-140) |
| --- | --- |

1. כתיב במתים חפשי כיון שמת אדם נעשה חפשי מן המצות

Part A

**Rabbi on his Deathbed I**

1. רבי ציוה שלשה דברים בשעת פטירתו < מן העולם>
   1. אל תזוז אלמנתי מביתי
   2. ואל תספידוני בעיירות
   3. ומי שניטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי

.

Commentary

* 1. אל תזוז אלמנתי מביתי . ולא מתניתא היא אלמנה שאמרה אי איפשי לזוז מבית בעלי אמר רבי דוסא דלא יימרון לה בייתא דנשוותא הוא משתעבד לנשוותה
     1. אמר רבי לעזר בן יוסי כהדא דתני דרה בבית כשם שהיתה דרה ובעלה נתון במדינת הים ומשתמשת בכלי כסף ובכלי זהב כשם שהיתה משתמשת ובעלה נתון במדינת הים וניזונת כשם שהיתה ניזונת ובעלה נתון במדינת הים
  2. אל תספידוני בעיירות מפני המחלוקת
  3. ומי שניטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי אמר רבי חנינה <חנניה> דציפורין כגון יוסף אפרתי יוסה חפני <ויוסף חפנים>

Part B

**Rabbi on his Deathbed I**

1. רבי חזקיה מוסיף
   1. אל תרבו עלי תכריכין
   2. ותהא ארוני נקובה לארץ

Commentary

1. מילתא אמרה בסדין אחד הוא נקבר רבי
   1. דרבי אמר <לא> כמה דבר נשא אזיל הוא אתי ורבנין אמרין כמו דבר נש אזיל הוא אתי
   2. תני בשם רבי נתן כסות היורדת עם אדם לשאול היא באה עמו מאי טעמא תתהפך כחומר חותם ויתיצבו כמו לבוש
   3. אנטולינוס שאל לר' מהו הדין דכתיב תתהפך כחומר חותם אמר ליה מי שהוא מביא את הדור הוא מלבישו
   4. רבי יוחנן מפקד אלבשוני בורדיקא לא חיורין ולא אוכמין אין קמית ביני צדיקיא לא נכחת <נבהת> ואין קמית ביני רשיעייא לא נבהית
   5. רבי יאשיה פקיד אלבשוני חיוורין חפותין אמרו ליה מה את טב מן רבך אמר לון ומה אנא בהית בעובדיי
   6. רבי ירמיה מפקד אלבשוני חיורין חפותין אלבשוני דנרסיי והבון מסנאיי ברגליי וחוטרא בידי ויהבוני על סיטרא אין אתי משיחא ואנא מעתד

Part C

**Rabbi’s Death: From Sepphoris to Beth Shearim**

1. ציפורייא אמרין מאן דמר לן דמית רבי אנן קטלין ליה אדיק להון בר קפרא רישיה מכוסיי מאנוי מבזעין אמר לון יצוקים ואראלים תפשון בלוחות <הברית> וגברה ידן של אראלים וחטפו את הלוחות אמרו ליה דמך רבי אמר לון אתון אמרתון וקרעון ואזיל קלה לקרעיו לגו פתתה <פפתה>מהלך תלתא מילין
2. רבי נתן <נחמן> בשם רבי מנא מעשה ניסים נעשו באותו היום ערב שבת היה ונכנסו <ונתכנסו> כל העיירות להספידו ואישרוניה תמני עשרה בניסן <כנישן> ואחתוניה לבית שריי ותלת לון יומא עד שהיה כל אחד ואחד מגיע לביתו וממלא לו חבית של מים ומדליק את הנר כיון ששקעה החמה קרא הגבר שרייא מציקין אמרין דילמא דחללינן שובתא ואתת בת קול ואמרה להון כל מי שלא נתעצל בהספידו של רבי יהא מבושר לחיי העולם הבא בר מן קצרה כיון דשמע כן סליק לאיגרא וטליק גרמיה ומית נפקת ברת <בת> קלא ואמרת ואפילו קצרא

Appendix Palestinian Midrash Parallels

| **בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) כי"ו פרשת ויחי פרשה קא** | **תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כלאים פרק ט דף לב טור א /ה"א** | **תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כתובות פרק יא דף לד טור ד /ה"ז** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [[142]](#footnote-141) | כתיב במתים חפשי כיון שאדם מת נעשה חפשי מן המצות | כתיב במתים חפשי כיון שמת אדם נעשה חפשי מן המצות |
| רבינו צוה שלשה דברים לפני מיתתו, אמר להם | ר' ציוה שלשה דברים בשעת פטירתו מן העולם | רבי ציוה שלשה דברים בשעת פטירתו |
| אל תספדוני בעיירות,ואל תזוז אלמנתי מתוך ביתי, ומי שנטפל בי בחיי הוא יטפל בי במותי | אל תזוז אלמנתי מביתי ואל תספדוני בעיירות ומי שניטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי | אל תזוז אלמנתי מביתי ואל תספידוני בעיירות ומי שניטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי |
| ORDER REVERSED  ואל תזוז אלמנתי מתוך ביתי, ולא מתניתא היא, אלמנה שאמרה אי אפשי לזוז מבית בעלי, אין יורשין יכולין לומר לה לכי לבית אביך ואנו זנין אותיך, אלא זנין אותה ונותנין לה מדור לפי כבודה, | אל תזוז אלמנתי מביתי ולאו מתניתא היא אלמנה שאמרה אי איפשי לזוז מבית בעלי | אל תזוז אלמנתי מביתי ולא  מתניתא היא אלמנה שאמרה אי איפשי לזוז מבית בעלי |
| אלא לפי שדרכו של נשיא להיות כל חפציו משל ציבור, וזה על ידי שלא נהנה משל ציבור כלום לפיכך הוא אומר אל תזוז אלמנתי מתוך ביתי, |  |  |
| אמר רבי דוסתאי דלא יאמרון לה, ביתא דנשיאותא הוא ישתעבד לנשיאותא, | אמר רבי דרוסא דלא יימרון לה ביתה דנשיותה הוא משועבד הוא לנישיותה | אמר רבי דוסא דלא יימרון לה בייתא דנשוותא הוא משתעבד לנשוותה |
|  | אמר רבי לעז' בר יוסה כהדא דתני דרה בבתים כשם שהית' דרה בהן ובעלה נתון במדינ' הים ומשתמשת בכלי כסף ובכלי זהב כשם שהיתה משתמשת ובעלה נתון במדינת הים וניזונת כשם שהית' ניזונ' ובעלה נתון במדינת הים | אמר רבי לעזר בן יוסי כהדא דתני דרה בבית כשם שהיתה דרה ובעלה נתון במדינת הים ומשתמשת בכלי כסף ובכלי זהב כשם שהיתה משתמשת ובעלה נתון במדינת הים וניזונת כשם שהיתה ניזונת ובעלה נתון במדינת הים |
| אל תספדוני בעיירות, מפני המחלקות, | ואל תספדוני בעיירו' מפני המחלוקת | אל תספידוני בעיירות מפני המחלוקת |
| מי שנטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי, א"ר חנינה ציפוראה כגון יוסי הפינוס ויוסי הפרתים | ומי שניטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי אמר רבי חנניה דציפורין כגון יוסי אפרתי ויוסף חפנים | ומי שניטפל בי בחיי יטפל בי במותי אמר רביחנינה דציפורין כגון יוסף אפרתי יוסה חפני |
| ר' חזקיה מוסיף **עוד תרתי** | רבי חזקיה מוסיף | רבי חזקיה מוסיף |
| אל תרבו עלי תכריכין, ותהא ארוני נקובה לארץ | אל תרבו עלי תכריכין ותהא ארוני נקובה בארץ | אל תרבו עלי תכריכין ותהא ארוני נקובה לארץ |
| **אל תרבו עלי תכריכין, מפני רמה,** |  |  |
| **ותהא ארוני נקובה לארץ, מפני המוחל,** |  |  |
|  | מילתא אמרין בסדין אחד נקבר רבי | מילתא אמרה בסדין אחד הוא נקבר רבי |
| דרבי אמרה לא כמה דבר נש אזיל הוא אתי, | דר אמר לא כמה דבר אינש אזל הוא אתי | דרבי אמר כמה דבר נשא אזיל הוא אתי |
| מילהון דרבנן דאינון אמרין כמה דברנש אזיל הוא אתי. | ורבנין אמרין כמה דבר נש אזל הוא אתי | ורבנין אמרין כמו דבר נש אזיל הוא אתי |
|  | תני בשם ר' נתן כסות היורדת עם אדם לשאול היא באה עמו מה טעמא תתהפך כחומר חותם ויתייצבו כמו לבוש אנטולינוס שאל לרבי מהו תתהפך כחומר חותם אמר ליה מי שהוא מביא את הדור הוא מלבישו | תני בשם רבי נתן כסות היורדת עם אדם לשאול היא באה עמו מאי טעמא תתהפך כחומר חותם ויתיצבו כמו לבוש אנטולינוס שאל לר' מהו **הדין דכתיב** תתהפך כחומר חותם אמר ליה מי שהוא מביא את הדור הוא מלבישו |
| ר' יוחנן מפקד **ואמ'** לא תלבשוני לא חיורי' ולא אוכמין אלא מאנין בריקא, אם אתבעית עם צדיקיא לאידעין בי רשיעיא, ואם איתבעית עם רשיעיא לא ידעין בי צדיקיא, | רבי יוחנן מפקד מלבשוני בוריריקא לא חיוורין ולא אוכמין אין קמית ביני צדיקיא לא **נבהת** ואין קמית ביני רשיעיא לא נבהת | רבי יוחנן מפקד אלבשוני בורדיקא לא חיורין ולא אוכמין אין קמית ביני צדיקיא לא **נכחת** ואין קמית ביני רשיעייא לא נבהית |
| רבי יאשיה הוה מפקד ואמר אלבשוני מאנין חיורין חפיתין,  **אמרין ליה רבך אמר כדין ואת אמר כדין**, [אמ' להון] מה אנא בהית בעובדאי, | רבי יאשיה מפקד אלבשוני חיוורין חפיתין אמרין ליה ומה את טב מן רבך אמר לון ומהאנא בהית בעבדאי | רבי יאשיה פקיד אלבשוני חיוורין חפותין אמרו ליה מה את טב מן רבך אמר לון ומה אנא בהית בעובדיי |
| רבי ירמיה הוה מפקד ואמר אלבשוני מאנין חיורין חפיתין ואלבשוני דרדסאי והבון חוטרי בידי **וסנדלאי ברגלי והבו יתי על אורחא, דאם איתבעית אנא קאים אוטמוס, ה"ה דאמ' רבי יונה בש"ר חמא רגלוהי דבר נש ערבתיה מקמאתי' בכל אתר דמתבעי.** | רבי ירמיה מפקד אלבשוני חיוורין חפיתין אלבשוני בנרסיי יהבון מסנא ברגליי וחוט' בידיי ויהבוני על סיטרא אין אתי משיחא אנא מעתד | רבי ירמיה מפקד אלבשוני חיורין חפותין אלבשוני דנרסיי והבון מסנאיי ברגליי וחוטרא בידי ויהבוני על סיטרא אין אתי משיחא ואנא מעתד |

| **תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כתובות פרק יא דף לד טור ד /ה"ז** | **תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת כלאים פרק ט דף לב טור א /ה"א** | **קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ז** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ציפורייא אמרין מאן דמר לן דמית רבי אנן קטלין ליה | ציפריא אמרין מאן דאמר לן רבי דמך אנן קטלי' ליה | **ר' הוה דמיך** בציפורין ואמרין ציפוראי כל דאתא ואמר דמך ר' אנן קטלין ליה, |
| אדיק להון בר קפרא רישיה מכוסיי מאנוי מבזעין | אדיק לון בר קפרא רישיה מכסי מאנוי מבזעין | אזל בר קפרא ועלל בכוותא ואדיק ליה ורישיה מיכרך, ומניה בזיעין |
| אמר לון יצוקים ואראלים תפשון בלוחות וגברה ידן של אראלים וחטפו את הלוחות | אמר לון יצוקים ואראלי' תפוסין בלוחות הברית וגברה ידן של אראלים וחטפו את הלוחות | אמר אחינו בני ידעיה שמעוני שמעוני, אראלים ומצוקים אחזו ידן בלוחות הברית, גברה ידן של אראלים וחטפו את הלוחות, |
| אמרו ליה דמך רבי אמר לון אתון אמרתון וקרעון ואזיל קלה לקרעיו לגו פתתה מהלך תלתא מילין | אמרין ליה דמך ר' אמר לון אתון אמריתון וקרעון ואזל קלא דקרעון לגו פפתה מהלך תלתה מילין | אמרין ליה דמך רבי, ואמר להו אתון אמריתון א**נא לא אמינא**, ו**למה לא אמר דכתיב (משלי י')ומוציא דבה הוא כסיל** קרעון מניהון עד דאזל קליה דקריעה עד גופתתא מהלך שלשה מילין **וקרא עליה ויתרון דעת החכמה תחיה בעליה** |
| רבי **נתן** בשם רבי מנא מעשה ניסים נעשו באותו היום ערב שבת היה ונכנסו כל העיירות להספידו ואישרוניה תמני עשרה **בניסן** ואחתוניה לבית שריי ותלת לון יומא עד שהיה כל אחד ואחד מגיע לביתו וממלא לו חבית של מים ומדליק את הנר כיון ששקעה החמה קרא הגבר שרייא מציקין אמרין דילמא דחללינן שובתא ואתת בת קול ואמרה להון כל מי שלא נתעצל בהספידו של רבי יהא מבושר לחיי העולם הבא בר מן קצרה כיון דשמע כן סליק לאיגרא וטליק גרמיה ומית נפקת **ברת** קלא ואמרת ואפילו קצרא | רבי **נחמן** בשם רבי מנא מעשה ניסין נעשו באותו היום ערב שבת היתה ונתכנסו כל העיירות להספידו ואשירוניה תמני עשרה כנישן ואחתוניה לבית שריי ותלה לון יומא עד שהיה כל אחד ואחד מגיע לביתו וממלא לו חבית של מים ומדליק לו את הנר כיון ששקעה החמה קרא הגבר שרון מציקין אמרין דילמא דחללינן שבתא יצתה בת קול ואמרה להן כל מי שלא נתעצל בהספידו של ר' יהא מבושר מחיי העולם הבא בר מן קצרא כיוןדשמע כן סלק ליה לאיגרא וטלק גרמיה ומית נפקת בת קלא ואמרה ואפילו קצרא | ר' נחמיה בשם ר' מנא מעשה נסים נעשו באותו היום, ע"ש היה ואיתכנשין כל קרייתא להספידא דרבי, אשרוניה בתמני עשר כנישתא ואובלוניה לבית שערים ותלא לון יומא עד דמטא כל חד וחד מישראל לביתו ומדליק לו את הנר, וצולה לו דג וממלא לו חבית מים, עד שעשה האחרון שבהן שקעה החמהוקרא הגבר שרון מצוקין אמרין ווי דחללינן שבתא, יצתה בת קול ואמרה כל מי שלא נתעצל בהספדו של רבי מזומן לחיי העולם הבא בר מן קצרה דהוה תמן ולא אתא, כיון דשמע כן סלק וטלק גרמיה מן איגרא ונפל ומת,יצתה בת קול ואמרה אף לאגרא קצרא **מזומן** לחיי העולם הבא. |

1. I thank Jeffrey Rubenstein for his insightful comments on multiple drafts of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Fukuyama, *The End of History;* Derrida, *Specters of Marx.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Derrida, “Spectrographies*,”* 39 in Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Davis, “Hauntology,” 373. See also Derrida, *Specters,* 63, Buse and Scott, *Ghosts*,10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. On a material level, this could be the sight of old soviet buildings that elicit feelings of loss, nostalgia or anachronism. As the critic Mark Fisher (“Hauntology,” 18) writes: “The future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production. Derrida (*Specters,* 48)writes: “If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general.” Ketchum (*Haunting Empty Tombs*, 242-3), citing Gordon, puts the points like this: “[W]hen ghosts appear to you, the dead or the disappeared or the lost or the invisible are demanding their due.” Thus, such a spectral figure brings concerns about the future to bear on the past’s meddling with the present.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. As Jeffrey Weinstock (*Spectral America*, 62) writes: “Because ghosts are unstable interstitial figures that problematize dichotomous thinking, it perhaps should come as no surprise that phantoms have become a privileged poststructuralist academic trope. Neither living nor dead, present nor absent, the ghost functions as the paradigmatic deconstructive gesture, the “shadowy third” or trace of an absence that undermines the fixedness of such binary oppositions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Blanco and Peereen (The Spectralities Reader, 11) write: “To be traumatized, as Cathy Caruth has explained, is to be “possessed by an image or event” located in the past. To be “possessed”—gripped indefinitely by an anachronistic event—also describes the condition of being haunted...When we think of ghost stories (traditional ones, at least), it is the haunting of the present by the past that emerges as the most insistent narrative. The mode of expression that many scholars use to describe the spectral, then, is similar to, if not fully consonant with, the terms used to describe the affective qualities of trauma.” See also Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*; Buse, *Ghosts*; Davis, “Hauntology;” Blanco and Peeran, *Spectralities*; Riley, “Hauntology.” For work on hauntology in Bible/New Testament scholarship, see Kuhlin, “Neither God;” Wilson, *Transfigured*; McLellan, “Specters of Mark;” Ketchum, “Haunting Empty Tombs”; Buell, “Hauntology;” Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings.”

   In one instructive example of hauntology in the field of photography, Ulrich Baer (Blanco & Pereen, *Spectralities*,11) comments on two photographs of Holocaust sites that “contain no evidence of the sites’ historical uses…. In most other images of former camps or killing fields, we are confronted with the oversaturated referents of ruin: crumbled buildings once built to kill and now maintained and “museumized” for purposes of commemoration; the scraps of barbed wire; the memorial stones. Instead of showing such markers, Reinartz’s and Levin’s images refer to the Holocaust only through their titles and the accompanying texts that announce: “These are Holocaust sites”... The deliberate destruction of evidence that would reveal these sites’ significance constitutes the event’s historical truth and limits the possibility of its telling. For the nothing to be “translated” into sight, it must be shown as nothing, rather than as the absence of something we could know.” For Baer, *showing nothing* is precisely what makes these photographs “haunting” or “ghostly.” We look at these landscapes and see no signs of the Holocaust. Yet because we are informed of what took place there, we are made aware that we see nothing and that leads us to experience a lingering “trace” of those events in the image. The Holocaust is simultaneously present and not-present. As Blanco and Peeren put it, it is as if “we have arrived late at the scene of a ‘retained past’ that nevertheless reminds us of its absence in our present.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. In the Yerushalmi, the laundry man’s suicide is described ‘וטליק גרמיה ומית’. In the Bavli, it is ‘ונפל לארעא ומית.’ In the former, he *throws himself off* the roof, while in the latter, he technically *falls* off the roof but the meaning is the same as this is a common Bavli euphemism. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. For example, Ware, “Dialectic.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. See M. Ketubot 4:12 where this was a customary clause in Ketubot and even when it was omitted, it was construed to be implied. The mishnah, however, testifies that this was not a universal practice, but determined by local practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. P. Kilayim: Rav Darosa [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. In Gen Rabba 110:2 it is explained that while the patriarch’s house was generally communally owned, the Rabbi's house was privately owned. See Albeck, 1284. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Lieberman (Tosefta K’Peshuta, Ketubot 11:5) persuasively argues that this statement explains the Mishnah. It was not meant to answer the anonymous question concerning Rabbi’s need to state this (i.e., that he was following the baraita which requires more protection for the widow. See Teshuvot HaRashba 1:523). In support, he notes that this statement is not found in Gen Rabba. He also cited the Ittur’s commentary on b Ketubot 61a, suggesting that a woman’s status is not diminished after the death of her husband. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Gen Rabba 96:5 (Vilna): “Do not permit a non-Jew to touch my coffin. Only those who attended me in my life shall attend to me when I die. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. That the dead are resurrected clothed, see b. Ketubot 111b. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Gen Rabba, 67:6, 75:5, P. Sanhedrin 10:5, B. Avodah Zara 10a-b. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Genesis Rabba 100:2, B. Niddah 20a [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. On this location, see Miller, *Sages*, 259 and 270 fn181. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. See Miller (“Number of Synagogues”) who argues for why the term should not be rendered ‘synagogues.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. This appears to be an added Aramaic gloss within the Hebrew narrative. See Meir, “Story of Rabbi’s Death,”155-7 and *Rabbi Judah the Patriarch*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. The Talmudic commentary explains the necessity of Rabbi’s directive given its statutory nature. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. The rabbis’ view is assumed in B. Berakhot 18b. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Note that if we put the commentary aside, there is an alternative way to interpret Rabbi’s desire for simple shrouds. The request is reminiscent of, and might even draw upon, a baraita in B. Moed Qatan 27b (B. Ketubot 8b) that discusses his grandfather Rabban Gamliel wish for simple shrouds. “Formerly the [expense of] taking the dead out [to his burial] fell harder on his near-of-kin than his death so that the dead man's near-of-kin abandoned him and fled, until at last Rabban Gamaliel came [forward] and, disregarding his own dignity, came out [to his burial] in flaxen vestments and thereafter the people followed his lead to come out [to burial] in flaxen vestments.”Gamliel did so as a matter of public policy to decrease the cost of burial so that even the poor could afford a funeral for a relative without feeling shame. Rabbi may have just been following Gamliel’s practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Cf. P. Kilayim 9:1, where it seems Rabbi did not consider kilayim acceptable for burial shrouds: “R. Hillel b. Valis had a garment worth three hundred thousand denars and he gave it to Rabbi, who found mixed stuff in it and burned it. R. Mana had a garment worth three hundred thousand denars and he gave it to R. Hiyya bar Ada. He said to him, “Sell it to a corpse and stay there until he is shrouded with it [for that is all for which it can now be used].” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Note that only one of the five requests P.B. (2) is not commented on. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. The chronology sharply breaks in the next section, as the Yerushalmi proceeds to cite a different textual unit concerning Rabbi’s illnesses and ailments. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. You also find interesting contrasts. While Rabbi wants his wife to enjoy all of his worldly possessions, P.A, he himself wants a simple burial, P.B. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Miller, “Number of Synagogues,” 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. On this issue, it should be noted that two parallel versions of the story dependant on the Yerushalmi (Kohelet Rabba and the Bavli), adjust the Yerushalmi’s language to make clear that the townsmen eulogized in larger cities, in compliance with Rabbi’s wishes, which may suggest the editors were aware of ambiguity and alternative reading and were more comfortable reading the townsmen as compliant. Moreover, a textual variant in the Yerushalmi manuscripts on the key word (נכנסו/נתכנסו) may likewise suggest that the manuscript copyists were likewise aware of the ambiguity. The reflexive verb may suggest that the townsmen congregated and eulogized amongst themselves in violation of Rabbi’s wish, whereas the transitive verb suggests they may have joined larger assemblies. If we entertain the reading that the townsmen violated Rabbi’s directive, it may offer different ways of reading the continuation of the story. It dramatizes how uncontainable their grief and mourning for Rabbi was, and may also place a measure of culpability upon them for almost desecrating the Sabbath, had the day not been miraculously extended. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Indeed the metaphor of death as “living overseas” may imply an eventual return home which anticipates Part B’s discussion of the resurrection of the dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. ​​On death in rabbinic literature, see Kraemer, *Meanings of Death*; Avery-Peck & Neusner, *Judaism in Late Antiquity 4.* [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. Fisher, “Hauntology,” 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Moreover, Bar Kappara never explicitly tells the Sepphoreans about Rabbi’s death. Instead he offers a metaphor of the tablets of the covenant being snatched away from on high. The metaphor allows him to convey news in a way they will be open to hearing and which will not get him killed. It also validates their feelings that somehow this loss is simply unjust. Rabbi, the embodiment of Torah, has been snatched away. We did all we could -- it was a fight until the end-- but we lost him. The Sepphoreans, processing the metaphor, ask Bar Kappara to confirm Rabbi’s death explicitly, but Bar Kappara refuses. The announcement is left in symbolic terms. It’s easier to process the news that way, but it also shows that they can’t fully confront the reality before them. But Bar Kappara didn’t need to say anymore. Grief-stricken, the Sepphoreans turn their violence -- once expressed as a threat to others-- inwards, their knives towards themselves, and they forcefully rend their garments. They are forced to confront their grief and begin to mourn. Note also that the audience, like the Sepphoreans, don’t know what Bat Kappara knows. The narrator never discloses to us that Rabbi has died, although we anticipate it given that we already learn in Part A that the story takes place “at the time of Rabbi’s passing.” But officially, we only learn about Rabbi’s death from Bar Kappara along with the Sepphoreans. This enables the audience to mourn Rabbi’s loss along with the Sepphoreans. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Hamilton (“The Spectral Narrative,” 4) writes: The temporal blurring that comes with the specter—it is always both present and absent, belonging to another time but present in this—leads Derrida to an emphasis on the future, the obscurely “coming” event, and even the messianic. But this is not a messianism with identifiable content; instead, it is “the non-knowledge and the non-advent of an event, of what remains to be” (Specters of Marx 19). The image of a dead Rav Yirmiyah dressed in his tomb with the finest white frock, with shoes on his feet, and a staff in his hand, ready for the Messiah is evocative of the failed future haunting the Yerushalmi editor. For more on hauntology and messianism, see Ware, “Dialectic.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Cf. Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis Reconsidered,” who questions identifying these epigraphical rabbis with the literary ones. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Rajak, “The Rabbinic Dead.” Cf. Levine, "Bet She'arim in its Patriarchal Context, 212-17; *The Rabbinic Class*, 49-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. “While numerous Jewish tombs have been uncovered from late antiquity, no monumental Jewish necropoleis have yet been uncovered in Palestinian cities with large Jewish populations, including Bet Guvrin, Caesarea, Sepphoris, and Tiber- ias—nor are necropoleis in these places discussed in rabbinic or non-Jewish sources (Weiss 1989). The necropolis of Bet She’arim is the outstanding exception (Mazar, et al. 1973–1976; Stern 1993–2008: 236–248; Levine 2005: 197–225). Its twenty-four excavated burial units stretch to the west and south of the ancient town, near the juncture of major east-west and north-south traffic arteries at the foot of Mt. Carmel and overlooking the western Jezreel Valley (the New Testament’s ‘Plain of Armageddon). The significance of this massive complex for the local economy cannot be doubted, as dedicatory inscriptions discovered within the large local synagogue commemorate the euergetism of Jews who worked in the funerary industry.” Fine, “Death, Burial, and Afterlife,” 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Rajak, “The Dead at Beth Shearim,” 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. Rajak (ibid, 486-7) writes: “But the spatial distribution at Beth She'arim rather points to the rabbis as just one kind of special group among others; a group with large aspirations perhaps, but one whose principles and teach- ings had not yet permeated Jewish society by the time of the Mishnah, and probably not even considerably later. For, while the rabbinic burials are to a limited extent clustered, they are not in any way marked off as exclusive; indeed they are not even separated from those of others in the community. Indeed, even in catacomb 20, non-rabbinic as well as rabbinic graves are in evidence. Epitaphs and images incorporate themes which may be said to belong to a different Jewish value-system. One brief epitaph there, not ascribed to a rabbi, enjoins passers-by to cheer up, since no one is immortal; while another, perhaps in jest, seems to be concerned with wishing the deceased a successful res- urrection: (194)... We cannot but observe that neither the position nor appearance of the graves suggests that even the Nasi's family was singled out for any preferential treatment.” Cf. Weiss, “Social Aspects of Burial in Beth She'arim.” [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. She presents her interpretation of the discoveries are Beth Shearim as most consistent with the revisionist historiographies of scholars like Seth Schwartz (*Imperialism and Jewish Society*) who argues that the rabbis in the second and third centuries did not enjoy consolidated power amongst the Jewish urban population but were one group of sub-elites who competed for influence and power. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Levinson, “There is No Place Like Home.” See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. See the initial report of the excavated area published by archaeologists Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Mazar, Mazar, Beth Sheʿarim, 1:13–20; Avigad, Beth Sheʿarim, 3:2–3. See also Levine, “Bet Šeʿarim in Its Patriarchal Context.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. See the hauntological readings of the empty tomb of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark cited in fn [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Weiss,” Burial Practices”. Ariel and Bijovsky, “The Numismatic Evidence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. There was likely a legion of Roman troops stationed outside of Tiberias. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. See Schwartz, *Imperialism.* [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. Levinson, “There is No Place Like Home” including a citation from Doron Bar, “The Christianization of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity,” JEH 54.3 (2003): 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. Bowman, “Pilgrim Narratives,” 156. See also Markus, “How on Earth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. Smith, “To Take Place,” 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. Miller, Mary, 398. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. Panarion 11,9- 12,9. 180-181 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Levinson, “No Place Like Home,” 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. Markus, “How on Earth,” 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. Levinson, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. Derrida (*Specters*, xviii) writes that living with specters is a “politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.” See Meekings, “Writing Ghostly Space.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. Ibid, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. Fisher, “ Hauntology” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. See Schwartz, *Imperialism.* Lapin (“Epigraphical,” 332) writes: “As with evidence from Church writers and Roman legal texts, the limited epigraphic evidence points to the fourth century and later as the period where Rabbis became "visible" beyond the immediate confines of rabbinic texts.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
59. On resurrection in rabbinic literature, see Boyarin, “Resurrection, Rabbinic Period.” [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
60. These stories have generated a significant amount of scholarly inquiry from the 19th century on. For a bibliography of relevant scholarship see, *Genesis Rabbah in Text and Context* Edited by Sarit Kattan Gribetz, David M. Grossberg, Martha Himmelfarb, Peter Schäfer, page 41 n23:. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
61. For other examples of this rhetorical strategy of the rabbis, see Gribetz, "A Matter of Time”. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
62. Cohen, "The Conversion of Antoninus.” [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
63. For example, a third century coin was found in Sepphoris with the inscription “Diocaesarea, Holy, Refuge, Autonomous, Loyal, Friend [and] Ally of the Holy Senate and of the People of Rome” which has been used, along with Rabbi’s patriarchal house in Sepphoris, and the final publication of the Mishnah there, as evidence for good relations with Rome. See “The Numismatic Evidence,” 511-512. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
64. Levinson (“There Is No Place Like Home,” 101) citing the term from Mary Louise Pratt who defines it as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet,clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
65. Rajak, “The Rabbinic Dead,” 479. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
66. See for example, P. Moed Katan, 3:5, 82c. Levinson (“There is No Place Like Home,” 104) observes: “While tannaitic literature lists various propitiatory rituals to be carried out by the community on these occasions, only in the later amoraic stratum of talmudic literature is it recorded that graves are visited. One reason given for this apparently new custom is so that “the dead may intercede for us” (yTaʿan 2.1 [65a]; bTaʿan 16a).” [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
67. Cf. Rajak, 439: “Sarcophagi were in use in the West from the second century, and among the Christians from the third. It is worth noting that they were in established Jewish use in Palestine at the necropolis of Beth She'arim during this same period.” For a general discussion of the amoraic development of burial in Eretz-Israel, see Gafni, 1981, 96-104, 1997, 79-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
68. Miller, “Mary,” 397-398. See Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle*, 147-175. Cf. P. Ketubot 12:3, in which Rabbi is explicitly not from the tribe of Judah/House of David, but for that very reason, he is willing to give up the patriarchate to Rav Huna. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
69. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures 12,17; Epiphanius of Salamis, Panarion 30 (on the Ebionites); Lucian of Caphar Gamla, S. Vanderlinden, “Revelatio Sancti Stephani (BHL 7850–6),” REB 4 (1946): 178–217 (two Latin recensions). See Irshai, “Confronting a Christian Empire,” 820-1. See also E. Reiner, “Joseph the Comes of Tiberias and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue in Fourth Century Galilee,” in *Continu- ity and Renewal,* ed., L. Levine (Jerusalem, 2004), 355–86 (Hebrew), and O. Irshai, “St. Stephen and Gamaliel: Relics, Politics and Polemics in Early Fifth Century Palestine,” in: *“Ut Videant et Contignant”: Essays on Pilgrimage and Sacred Space, In Honor of Ora Limor*, eds., Y. Hen and I. Shagrir (Ra’anana, 2011), 49–69 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
70. For further references, see Miller, “Mary,”, 399 fn. 81.The Yerushalmi’s narrative may even contain traces of Christian polemic. Consider the following:1. Rabbi’s death grants eternal reward for anyone who eulogizes him. 2. He dies and is buried on a Friday. 2. His burial attendant is a man named Joseph (same name as man who attended Jesus' burial). 3. He asks to be wrapped in a single linen sheet (like Jesus) 4. There is an unusual hesitation about officially declaring him dead. 5. He tutors the Roman Emperor on the Jewish (rather than Christian) view of resurrection. 6. There is a rooster's crow - a rooster crows three times after Judas betrays Jesus. 8. Ofra Meir (“The Story of Rabbi's Death”) points out that when the Sephoreans declare Judah dead, Bar Kappara who had torn clothing says "you said it" not me, a phrase that Jesus uses several times including Luke 22:70, 23:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
71. The irony is that, notwithstanding the Talmudic tradition, for much of the medieval period, it was Sepphoris not Beit She'an/Beth Shearim in which Judah’s grave was said to be found. Based on a Geniza fragment attributed to Sherira Gaon (10th century), Stuart Miller suggests that by then, Beth Shearim lost its former glory and “could not serve in the same way [as Sepphoris] as a foil to the ascendancy of the rabbinic courts of Babylonia. Miller also cites Rabbi Bezalel Ashkenazi’s (ca. 1520-1594) understanding of Rashi on b. Ketubot 103 ( “rabbi lay during his illness at sepphoris [during which time] a place was acquired and prepared” for him [rabbi] at bet shearim) to mean that Rashi “knew the tradition that Rabbi was buried in Sepphoris” and his intention was “to emphasize that it was the untimely passing of the patriarch on the eve of shabbat (a detail provided only in the palestinian ac- counts!) that prevented his burial at the site reserved for him in Bet Shearim). See Miller, “Mary.” [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
72. The Bavli recognizes the value of burial and Israel and attests to certain Babylonian rabbis like Rav Huna were buried there although Beth Shearim is not explicitly stated. See b. Moed Katana 25a and its parallel in p. Ketubot 12:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
73. Rajak, “Burial,” 489, 498; Weiss, “Burial Practices,” 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
74. See Miller, “Mary.” [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
75. Cf. B. Sanhedrin 65b on whether it would be possible to communicate with the dead (using necromancy) on Shabbat. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
76. See B. Menachot 109b. Onion defers the high priesthood to his brother Shimi, two and half years his elder. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
77. See B. Bava Metsia 59b. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
78. See Evel Rabbati, 3:1; Avot D'Rabbi Natan 25:1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
79. In B. Berachot 5b, Rabbi Elazar cries at the prospect of Rabbi Yohanan’s beautiful body decomposing. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
80. This is the reading in Evel Rabbati. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
81. See B. Bava Metsia 85b [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
82. P. Gittin 6:7: “If somebody questioned statements of Rebbi Yose, Rebbi said, we miserable ones asked against Rebbi Yose, for as there is a difference between the most holy and the most profane, so is there a difference between Rebbi Yose’s generation and ours.” [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
83. See B. Makkot 24a. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
84. See B. Megillah 6a. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
85. For the phrase, “will be stabbed with a sword,” see B. Yevamot 77a, B. Sanhedrin 19b, 94b. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
86. See B. Pesachim 3b, Rav Joshua b. Idi’s report on the death of Rav Kahane. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
87. However, the end of B.B contains a brief extra narrative-commentary section (B.B(4) -B.B(4)(c)) which echoes and continues the narrative of B.B (3). Essentially his deathbed wish *about* his sons becomes narrativized as a direct address *to* his sons. The Bavli’s B.C like the Yerushalmi’s P.C describes Rabbi’s death and burial. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
88. Rabbi’s first request in the Bavli parallels his first request in the Yerushalmi. Both requests concern the treatment of his wife. The concerns of the appended commentary are also paralleled. Why would Rabbi give an instruction that is already statutory law? It looks like the Bavli redactor used the Yerushalmi here as a template. The change, however, from Rabbi requesting that his widow be maintained in his house (Yerushalmi) to a general request to respect her (Bavli) requires explanation because the change actually severs the literary connection between the story and the accompanying mishnah in Ketubot that we noted above. One hypothesis is that the Bavli redactor wanted to update the story to reflect Sasanian legal practice. J. Milgrom has shown that the tannaitic law developed from within a Roman-Palestinian context. Roman wills and estates testify to husbands agreeing to allow their widows, under certain conditions, to live in his house. While it wasn’t a statutory practice, it was a common custom. In Sasanian Persia, however, the evidence points otherwise.

    The wife (or wives) received a portion (bahr ī kadag-bānūg or bahr ī zanīh) the same size as that of a son …. Wives and children from the two other forms of matrimony, the “auxiliary marriage” (čagar) and the “consensus marriage” (xwasrāyēn/gādār), were not entitled to any part of the deceased’s estate—in full accordance with the different purposes of these two marriages... In order to keep the property together, the sons often entered into a partnership (hambāyīh) of co-inheritors or co-holders (brād ī hambāy).

    Perhaps then, our Bavli storyteller changed the Yerushalmi according to Sasanian legal custom. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
89. Cf. B. Rosh Hashana 31b, in which Beth Shearim and Sepphoris are both remembered as sites of the Sanhedrin. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
90. This kind of rabbinization is not an uncommon change for the Bavli. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
91. It is also noteworthy that the Bavli doesn’t even preserve the Yerushalmi’s initial deathbed wish (2:1) which directly connects the Rabbi narrative to the mishnah. Instead of Rabbi requesting his wife remain in the house, the request in the Bavli is that his children continue to be respectful of her. As such, the Bavli loses the Mishnaic hook altogether. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
92. On the succession, see Cohen, “Patriarchs and Scholarchs,” 60-65. See also P. Taanit 4.2.68a. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
93. Part of the evidence that this was actually an appointment comes later in the story which draws an explicit parallel between the appointments of his two sons: “He said to them: I need my younger son. Rabbi Shimon entered his presence. He transmitted to him the orders of wisdom. He said to them: I need my older son. Rabban Gamliel entered his presence and Rabbi transmitted to him the procedures of the patriarchate.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
94. Elsewhere we find examples in which the Bavli reads/reinterprets the Patriarch not only as a political leader but as the Head of the Academy. See Steinmetz (“Uktzin”) where she analyzes Bavli stories about the patriarch and shows the ways in which the Bavli editors project their own values and ideals and retroject them back onto their patriarchal history. See also Urbach (The Sages, 538) in which he suggests that the split between the political and academic position may be a reflection of the Babylonian (sometimes uneasy) division of power between the exilarch and head of the academy. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
95. See Steinmetz, “Must the Patriarch.” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
96. Rubenstein, *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
97. The Bavli sets up the difference between Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Hanina as a choice not only between two modes of preservation, but also between piety (engaged in mitzvot) and scholarship. This maps closely to its earlier discussion about the appointment of Gamliel, who was pious like his father, if not as scholarly or wise. Taken together, the Bavli maps the Head of the Academy with scholarship and the patriarchate with piety. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
98. Analogously, Mark Fisher discusses 1990’s electronic music and the hauntological reckoning that maybe there was no more “futuristic” music left to produce. Electronic music seemed to have hit an impasse and the future seemed lost. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
99. Indeed, Rabbi himself in our story, suggests that Hiyya was greater than him. Rabbi Hiyya was known as the compiler of baraitot, rabbinic teaching that are left out (exceed) the teachings contained in Rabbi’s Mishnah. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
100. Intermediary beings appear more frequently in the Bavli than the Yerushalmi. See Ronis, “Do Not Go Alone*,”* 208, Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 60. and earlier scholars she cites like Ginzberg, *The Palestinian Talmud,* xxxiii-xxxvi. Ronis (“Intermediary Beings,” 96) also notes that “rabbinic literature itself notes explicitly that intermediary beings appear with significantly more frequency and prominence in the Babylonian Talmud than they do in the Palestinian rabbinic materials (b. Pesahim 110b; p. Shabbat 14.3, 14c, and see Elman 2005b: 403; Kalmin 2011: 131; Bohak 2013; Ronis 2015: 208-212, 268-71).” [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
101. Like the Yerushalmi, a hauntological analysis helps see recurring motifs. Rabbi is on his deathbed in between life and death. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
102. Meir, *Rabbi Judah the Patriarch*. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
103. For example, Ronis, *Do Not Go Alone.* [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
104. For example, B. Berakhot 18b. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
105. Here ghostliness is actually an index for righteousness. It was Rabbi’s righteousness that entitled him to return. Ironically, it was also his righteousness (his desire not to besmirch the reputation of other dead righteous men) that held him back from returning again. Ronis (“Intermediary Beings,” 95) notes that “intermediary beings function in a variety of ways in ancient Jews’ constructions of space, time, cosmology, divine providence, divine judgment, and law.” [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
106. For studies on ghosts in the Greco-Roman world, see Johnston, *Restless Dead*; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts,* 146-209; “Religions of the Ancient World,” 470–495; Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome*; Hickman, *Ghostly Etiquette on the Classical Stage;* Russell*, "Greek and Roman Ghosts."* Harari (*Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah,* 306-7) points out that unlike in Greco-Roman sources, rabbinic sources do not portray spirits of the dead as harmful. For studies that focus on late antique Babylonia, see Moroney, “Magic and Society in Late Sasanian Iraq.” [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
107. One wonders though about whether a connection should be made between the maidservant’s prayers and actions to hasten Rabbi’s death and his return as a ghost. Is there some unfinished business to be had? What can be said is that there is certainly a literary parallelism between these two anecdotes featuring the maidservant and found only in the Bavli.The maidservant cares for Rabbi while he is alive and also when he is dead. She is also responsible (by making noise!) for him leaving this world early and leaving as a ghost early. It’s also noteworthy that the Bavli story ends with a Divine Voice saying “He enters in peace, they rest in their beds” when we know from earlier, that he doesn’t rest for long. He returns to his old bed at home. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
108. See Harari, “Divination through the Dead in Jewish Tradition of Magic.” On Greek and Roman necromancy, see Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*. On necromancy in rabbinic literature, Harari (*Jewish Magic*, 409 fn 167) cites: M. Sanhedrin 7:7, Tosefta Sanhedrin 10:6, B. Sanhedrin 65b, B. Keritoth 3b, and B. Berakhot 59a. See also B. Chagigah 3b, B. Gittin 56b-57a. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
109. On the other hand, there is certainly something ‘spectral’ about Rabbi’s ghost. Consider the timing of his arrival, twilight, a liminal time between day and night. If it is also Friday night, it is doubly liminal, l, as it also inscribes a transitional time between the sacred and profane. See Avot, in which the first primordial Friday evening twilight was a time in which magical and supernatural beings were created. In Genesis Rabbah 7:5, this was also the time when demons were created. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
110. For example, see Harari, *Jewish Magic*. On the belief of transmundane powers in the ancient Mediterranean world, Reed (*Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism*, 2) writes: “Ancient opinions varied as to the precise nature and purpose of these powers. Rarely contested, however, was their existence. Some such creatures – it was commonly believed – shared the inhabitable earth with humankind. Some peered down from above. Others lurked below or beyond. That they could sway human lives is a conviction expressed in ancient rituals for protection, prayers of petition, tales about transmundane encounters, and narratives about the cosmic unfurling of human history. Across the ancient Mediterranean world, the population of the otherworld often provided a symbolic language for the articulation of this worldly concerns.” [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
111. Levene, “Calvariae Magicae,” 359–79. The practice is attested in T. Sanhedrin 10:7 and B. Sanherin 82a, 104a. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
112. Harari, *Jewish Magic*, 283-4 citing M. Margalioth (1966, 76– 77). Harari also discusses the practice of reciting the second blessing in the Amidah prayer, Gevurot (“You, who revive the dead”) in order to “bring the dead back from his grave.” See there for fuller bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
113. See Deut 18:10-11; Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
114. Bolz, “Rabbinic Discourse,” 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
115. In that sense, I freely depart from a spectral reading, which generally represents a conscious movement away not only from the ontological question of whether ghosts are “real” but also from the historical question of whether the producers of a ghost story believed in the empirical reality of ghosts. Instead ghosts are read as a metaphor signifying the presence of absence. In our case, the scholarly consensus is that Babylonian Jews believed in intermediary beings like ghosts. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
116. Ronis, “Do Not Go Alone*,”* 1. Reed (*Demons*, 309), drawing on the work of Bruce Lincoln, similarly ​​highlights a scholarly habit that needs to be checked: “When confronted with premodern references to angels and demons by learned elites, it is common to presume that they must be symbols or ciphers for something else.” Instead, scholars must recognize that transmundane powers, including ghosts, were considered active agents in their world. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
117. See for example B. Baba Batra 58a where the ghost of Rav Tovi bar Mattana, grabbed the beard of a certain magus who was disturbing him. See also B. Berakhot 18b. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
118. So much recent work has been done showing the ways in which the rabbis were immersed in demons, angels, and magic. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
119. This fits well with the “episteme” famously articulated in B. Bava Metzia 59b. As Boyarin (Border Lines, 170-171) comments: “Rabbi Eliezer, possessor of the divine voice and power to do miracles, is severely punished by excommunication and exile from the House of Study for his refusal to accept the conclusions of the majority and their dialectical disputations. It is not the content of Rabbi Eli'ezer's dissent that is anathematized, but his appeal to mantic and even prophetic modes of authority, whereas the Rabbis are struggling to establish their sole control via the institution of Torah…Rabbi Yehoshua’s statement [The Torah is Not in Heaven], frequently taken to be an instance of a sort of protodeconstruction [fn 80: “including by the present writer in a former scholarly life”], in this Babylonian version represents an instance of the complete rabbinic takeover of religious life and practice via the Oral Torah. Not even God, not even the angels can compete with the Rabbis and their Torah. The Torah is no longer in heaven. It is on earth in the possession of the rabbinic institution. As the fourth-century Rabbi Yirmiah glosses Rabbi Yehoshua"s statement: "Since the Torah has been given on Mt. Sinai, we no longer listen to heavenly voices, for you have already written in the Torah: 'Incline after the majority' [Exod. 23:2]." Rabbinic Judaism thus represents a particular episteme of power/knowledge. In the face of the perceived failure of dialectic to produce consensus, it seeks to effect a transfer of authority and of control over discourse from heaven, reasoned and compelling argument, to earth, the allegedly Godgiven authority of the majority of the Rabbis." To see competing non-rabbinic “epistemes” see Harari, ‘“To Open the Heart.” [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
120. This is another way in which Derrida’s hauntology has been understood and applied. The act of reading and interpreting is an act of communing with the dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
121. This includes prophetic knowledge about the future. See for example, B. Berakhot 18b and B. Shabbat 152a-b. Indeed learning about the future was the primary reason Saul consults the witch of Endor to consult the ghost of Samuel. See 1 Sam 28:3-25. As toAs to the question of how long after death, does a person know about the world of the living see B. Shabbat 152a-b, B. Berakhot 18b. See also Harari, “Opening the Heart,” 335-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
122. See Meir, “The Story of Rabbi's Death,” 155 and following. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
123. Ofra Meir (ibid.) makes this observation as well. This textualization finds literary expression in the story when Rabbi’s body is likened to the “Ark of the Covenant” (in the Yerushalmi, it’s the Tablets of the Covenant). Other rabbis are described as physical embodiments of Torah, like Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
124. There is another sense in which the Bavli *performs* a kind of ghosting of Rabbi. Unlike the Yerushalmi which preserves a chronological frame to the story, in the Bavli, the commentary cite intertexts which disrupt the chronological flow, with the literary effect being that Rabbi keeps returning from the dead. Even after he dies in the story, anecdotes about him while he is a live get spliced in. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
125. This is not the only place where this phenomenon occurs. This may also relate to a phenomenon discussed by Bolz (“Discourse on Divination” 75) in which the last words of a dying man signify something particularly salient, the interpretation of which, constitutes a form of divination (cledonomancy). See for example, B. Baaba Batra, 58 a-b. Relatedly, we have the special laws of the “shechiv mera” (a person on his deathbed, see B. Baba Batra 156-7) as well as the commandment of fulfilling a person’s dying wishes, (a law that is cited in the name of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch. See B. Gittin 14b). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
126. Vidas, *Tradition,* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
127. Vidas, *Tradition,* 9. He cites Agamben’s exposition of Benjamin: “The particular power of quotations arises, according to Benjamin, not from their ability to transmit that past and allow the reader to relive it but, on the contrary, from their capacity... to destroy. Alienating by force a fragment (p.15) of the past from its historical context, the quotation at once makes it lose its character of authentic testimony and invests it with an alienating power that constitutes its unmistakable aggressive force.” [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
128. As Vidas (*Tradition,* 7) writes, “The Bavli's creators themselves are not hiding: they are there in almost every sugya, structuring the discussion and leading the reader (or listener) through the sources, expressing their voice in the anonymous discussion that organizes most of the Talmud.” [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
129. Vidas, *Tradition,*  8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
130. The Bavli editors, at once storytellers and dialecticians, construct and deconstruct the boundaries of narrative and commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
131. Vidas, *Tradition,* 2. Recently other scholars have attended to this boldness as well, like their resistance to logocentrism, their reliance on legal fictions, polysemy, and legal pluralism. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
132. Stern, *The Anthology in Jewish Literature,* 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
133. Halberstam, *Law and Truth*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
134. Rabbi’s instruction regarding his lamp, table, and bed, might be another example, at least in the sense that it isn’t clear whether his family knows why he instructed them so. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
135. On the one hand, these examples show confidence in the rabbinic ability to ascertain Rabbi’s meaning. On the other hand, it also displays an intellectual humility that initial understandings could be proven wrong. Meaning can be deferred (even if not infinitely so). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
136. See Stern, “Moses-Cide” and his exchange of articles with Susan Handleman. Derrida claims that all meaning is infinitely deferred, a phenomenon he calls ‘différance’ and which he associated with the ‘ghostly.’

     Buse (*Ghosts*, 10-11) explains further: “The relevance of a trope of spectrality to deconstruction is clear. Ghosts are neither dead nor alive, neither corporeal objects nor stern absences. As such, they are the stock-in-trade of the Derridean enterprise, standing in defiance of binary oppositions such as presence and absence, body and spirit, past and present, life and death. For deconstruction, these terms cannot stand in clear, independent opposition to one another, as each can be shown to possess an element or trace of the term that it is meant to oppose. In the figure of the ghost, we see that past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past, as well as the anticipations of the future. And so the liminal spirit, or to use Derrida's favoured term, revenant, the thing that returns, comes to represent a mobilization of familiar Derridean concepts such as trace, iteration and the deferral of presence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
137. Beyond the question of mediating the gap between text and meaning, two other aspects stand out as hauntological: the orality of the Mishnah (the performative context makes it difficult to even speak of an ‘original’ text) and its canonicity which by definition entails that there are traditions (baraitot) that will be left out. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
138. Stern, “Moses-cide,” 303n5. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
139. This sense of belatedness parallels the belatedness that Blanco and Peeren identify in Ulrich Baer’s study of the Holocaust photographs discussed in fn \_\_: “We have arrived late at the scene of a ‘retained past’ that nevertheless reminds us of its absence in our present.” [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
140. See also מסכתות קטנות מסכת שמחות ברייתות מאבל רבתי פרק ג [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
141. In P. Kilayim [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
142. **בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת ויחי פרשה צו**

     רבינו כשהיה נפטר מן העולם צוה שלשה דברים, אמר להם אל תזוז אלמנותי מתוך ביתי ואל תספדוני בעיירות שבא"י ואל תניחו לנכרי שיגע במטתי אלא מי שנטפל עמי בחיי יטפל בי במותי, [↑](#footnote-ref-141)