**What Is Hidden in the Small Box?**

**Narratives of Late Antique Roman Palestine in Dialogue**

**Abstract:** *This study is a comparative reading of two distinct narrative traditions with very similar features of plot and content. The first tradition is from the Palestinian midrash Kohelet Rabbah and could be dated to the fifth to sixth centuries. The second is from John Moschos’s* Spiritual Meadow [Pratum spirituale]*, which is very close to Kohelet Rabbah in time and space. The stories compared, though very close, differ in certain points. Pioneers of modern Judaic studies had been interested in the question of the relationships between early Christian authors and the rabbis, including Samuel Krauss and Louis Ginzberg; however, the relationships between John Moschos and Palestinian rabbinic writings have never been systematically treated (despite one very enlightening study by Hillel Newman). Here, in this case study, I ask the typical questions of comparative analyses: Did the midrash borrow the tradition from Christian lore? Or was the church author impressed by the teachings of midrash? Or did they both learn the story from the shared continuum of local narrative tradition? Beyond these typical inquiries, I seek to understand the cultural mechanisms underlying the narration.*

Two traditions, found in both the Palestinian midrash Kohelet Rabbah (KR),[[1]](#footnote-1) which can be dated to the sixth century, though its final redaction probably did not occur before the seventh century,[[2]](#footnote-2) and John Moschos’s *Spiritual Meadow* [*Pratum spirituale*=PS], [[3]](#footnote-3) composed in very close temporal and geographical proximity to Kohelet Rabbah,[[4]](#footnote-4) share striking similarities in plot and content. To explore these intriguing similarities, I analyze these two sets of stories from Kohelet Rabbah and consider their parallels in rabbinic literature and the *Spiritual Meadow*. I argue that the first story from KR belongs to the same tradition as the story in PS, and stems from the same narrative milieu. For the second story, I discuss the occurrence of the same ancient Mediterranean motif, which appears to fit the context of PS much better than that of KR. As KR is its first appearance in rabbinic literature, we can assume its appropriation by the rabbinic narrator from the same narrative milieu from which it came to PS. In neither case do I believe that a direct influence on Kohelet Rabbah from *Pratum spirituale* is possible: the book was known only in narrow monastic circles,[[5]](#footnote-5) and it is doubtful that the editor of KR would have been able to read it. This leads me to propose the presence of a shared narrative tradition.

The following comparison of the two sets of stories will address both their extensive similarities and the differences between them, tackling previously undiscussed textual case studies and reflecting on different models for explaining parallel traditions. The question of the relationship between Christian authors and the talmudic rabbis has been thoroughly investigated by pioneers of modern Judaic studies such as Samuel Krauss and Louis Ginzberg,[[6]](#footnote-6) and the inquiry has been continued by numerous contemporary scholars.[[7]](#footnote-7) However, the specific relationship between John Moschos’s work and Palestinian rabbinic writings has never been systematically treated (despite one enlightening study by Hillel Newman).[[8]](#footnote-8) Here, in this case study, I ask the typical questions of comparative analyses: Did the editor of KR borrow the tradition from Christian lore? Alternatively, was the church author impressed by midrashic teachings? Or, did they both absorb the story from a shared narrative milieu? Alongside these expected inquiries, I seek to understand the cultural mechanisms underlying the narration.[[9]](#footnote-9) I hope that this reading of these two short stories will ultimately facilitate the discovery of the cultural treasures of Jewish and Christian narrators that are still hidden in the small boxes of their own tales.

**What Is in A Small Box?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Kohelet Rabbah 3:2-8[[10]](#footnote-10)** | |
| “A time to seek” [Eccl 3:6]—in a time of peace, “and a time to lose”—in a time of war; “a time to keep”—in a time of sustainment, “and a time to cast away”—in troubled times. | "עת לבקש" בשעת שלום "ועת לאבד" בשעת מלחמה, "עת לשמור" בשעה טובה "ועת להשליך" בשעה רעה. |
| A story: There was a merchant who was going to sail on the sea, he and his son. There was with him a box (קובין) with denarii. He gave it to them counted [to keep?] [in the dark] [in the ship].[[11]](#footnote-11) He heard the voices of the sailors say, “When we enter the sea [לפילגוס] we kill them and throw them into the sea and we take the treasure of dinars from him.” What did this man do? He made himself angry at his son and took the [dinars] and threw them into the sea. On entering the city, he complained about this to the proconsul [אנטיפוטא] of Caesarea, and [the proconsul] brought them into the prison and they were judged and obliged to give him back the property of dinars. They said to him: “Where did you learn this law to find us guilty?” He said to them: “From Solomon the king of Israel, as it is written: ‘and a time to cast away.’” | עובדה הוה בחד פרגמטוטיס דהוה אזיל פריש בימא הוא ובריה והוה אית גביה קובין דינרין יהיב ליה [מנא] יתהון באפילה. שמע קלהון דמוטייא אמרין כד עללין אנן לפלגוס אנן קטלין לון ומשליכין לון לימא ונסבין הדין מדליה דדינרין מיניה. מה עבד ההוא גברא, עבד גרמיה מצהיב עם בריה ונסב יתהון ורמא יתהון לימא. כיון דעלון לון למדינתא אזל וקבל עליהון גבי אנטיפוטא דקסרין, ואיתינן בבי איסרי ואדון וחייביהון לתן ליה מדליה דינרין. אמרין ליה מנן אית הדא דינא לן דחיבינן. א"ל משלמה מלך ישראל דכתו' עת להשליך. |

Let us summarize this brief tale, brought by way of illustration for Ecclesiastes 3:8. A certain trader embarks on a sea journey, carrying with him a small box,(קובין), which contains a considerable number of denarii. He hears the talk of sailors[[12]](#footnote-12) who are plotting to kill him and his son once the ship enters the high sea,[[13]](#footnote-13) and take possession of the money. In order to avert this scenario, father and son pretend to quarrel,[[14]](#footnote-14) after which the merchant throws the box into the sea and survives. Upon arrival to Caesarea, he complains to the proconsul himself, and this high official demands the sailors cover the merchant’s loss. Alive and newly wealthy, the merchant explains that he found a blueprint for this clever plan in the words of Ecclesiastes: It is good to “cast away,” namely, to lose wealth in troubled times, after which you can be rewarded again.[[15]](#footnote-15) The link to the verse appears artificial, and the end of the story is not particularly convincing.[[16]](#footnote-16) Of course, storytellers since time immemorial have sent their heroes on long journeys, including sea travel, in order to bring them back, having gained a new perspective.[[17]](#footnote-17) Is this what happened here? Has the narrator invented the plot solely to substantiate Solomon’s recommendations? While this is plausible, it is not the only possibility. Taking a different direction, I would like to understand the history of this tradition within a broader discourse, but not before we reflect on the whimsical vocabulary of our rather modest story.

This short and slightly elliptical tale deteriorated severely in its textual transmission. Saul Lieberman tried to reconstruct the text with the help of suggestions made by the medieval author R. Yehudah ben Sheshet (Rivash, 1326–1408), who read this story in a letter from a correspondent.[[18]](#footnote-18) Lieberman devoted special effort to explaining the following phrase: קובין דדינרין יהיב ליה מנא יתהון באפילה (which could be translated: “a box with denarii. He gave [it] to them to keep it in the dark.” However, this is a corrupted version; see further). The ambiguous word קובין (*kubin)* was emended by Lieberman, following an explanation proposed by Rivash, to קיבוטרין (*kibutrin*). Rivash assumed that this was the term for a certain box that belongs to the crew of the ship.[[19]](#footnote-19) And Lieberman took the word אפילה (*ʾafelah*) “darkness” to be a corrupted אילפא (*ʾilfaʾ*), as Rivash recorded it, which is the Aramaic term for “ship.”[[20]](#footnote-20) The father in the story, Lieberman proposed, gave his son the box, and the son attracted the attention of the sailors by counting the dinars in the box—although none of this is found in the story.[[21]](#footnote-21)

As it turns out, however, a comparative reading of the story with one recorded in the writings of John Moschos frees us from the need to justify the logic of the narrative.

**The Story of a Jeweller Who, by a Wise Decision, Saved His Life at Sea**[[22]](#footnote-23)

One of the fathers said there was a jeweller of the kind known as a gem-engraver. He had some valuable stones and pearls when he went aboard a ship together with his servants [παίδων αὐτοῦ];[[23]](#footnote-24) it was his intention to go do business elsewhere. By divine providence, it happened that he became fond of the crewman who was detailed to wait upon him. This servant slept at his side and ate the same food he ate. One day, the servant overheard the sailors whispering [τῶν ναυτῶν ψιθυριζόντων] to each other and determining among themselves to throw the gem-engraver into the sea, to get their hands on the stones he had with him. It was a very disturbed servant who went in to wait on the good man. “Why are you so gloomy [στυγνός] today, boy?” asked the man, but the other kept his own counsel and said nothing. He asked him again: “Come now, tell me what the matter is,” at which the servant broke into tears and sobbed out that the sailors were planning to do this and that to the jeweller, who asked: “Is this really so?” *“*Yes,” was the reply; “That is what they have decided among themselves to do to you.” Then the jeweller called his sons and said to them: “Whatever I tell you to do, do it at once and without arguing.” Then he unfolded a linen cloth and said to them: “Bring the inlaid chests [φέρετε τά μου ζικία],” and they brought them. He opened them and began taking out the stones. When they were all set out, he began to say: “Is this what life is <all about>? Is it for these that I put my life in danger and at the mercy of the sea when, in a little while, I shall die, and take nothing with me out of this world?” He said to his sons: “Empty it all into the sea.” As soon as he spoke, they cast the riches into the sea. The sailors were amazed—and their conspiracy was frustrated.

The common points between the two tales are clear. In both stories, a wealthy merchant goes on a journey by sea, accompanied by his son(s) or servants.[[24]](#footnote-25) Moreover, both stories feature a small box with precious content. This box attracts the sailors’ attention and puts them on a course of criminal intent. Additionally, in the two stories, the object of their desire was thrown into the sea, thereby preventing the would-be criminals from attaining their goal.

A further matching detail is the oddity of the term used for the small box. The subject of the sailors’ plot has drawn lexicographical speculation not only from Lieberman when reading the story in the midrash, but also from scholars of Byzantium reading Moschos. As discussed by John Duffy and Gary Vikan, “One of the distinguishing features of the Pratum is its language: Moschos writes Greek that tends towards the colloquial, and he is one of a handful of authors who bring us close to the Byzantine vernacular of the period. This informal style allows him to admit certain words from everyday language which, if writing in a more elevated manner, he would likely avoid.”[[25]](#footnote-26) According to the Greek text, the man orders the lads to fetch the chest by saying [φέρετε τά μου ζικία]. An accompanying note in the Migne edition explains that the word [ζικία ] is unattested and that, to judge by the ancient Latin translation, the intention is “capsulas.”[[26]](#footnote-28) Thus, according to Migne, the term βικία may have been intended.[[27]](#footnote-29) This attempt at emendation was described by Duffy and Vikan as “admirable, in view of the context, but . . . not the correct one.”[[28]](#footnote-30) They proposed their own emendation: “But the problem is not deep-seated, for it can be removed by a slight shift of the elements, namely by reading φέρετε τά μουζικία. This again confronts us with a rare word, μουζικίον, but fortunately it is attested twice in another story of the same John Moschos, and apart from that in no other Greek author. … We may conclude, then, from the two surviving examples that at the very least μουζικίον denotes a small box for keeping precious objects.”[[29]](#footnote-31) Ultimately, Dufay and Vikar identify this object with the ivory pyxides used in pagan and Christian rituals. This highly creative explanation was accepted, in part, by Jeffrey Featherstone and Cyril Mango.[[30]](#footnote-32)

In my view, however, the suggestion offered by Migne, and followed by Lampe, that ζικίον may be a mistake for βικίον, *vessel*, *box*, seems most plausible. The phonetical proximity of the Aramaicקובין /קוביא of Kohelet Rabbah and the Greek βικία is evident, as is the usage of the same word freely borrowed from the lexicon of everyday life of fifth-century Roman Palestine. Naturally, the term was ביקיא, which somehow was corrupted intoקובין = קיביא in the transmission to the text of KR.[[31]](#footnote-33)

It is not merely this original term, though, that was preserved best in Moschos’s text. The version of the story in PS shows obvious signs of its primacy. The story aims to show that life is worth more than money, and that a clever traveller managed to save his life by derailing the plans of those who would steal his money. This storyline, in all likelihood, is part of the prototypical design. Clearly, the tale was not crafted to elucidate the third chapter of Ecclesiastes; thus, we see that the plot was reused in KR.[[32]](#footnote-34) For the rabbinic narrator, it was very important to reward his pious hero by compensation for his lost money, thereby imparting to his audience a sense that the local law system could be relied upon. At the same time, it is notable that the story in PSis not a typical Christian hagiographic story, either, lacking the glorification of pious monks or ascetics. Thus, it was likely a widespread entertaining narrative, with picaresque elements mobilized for the needs of the Christian narrator.[[33]](#footnote-35)

Although, as we have seen above, the story in PS appears more original than the one in KR, we should not assume that the latter was borrowed from the Christian source. In general, I would caution against the linear models of an "interaction effect," and rather, propose an alternative model whereby these two literary works drew their stories from the shared living narrative milieu of their time.[[34]](#footnote-36) . In light of the textual parallels, the common culture behind these texts, which created these stories, can be detected.[[35]](#footnote-37) As the writings of John Moschos were probably known only to his monastic brethren,[[36]](#footnote-38) I rule out the possibility that the editor of KR read this text. The editor’s awareness of the stories of the Greek-speaking population of the Land of Israel, however, is unquestionable.[[37]](#footnote-39)

**What Is in the Fish?**

A second pronounced parallel between KR and PS, unrelated to the one discussed above, evinces a different kind of relationship between the compared textual traditions. This parallel is an example of a common motif, namely, a single plot item, which could be titled “the treasure in the belly of the fish.” This motif travelled from the ancient Orient to the Mediterranean Basin early, but, as I will show below, around the same time it was borrowed by the two storytellers—a Christian and a rabbinic author. Let us begin with the small and rather elliptical fish story that appears in KR 11:1.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Kohelet Rabbah 11:1**[[38]](#footnote-40) | |
| A story about a man who threw one loaf of bread into the Great Sea [Mediterranean Sea] every day. One day, he bought a fish, opened it, and found a treasure [another version: pearl] within it. They said to him: This is a man who has a loaf of bread which caused him success! And they proclaimed concerning him: “sending bread upon the waters” [Eccl 11:1]. | עובדא הוה בחד בר נש, דהוה בכל יום נסיב חד עגול ומקלק לימא רבא. חד יומא אזל וזבן חד נון וקרעיה ואשכח ביה סימא. א"ל: הידא הוא גברא דקם ליה עיגוליה! וקרון עליה: "שלח לחמך על פני המים" (קהלת יא, א). |

In this story, the puzzling verse from Ecclesiastes was read not as a metaphor but as an order to perform a ritual. The plot of the tale is hard to make sense of. The narrator does not explain why the man threw the bread into the sea, although it is not the custom of pious men to do such things. Perhaps the narrator wished to convey that one may reap great reward for an act even if it appears foolish in the eye of a beholder. Clearly, the story in KR appears in its secondary context; that is, it was imported from some other text. This story was not devised to illustrate the verse from Ecclesiastes but rather attracted the attention of the KR’s editor, whose "encyclopaedic" tendencies are well known.[[39]](#footnote-41) The editor endeavoured to enrich his book by liberally gleaning material, somehow connected to a verse, from different sources. In this case, he borrowed the story from the conventional wisdom of the complex folk stories of his environment.[[40]](#footnote-42) This version of the story is much simpler than its Jewish kin in the Babylonian Talmud, and the Christian version in Moschos’s book. The closest parallel known from rabbinic literature is found in B. Shabbat 119a, and it is a rather celebrated one:[[41]](#footnote-43)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **B. Shabbat 119a**[[42]](#footnote-44) | |
| There was a gentile in the neighbourhood of [a man named] Joseph Who Honors the Sabbath whose property was very great. The astrologers said to him: “Joseph Who Honors the Sabbath will consume all your property.” He went and sold all his property and bought with it a pearl, which he put in his cap. While the ferry was crossing, the wind blew it off, cast it into the water, and a fish swallowed it. They caught it [the fish] and brought it on the cusp of the Sabbath eve. They said: “Who buys at a time like this?” They told them: “Go and take it to Joseph Who Honors the Sabbath, who is accustomed to buying.” They brought it to him, and he bought it. He cut it open, found the pearl inside, and sold it for thirteen measures of golden dinars. A certain old man met him and said: “Whoever lends to the Sabbath, the Sabbath repays him.” | יוסף מוקיר שבי, הוה ההוא נכרי בשבבותיה, דהוה נפישי נכסיה טובא. אמרי ליה כלדאי: כולהו נכסי - יוסף מוקר שבי אכיל להו. אזל זבנינהו לכולהו ניכסי, זבן בהו מרגניתא, אותבה בסייניה. בהדי דקא עבר מברא - אפרחיה זיקא, שדייה במיא, בלעיה כוורא. אסקוה אייתוה אפניא דמעלי שבתא. אמרי: מאן זבין כי השתא? אמרי להו: זילו אמטיוהו לגבי יוסף מוקר שבי, דרגיל דזבין. אמטיוה ניהליה, זבניה. קרעיה, אשכח ביה מרגניתא, זבניה בתליסר עיליתא דדינרי דדהבא. פגע ביה ההוא סבא, אמר: מאן דיזיף שבתא - פרעיה שבתא. |

Hillel Newman, arguing against Yonah Fraenkel’s famous thesis concerning the “closure” of the talmudic story, chose to conduct a comparative analysis of this tale, and to elucidate it with the aid of a nonrabbinic parallel from PS.[[43]](#footnote-46) Newman first noted that Moschos relates a story he heard from a woman named Mary on the Greek island of Samos, who told him a tale of a Christian woman of Nisibis in Babylonia who was married to a pagan:[[44]](#footnote-47)

They possessed fifty miliarisia. One day, the husband said to his wife: “Let us lend out that money and get some advantage from it, for in drawing on it a little at a time, we are going to spend it all.” The wife answered: “If you insist on lending this money, come: lend it to the God of the Christians.” He said to her: “Well, where is this God of the Christians, so we can lend it to him?” She said: “I will show you. Not only shall you not lose your money, but it shall even earn interest for you and the capital shall be doubled.” He said to her: “Come on then; show me and we will lend to him.”

To sum up the lengthy plot: The woman takes her husband to the church of Nisibis, where he gives his money to the poor. Three months later, unable to meet his own expenses, the husband returns to the church, where he finds a coin on the floor. His wife sends him off to buy food. He buys bread, wine, and fish, and when his wife opens the fish, she finds within it a precious gem. He sells the gem for three hundred miliarisia. Next, we read the internal analysis:

Filled with wonder at the goodness of God, she said to him: “Oh husband, see how good and generous and affluent is the God of the Christians! Look how he has not merely returned to you the fifty miliarisia you lent him together with interest, but in only a few days has given you the capital multiplied by six! Know therefore that there is no other God, neither on earth nor in heaven, but him alone.” Convinced by this miracle and learning the truth by experience, he immediately became a Christian and glorified our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Newman explains:

The importance of this parallel lies not only in the shared motif of the fabulous gem in the fish but also in the fact that both Jewish and Christian stories explicitly cast the appearance of the gem as repayment of a religious loan, thereby validating the extraordinary stature of the borrower. Joseph lends to the Jewish Sabbath; the pagan lends to the god of the Christians. Joseph’s belief is vindicated at the expense of the gentile; the faith of the pagan’s wife is vindicated, and he becomes a Christian. Without belittling all that is unique to each story, I suggest that the similarities are not merely coincidental, especially because both would appear to be Babylonian,[[45]](#footnote-48) and they are roughly contemporary.[[46]](#footnote-49)

The Babylonian character of the motif of “a precious stone in a fish’s belly” could be reinforced by the following story (not mentioned by Newman):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **B. Bava Batra 133b** |  |
| Come and hear: Joseph b. Joezer had a son who did not conduct himself in a proper manner. He had a loft [full] of denarii and he consecrated it [for the Temple]. He, [the son], went away and married the daughter of one who plaits the wreaths of King Yannai. [On the occasion when] his wife gave birth to a son he bought for her a fish. Opening it he found therein a pearl. “Do not take it to the king,” she said to him, “for they will take it away from you for a small sum of money. Go take it rather to the Treasurers [of the Temple], but do not you suggest its price since the making of an offer to the Most High is [as binding] as [actual] delivery in ordinary transactions. But let them fix the price.” On being brought [to the Temple] it was valued at thirteen lofts of denarii. “Seven [of them],” they said to him, “are available, [but the remaining] six are not available.” He said to them, “Give me the seven; and the six are, [hereby] consecrated to the Temple.” Thereupon it was recorded, “Joseph b. Joezer brought in one, but his son brought in six.” | ת"ש: דיוסף בן יועזר היה לו בן שלא היה נוהג כשורה, הוה ליה עיליתא דדינרי, קם אקדשה. אזיל נסיב בת גאדיל כלילי דינאי מלכא, אולידה דביתהו, זבין לה ביניתא, קרעה אשכח בה מרגליתא. אמרה ליה: לא תמטייה למלכא, דשקלי לה מינך בדמי קלילי, זיל אמטייה לגבי גזברי, ולא תשיימה את, דאמירתו לגבוה כמסירתו להדיוט, אלא לשיימוה אינהו. אמטייה, שמוה בתליסרי עליאתא דדינרי. אמרי ליה: שבע איכא, שית ליכא. אמר להו: שבע הבו לי, שית הרי הן מוקדשות לשמים. עמדו וכתבו: יוסף בן יועזר הכניס אחת, ובנו הכניס שש. |

This story is clearly of Babylonian origin. Its details, and especially the peculiarities of the plot, deserve in-depth analysis.[[47]](#footnote-50) Here, however, I will merely mention that it does not have any close parallel in Palestinian rabbinic literature, even though the event described in the story is situated in the Land of Israel. Nothing in the plot gives any hint of a Palestinian historical background. The marriage of the unsuccessful son of an ancient sage to the daughter of the king’s servant is conceived as a fall from grace. When she delivers a child, and her husband buys her a fish, this seems like an amusing invention of the Babylonian narrator. Even though none of these details are historically accurate, the Babylonian narrator is devoted to the motif of the precious stone in the fish’s belly. Now our analysis will travel from the Promised Land, as imagined in Babylonia, to the real Promised Land, which, in this case, is no less promising. Newman was aware of this different fish story in the Palestinian tradition, which follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Bereshit Rabbah 11:4**[[48]](#footnote-51) | |
| אמר ר' תנחומ'. עובדא הוה ברומי בערובת צומא רבה והוה תמן חד חייט ואזל דיזבון ליה חד נון. ואשתכח הוא וטליא דאפרכוס קיימין עלוי. הוה הדין מסיק ליה בטימי והדין מסיק ליה בטימי עד דמטא בי"ב דינרין ונסתיה ההוא חייטא. | R. Tanḥuma said: The story once happened in Rome on the eve of the great fast that a certain tailor went to buy a fish, and it turned out that he and the governor's servant began bargaining for it. Each overbid the other until it reached twelve dinars, at which price the tailor bought it. |
| בענתה דאריסטון אמר אפרכוס לטליא. למה לא אייטיתה נון. אמר ליה. מרי. מה נכפור מינך. לא הוה תמן אלא חד נון ואשכחית אנא וחד יהודאי קיימין עילויה. והוה הוא מסיק ליה בטימי ואנא מסיק ליה בטימי עד דמטא לתריסר דינרין». מה הוית בעי דניטי לך חד נון בי"ב דינרין. אתמהא. | At dinner, the governor demanded of the servant, “Why have you not served fish?” “I will tell you the truth, sir,” he replied. “It was only one fish, and a certain Jew and I were bargaining for it. He was bargaining on his money and I was bargaining on my money till we arrived at 12 dinars: did you really want me to bring you a single fish for twelve dinars!” |
| אמר ליה מן הוא. אמר ליה בר נש פלן. שלח בתריה ואתה לגביה. אמר. מאי חמית חייט יהודאי אכיל נון בי"ב דינרין. | “Who was it?” inquired he. “So-and-so,” he answered. He had him summoned and said to him, “A Jewish tailor can eat a fish at twelve dinars!” |
| אמר ליה. מרי. אית לן חד יום כל חובין דאנן עבדין כולה שתא הוא מכפר לן. וכד הוא אתי לית אנן צריכין ליקוריה אתמהא. הביא ראייה לדבריו שבקיה. | “Sir,” replied he, “we have one day when all our sins of the year are forgiven, and we honor it greatly.” When he produced proof of his words, he dismissed him. |
|  |  |

On the face of it, only the acts of buying and eating fish correspond to the motif analyzed above. No miracle is found within the fish’s stomach.[[49]](#footnote-52) However, this particular story is attested in another, much later, version in the midrashic literature, where the later compiler added the miraculous motif.

**Pesikta Rabbati 23**[[50]](#footnote-53)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| אמ"ר פנחס. מעשה בחסיד אחד ברומי שהיה מכבד את ימים טובים ואת שבתות. חדא ערובא. ואית דאמרין ערובת צומא רבא. הוה סליק לשוק מזבון כלום ולא אשכח אלא חד נון. והוה טלייא דאפרכא קיים תמן. והוה דין מעלי ליה ודין מעלי ליה. זבניה ההוא יהודאה ליטרתא דינר. | R. Phineas said: A story about one pious man in Rome who honored festivals and Sabbaths. Once, on the eve of Sabbath—some say it was on the eve of the Great Fast—he went to the market to buy something, and he found nothing but one fish. The governor's servant was [also] standing there. [And] one bid for it and so did the other. In the end, the Jew bought the fish at a denar per pound. |
| בענתה דאריסטון אמ' אפרכא לטלייא. לית הכא נון. א"ל. לא סליק יומא הדין אלא חד נון וזבניה חד יהודאי ליטרתא דינ'. | At mealtime, the governor said to his servant—“There is no fish!” The servant replied—“Today, only one fish was brought to the market and a Jew bought it at a denar per pound.” |
| אמ' ליה. ואת חכים ליה. א"ל אין. א"ל. איזל צווח ליה. דסימא אית ליה והוא למלכא. אזל צווח ליה.  א"ל. מאן אומנך. א"ל. חייט. א"ל. ואית חייט דאכיל ליטרתא דנונא דינר. | The governor asked: “Do you know him?” The servant replied: “Yes.” The governor said: “Go forth and summon him, for apparently the Jew owns a treasure which properly belongs to the king!” He went and called him.  He asked him: “What is your work?” He answered: “I am a tailor.” He replied: “But is there a tailor who can afford to eat food at a denar per pound?” |
| א"ל. מרי. יַבֿ לי רשות נשתעייה קדמך. א"ל. אישתאי. א"ל. אית לן יומא חד והוא חביב עלן סגיא מכל יומי שתא. דכל חובין דאנן עבדין ביה הוא משתרי ומשבק לן. בגין כן אנן מוקרין ליה סגין מי כל יומי שתא.  א"ל. הואיל והבאת ראיה לדבריך הרי אתה פטור. | He answered: “My lord, permit me and I will say something to defend myself.” He said him: “Speak!” He said: “We have one day which is more precious to us than all the other days of the year. That day atones for all the sins which we have committed during the year, so then we are forgiven.[[51]](#footnote-54) Therefore we honor it more than any other day of the year.”  He said to him: “Since you have provided a reason for your behavior, you are free to go.” |
| מה פרע לו הב"ה. זמן לו מתוכו אבן טובה אחת של מרגלית והיה מתפרנס ממנה כל ימיו. | How did the Holy One, blessed be He, requite the tailor? He caused him to find in the fish a gem of purest ray, a pearl, and on the money he got for it he sustained himself all the rest of his days. |

Here, some resemblance to the miraculous “precious stone in a fish belly” plot does show up, though only at the end of the story, leaving the impression that it is an addition that could easily have been dispensed with.[[52]](#footnote-55) Newman compared these tales to the version in the Bavli and identified a commonality—both are “fish stories” in which divine providence is somehow exposed through a fish purchased by the protagonist at the market. In the Palestinian fish story from Bereshit Rabbah, however, there is no gem and no repayment of a loan. In Pesikta Rabbati, these elements appear secondarily as a Hebrew addition to the Aramaic story,[[53]](#footnote-56) probably under the influence of the passage in the Bavli, cited above. They have also contaminated the poorer textual traditions of Bereshit Rabbah 11:4.

Nonetheless, it is quite possible that the motif of the precious stone found in the fish’s bowels was widespread, since ancient times, in both the East and the West. Its first appearance is in the *Histories of Herodotus* (3.39–43), in the fifth century BCE,[[54]](#footnote-57) and thereafter it occurs in lists of literary traditions, such as Kālidāsa’s *The Recognition of Śākuntalā*[[55]](#footnote-58) and early medieval Jewish and Muslim texts.[[56]](#footnote-59) Thus, the motif of the precious stone miraculously found in the belly of a fish is a universal migrating motif. However, it was not found in classical Palestinian literature until quite late. In Kohelet Rabbah, the motif is embedded in a genuine Palestinian narrative.[[57]](#footnote-60)

The artificiality of the appearance of the “precious stone in the fish’s belly” in Kohelet Rabbah attests less to the continuity the motif in Palestinian storytelling than to its arrival from another narrative milieu. Even in this case, however, the occurrence of the motif in Kohelet Rabbah is much less well integrated into the work than it is in the story told by Moschos.

**\* \* \* \* \***

One of the parallel traditions in Kohelet Rabbah and *Pratum spirituale* is a proper parallel—the two stories about a box thrown into the sea are clearly descended from a common prototype, and the Christian version is primary. My conclusion is based not only on the similarity of numerous plot elements, but also on the verbal echoes of the Greek prototype. The second parallel is an example of a common motif, namely, a single plot item: the treasure in the belly of the fish. This motif came from the ancient Orient to the Mediterranean Basin earlier than these texts, but around the same time, and it was borrowed by the two storytellers—Christian and Jewish. The clumsiness of the plot in KR is patent. The much-elaborated version in PS, by contrast, seems to indicate that KR is dependent on the Christian story. Thus, despite the differences between the two examples of parallel stories, while the first has many plot components in common and the second only one, they are complementary. Rummaging in the small boxes of late antique rabbinic and Christian narrative, then, has yielded a find: the proximity of the two literary traditions can be assumed because of these two parallels. Considering the textual parallels has afforded us a glimpse of the common culture that lies behind these texts and shapes these stories. I hope that this study, together with others, will further the development of a mode of investigation that argues that a comparative analysis of Jewish and Christian material can lead to the unearthing of literary topoi and motifs in broader circulation—neither particularly Jewish nor especially Christian—adopted, and adapted, by both religious groups. I focus here on two examples, demonstrating the reciprocal potential of a comparative study of Christian and rabbinic sources in late antique Roman Palestine. In these cases, the investigation of the sources representing the two textual communities both highlights their different religious agendas and allows for the restoration of patterns in the broader cultural backdrop with which they converse. In other words, complementing the traditional path of demonstrating dialogue between Jewish and Christian traditions, it is worthwhile to pursue the avenue of mapping broader common patterns reflected in those traditions.

1. This paper came to existence through conversation with Michail Kitsos (PhD student in University of Michigan has his position changed?), a devoted reader of Greek patristic writings to whom I am thankful. I owe many thanks to Hillel Newman for advice and bibliographical references and, to Beatrice Daskas for help with the Greek texts, and to Emmanouela Grypeou for reading and sharing her thoughtful notes. The first draft of this paper was presented to the participants of the International Conference: The Talmud and Christianity: Rabbinic Judaism after Constantine, at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, June 27– - 28, 2016, whose notes and comments helped me very much in the preparation of this paper. I began writing this paper during my stay at Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies (DFG-Kolleg-Forschergruppe FOR 2311) and finally prepared it for publication as an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellow in at the Judaic Studies Institute of the Free University of Berlin.

   See on this work Eleazar Grünhut, *Kritische Untersuchung des Midrasch Kohelet Rabbah* (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1892); Johannes Wachten, *Midrasch-Analyse: Strukturen in Midrasch Qohelet Rabba* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1978); Marc Hirshman, “Midrash Qohelet Rabbah: Chapters 1–4,” [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1983); Reuven Kiperwasser, “Midrashim on Kohelet: Studies in Their Redaction and Formation“ [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2005); Kiperwasser, “Towards the Redaction History of Kohelet Rabbah*,*” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 61 (2010): 257–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Regarding the relatively late final redaction of this work see Reuven Kiperwasser, “Structure and Form in Kohelet Rabbah as Evidence of Its Redaction,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 58 (2007): 283–302; Kiperwasser, “Towards the Redaction History of Kohelet Rabbah”; Kiperwasser, “Early and Late in Kohelet Rabbah: A Study in Redaction-Criticism” [in Hebrew] in *Iggud – Selected Essays in Jewish Studies*, ed. Baruch J. Schwartz, Abraham Melamed, Aharon Shemesh (Jerusalem: Magnes , 2008), 291–312. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. # A new English translation, titled *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschos*, was published by John Wortley (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1992); for the Greek text, see *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857–66) (hereafter PG), 87 (3): 2851–3112. It is also known as the *Leimon* or *Leimonarion* or *Neos Paradeisos*. The Greek text in Migne reproduces the 1681 edition by Jean-Baptiste Cotelier together with a facing Latin translation emended from that executed by the fifteenth-century Florentine humanist Ambrose Traversari (Fra Ambrogio). Despite the preliminary work of Philip Pattenden (“The Text of the Pratum Spirituale,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 26 [1975]: 38–54), the *Spiritual Meadow* still lacks a critical edition. For a first contemporary study of Moschos and his work, see Henry Chadwick, "John Moschus and His Friend Sophronius the Sophist," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974): 41–74, reprinted in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum, 1982). See also the recent works of José Simón Palmer, *El monacato oriental en el “Pratum Spirituale” de Juan Mosco* (Madrid: Fundacion universitaria espanola, 1993), 46–47; Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos’ Spiritual Meadow* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014); and Derek Krueger, “Between Monks: Tales of Monastic Companionship in Early Byzantium,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20 (2011): 28–61.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Chadwick, "John Moschus," 41: “Written in the second or third decade of the seventh century, it records anecdotes from the monasteries of Palestine and Egypt related to John Moschus as he travelled about with his friend Sophronius in search of edification and the unusual.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This would be true about every early Christian book. Despite extensive book production in monastic circles, books were read by a very small number of readers, as stated by Keith Hopkins, “many or most Christian communities … simply did not have among them a single sophisticated reader or writer.” See “Conquest by Book,” in *Literacy in the Roman World*, ed. Mary Beard et al., Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 3 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1991), 133–58. However, one can suggest that these very few readers did contribute to the circulation of the stories of Moschus, though it probably took a long time to spread among different Christian communities. On reading practices in early Christian communities see Guy Stroumsa, “The New Self and Reading Practices in Late Antique Christianity,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 95 (2015): 1–18, and recently Stroumsa, *The New Self and Reading Practices* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Samuel Krauss, ‘‘Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers,’’ *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5, no. 1 (1892): 122; Louis Ginzberg, “Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern,“ in *Abhandlungen zur Erinnerung an Hirsch Perez Chajes* (Vienna: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation 1933), 22–50. For the full bibliography of these approaches, see Judith R. Baskin, ‘‘Rabbinic-Patristic Contacts in Late Antiquity: A Bibliographical Reappraisal,’’ in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, vol. 5, *Studies in Judaism and Its Greco-Roman Context*, ed. William Scott Green (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 54 and 75–80. See also Samuel Krauss, “Church Fathers,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906), online version at http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4380- church-fathers. The works of Krauss and Ginzberg were preceded by Graetz’s studies; see Heinrich Graetz, ‘‘Haggadische Elemente bei den Kirchenvätern,”*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*3, no. 8 (1854): 311–19; 9 (1854): 352–55; 10 (1854): 381–87; 11 (1854): 428–31; 4, no. 5 (1855): 187–92, on which see the work of Baskin mentioned above. See also Hillel I. Newman, ‘‘Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, and the Church Fathers,’’ in *Die Entdeckung des Christentums in der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, ed. Görge K. Hasselhoff (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 147–63. For an analysis of Krauss’s approach, see Catherine Hezser, "[Samuel Krauss' Contribution to the Study of Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Graeco-Roman Culture within the Context of Wissenschaft Scholarship](https://www.academia.edu/4312304/Samuel_Krauss_Contribution_to_the_Study_of_Ancient_Judaism_Christianity_and_Graeco-Roman_Culture_Within_the_Context_of_Wissenschaft_Scholarship),” *Modern Judaism* 33, no. 3 (2013): 301–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It will be virtually impossible to mention all of them. Among scholars of rabbinic literature studying patristics there are the works of Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo- Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Hillel I. Newman, "Jerome's Judaizers," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 4 (2001): 421–52. See also the works I mention below regarding “the parting of the ways.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. # See Hillel I. Newman, “Closing the Circle: Yonah Fraenkel, the Talmudic Story, and Rabbinic History,” in *How Should Rabbinic Literature Be Read in the Modern World?*, ed. Matthew Kraus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 105–36. I will further analyse the same example.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I already tried my hand at a similar approach to the comparative reading of rabbinic texts and Syriac patristic writings in a few papers written together with Serge Ruzer: see Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer, “The Holy Land and Its Inhabitants in Travel-Stories of Bar-Sauma” [in Hebrew], *Cathedra* 148 (2012): 41–70 ; Kiperwasser and Ruzer, "To Convert a Persian and to Teach Him the Holy Scriptures: A Zoroastrian Proselyte in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives," in *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context*, ed. Geoffrey Herman (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 91–127; Kiperwasser and Ruzer, “Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jewry: Narratives and Identity Shaping in a Multi-Religious Setting," in *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of an International Conference to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the International Association of Patristic Studies*, ed. Carol Harrison, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, and Théodore De Bruyn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 421–42. However, I am now proposing new literary corpora for comparative analyses. The comparative reading of *Pratum spirituale* and rabbinic literature resembles, in general lines, the comparative study of rabbinic literature and *Apophthegmata patrum*, as both are anthologies of narratives about deeds of spiritual leaders. However, as I will show below, the cultural proximity between PS and rabbinic narratives is much stronger. See Catherine Hezser, “Apophthegmata Patrum and Apophthegmata of the Rabbis,” in *La narrativa cristiana antica: Codici narrativi, strutture formali, schemi retorici*, Studia Ephemerida Augustinianum 50 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1995), 453–64; Hezser, “Die Verwendung der hellenistischen Gattung Chrie im frühen Christentum und Judentum,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27 (1996): 371–439; Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Marc Hirshman’s critical edition of the first part of Kohelet Rabbah, *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 1–6* (Jerusalem: The Midrash Project of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2016), 178. For the synoptic edition see <http://www.schechter.ac.il/.upload/Midrash/kohelet%20raba/parasha3.pdf>. Please indicate if the quote you cite is your translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. According to all the manuscripts אפילה means darkness; however, I accept Lieberman’s emendation to אילפא. Please do not include cross-references to other footnotes. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Following the version of the printed edition, we could read here דנווטיא, which is probably a Graecism of the Greek ναυτής. See Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1898), 355. Other textual versions differ, though these differences could be explained as graphic errors. The version of the JTS manuscripts and the gloss which appears there is nonetheless quite interesting. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In Greek, πέλαγος; see Daniel Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1986), 147; and Raphael Patai, *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I think that the wording “He made himself angry at his son” indicates that the merchant pretended to be angry. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Here, I propose that the merchant is the character who articulates the verse in the end of the story. Traditional commentators of Kohelet Rabbah, however, understood these as the words of the proconsul, who judged according to the verse of Ecclesiastes. I have certain doubts that the narrator would attribute to the Roman high official, pagan or Christian, the ability to judge by interpreting the verses from the Bible; nonetheless, the suggestion is not completely implausible. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. By artificiality, I mean that this whole paragraph interprets Ecclesiastes 3:2–8, which is the famous “song of times.” Every verse in it is built as a collision between two opposed times, such as “a time to keep” and “a time to throw away.” In Kohelet Rabbah the midrashist interprets the first “time” and then the second (opposed) “time,” couple by couple. In the first half of the commentary, every first “time” is interpreted as a time that belongs to a period of peace, and the second “time” as belonging to a period of war. After our story, a tradition about peace and war is also appended, supported by scriptural examples. Only our story, inserted in between, is built on the second “time” of the verse Ecclesiastes 3:6 (“a time to throw away”). It does not hint to a “time to keep,” and does not belong to the theme of peace versus war. All these are clear features of an insertion made by the editor of Kohelet Rabbah. The story, then, is weakly connected to the verse, because it is based only on half of it. The end of the story is not convincing, because it is hard to hear in this verse any basis for a juridical decision. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On the Christian appropriation of the topos of a sea voyage and its comparison to the pagan one, see K. Backhaus, *Religion als Reise*, *http://www.christ-in-der-gegenwart.de/aktuell/extras/images/spacer.gif*Intertextuelle Lektüren in Antike und Christentum (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Regarding the comparison of rabbinic and Christian topos, see Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer, "Sea Voyage Tales in Conversation with the Jonah Story: Intertextuality and the Art of Narrative Bricolage," *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing* 20, no. 2 (2019): 39–57. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Saul Lieberman, "Six Words from Koheleth Rabba" [in Hebrew], in *Essays in Jewish History and Philology: Gedaliahu Allon Memorial Volume*, ed. Menahem Dorman et al. (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uḥad, 1970), 227–30; reprinted in David Rosenthal, (ed., *Studies in Palestinian Talmudic Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 498–99, to which I refer later. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 499–500. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Up to this point, Lieberman restricts himself to clarifying ambiguous words. Here, however, he proposes to correct the seemingly certain reading אנטיפוטא derived from the Greek ανθύπατος (proconsul) to another Greek-Aramaic term, דיוקטא from διώκτης, meaning “prosecutor,” arguing from logic that in such a trivial case the merchant would have appealed first to the prosecutor and not directly to the proconsul. This interesting suggestion is unnecessary, though—in folk narrative, and in this story as such, it is not necessary to follow subtle legal niceties. Regarding these terms, see Daniel Sperber, *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1984), 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See chap. 203 (3093A-C Migne). All quotations are from Wortley’s translation, *Spiritual Meadow*, 182, with some minor corrections. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Per Wortley: “servants.” But probably it means “sons,” as it is evident from the end of the story, which is about the children. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. The text uses the word παῖς throughout. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. See John Duffy and Gary Vikan, “A Small Box in John Moschus,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 24, no. 1 (1983): 96; and see R. Browning, "The Language of Byzantine Literature," in *The “Past” in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, peros (Melibu: Undena Publications, 1978), 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. L The Latin translation printed in Migne is the work of the fifteenth-century humanist Ambrogio Traversari. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
27. That is, a diminutive of ό βΐκος (jar, cask). Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961–68), s.v. “ζικίον,” evidently accepts this suggestion, listing the one occurrence as an "error for βικίον, vessel, box." [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
28. Duffy and Vican, “A Small Box,” l94. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
29. Ibid., 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
30. Jeffrey Featherstone and Cyril Mango, “Life of St. Matrona of Perge,” in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks , 1996), 56, found in the Vita of St. Matrona of Perge the line “that the servant Kallopodios had broken into the back side of the money chest (μουζικίον). He explained it as another usage of this rare word ‘also used by John Moschos (PG 87.3:2936 and 3093 [where a μου ζικία should be emended to μουζικία). The word (ζικία) was discussed by J. Duffy and G. Vikan, who were unaware of our text. It can now be said that a μουζικίον was specifically a strongbox for keeping valuables and that it could be, as here, of some size. It was not a pyxis.” Is this all one quote from Featherstone and Mango? There’s a single quotation mark above – is this misplaced, or are they quoting something else? See their footnote n. 104. I am thankful to Hillel Newman, who referred me to this work. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
31. It is difficult to determine how this occurred. It is likely that a simple change in the sequence of the two syllables occurred phonetically, but the possibility of graphical metamorphosis (as, for example, ביקיה-כיביה-קיביא-קובין (cannot be ruled out. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
32. One of the readers of this paper made an interesting suggestion that the story may have originated as part of a “clever merchant” prototype who saves both his life and eventually his money. In this view, PS “Christianized” this hypothetical prototype with the phrase “money is of no ultimate value after death” while the rabbinic storyteller kept the money in accordance with the same. As I have not found a story about a wise merchant in which all the elements in the rabbinic and Christian story were represented, I think that we should confine ourselves to comparing existing stories instead of presuming a hypothetical prototype. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
33. Without doubting the popularity of these categories and definitions for the reader of academic articles, for the sake of simplicity, I refer here to the well-known article by Dan Ben-Amos, “Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context,” *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 3–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
34. Recent research has drawn attention to the possibility of actual or indirect links between Babylonian Jewry of the talmudic period and contemporaneous Syriac Christianity, since the geographical and cultural affinity, e.g., the shared Aramaic (Syriac) language, strongly increases the likelihood of such links. Yet, it seems prudent to refrain from setting the axis line of this discussion on such complex phenomena by proposing a monastic influence on Judaism (see, for example, the work of Bar-Asher Siegal, cited above), or vice versa, by suggesting a Jewish influence on the Christian authors. See, for example, Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), ], 150–95; Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition* (Lund: Gleerup, 1978); Sebastian Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 212–32; Burton L. Visotzky, "Three Syriac Cruxes," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (1991): 167–75; Günter Stemberger, "Contacts between Christian and Jewish Exegesis in the Roman Empire," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, part 11, A*ntiquity*, ed. agne et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 583–85; Naomi Koltun-Fromm, “A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996): 45–63; Koltun-Fromm, "Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of Jewish-Christian Polemic," in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretations*, ed. udithucas(Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 57–72; Serge Ruzer and Aryeh Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies: Theology and Hermeneutics in Early Syriac Literatur*e (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 30–31, 43–48, 50, 56–59, 97–107; Elena Narinskaya, *Ephrem, a “Jewish Sage”: A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); Yifat Monnickendam, “Halakhic Issues in the Writings of the Syriac Church Fathers Ephrem and Aphrahat” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2011). For discussion of the existing appraisals of these links (from actual influence all the way to the Zeitgeist), see Adam Becker, "The Comparative Study of ‘Scholasticism’ in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians, " *AJS Review* 34, no. 1 (2010): 91–113. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
35. A common culture, however, still does not indicate the commonality of the ways. The traditional perception that the “parting of the ways” occurred during an extended period is widely accepted. For the description of an ongoing interchange between Jews and Christians see James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1961), 113–19, and also his “Rome, Pagan and Christian,” in *Judaism and Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Contact of Pharisaism with Other Cultures*, ed. Herbert Loewe (1937; repr. New York: Ktav, 1969), 115–44. His view was rejected by the group of authors of the anthology compiled by Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), who seem to think that discussion between Jews and Christians in antiquity is evidence against a parting of the ways, and that the “old model” of the parting of the ways did not allow for ongoing contacts between Jews and Christians. Though Parkes was aware of such ongoing contacts, for him, these did not call into question the reality of the parting of the ways. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians; The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (1992; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999). For more nuanced approaches see Boyarin, *Border Lines*; Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Ways That Parted: Jews, Christians, and Jewish-Christians ca. 100–150 CE,” in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: The Interbellum 70‒132 CE*, ed. Joshua J. Schwartz and Peter J. Tomson (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 307–33 . See also a very thoughtful analysis of this area of research in the recently published review by Megan H. Williams, “No More Clever Titles: Observations on Some Recent Studies of Jewish-Christian Relations in the Roman World,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009): 37–55. I strongly agree with her proposition: “To consider at every moment not a binary opposition, but … the shifting dynamics of a lopsided triangle defined by the interaction of cultural vectors of differing structure and unequal force,” p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
36. See above n. \*\*Please don’t include cross-references. Either repeat relevant material or delete the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
37. As every Galilean midrash, this book is full of elements of Byzantine Greek lore; however, in this case, some of them are unique, see for example in Marc Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggadah on Ecclesiastes: Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988): 137–65; Hirshman, " Protocol for Prayer: Origen, the Rabbis and Their Greco-Roman Milieu," in *Essays on Hebrew Literature in Honor of Avraham Holtz*, ed. Tseviyah Ben-Yosef Ginor (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2003), 3–14; Hirshman, “The *Kairos* of a Sage,” in *Studies in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature in Memory of Tirzah Lifshitz*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher, Aryeh Edrei, Joshua Levinson, Berachyahu Liftshitz (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2005), 127–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
38. For the synoptic edition that served to prepare the critical editions of this important work, see <http://www.schechter.ac.il/.upload/Midrash/kohelet%20raba/parasha11.pdf>. On this story as the representative of the certain *oikotype* of folklore storytelling, see Dov Noy, “Jewish Versions of the Animal Languages Folktale (AT 670)—A Typological-Structural Study,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 194–97. Please note whether this is your own translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
39. See Hirshman, “Greek Fathers and the Aggadah on Ecclesiastes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
40. See above n. 30 please don’t include cross-references. and recently Galit Hasan-Rokem, “Had Rabbis Been Aware of the Concept of Folklore?” [in Hebrew], in *Higayon L′Yona, New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyut, in Honor of Professor Yonah Fraenkel*, ed. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007), 199–229. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
41. See Yonah Fraenkel, *Studies in the Spiritual World of the Aggadic Narrative* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uḥad, 1981), 16–18. The story is also discussed in Fraenkel “Chiasmus in Talmudic-Aggadic Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 184–85; compare the similar conclusions of Norman J. Cohen, “Structural Analysis of a Talmudic Story: Joseph-Who-Honors-the-Sabbath,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1982): 161–77. Fraenkel expounds this story at length, pointing out the underlying tension between the determinism of the astrologers at the outset, and the reward for Joseph at the conclusion. Joseph lives in a deterministic universe, but he is indifferent to fate—even ignorant of it—making his choices freely and therefore truly entitled to the reward he receives. Hillel Newman’s approach to this tale takes a different direction. Notably, the story has not escaped the attention of folklorists, who look at it, of course, as a folktale. See Haim Schwarzbaum, *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 269–70; Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Pres, 1999), 124–25. However, as rightly pointed out by Newman, they have not compared it to what is probably the closest parallel to it in provenance, both chronologically and geographically, namely, PS. All these attempts of folklorists were preceded by a neglected book by Sholem-Zisl Beylin, titled *Wandering or International Sagas and Legends of Ancient Rabbinical Literature* [in Russian](Irkutsk, 1907), 351. For more on Beylin, who unfortunately was unrecognised by contemporary scholars, see <http://yleksikon.blogspot.de/2015/01/sholem-zisl-beylin.html>. He compared the rabbinic stories about the precious stone in the fish stomach with the above-mentioned Christian story; however, he knows its late version from the Greek-Slavic medieval work *Prologue* and not from PS, see there. The story was recently discussed briefly by Richard Kalmin, see *Migrating Tales: The Talmud’s Narratives and Their Historical Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 189–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
42. The English translation is according to Newman, “Closing the Circle,” 105–35, with minor changes. The original text is according to the editio princips. I do not deal here with the minor changes between the textual versions, due to their insignificance. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
43. See Newman, “Closing the Circle,” 105–35. In this article, Newman argues against Fraenkel’s famous thesis about the “closure” of the talmudic story. See Yonah Fraenkel, *Aggadic Narrative— the Unity of Content and Form* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: ʿAm ʿOved, 2001). See also: *Studies in the Spiritual World* ; *The Ways of the Midrash and the Aggadah* [in Hebrew] (Givatayim: Dvir, 1991), 235–85; *Midrash and Aggadah* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1996), 329–97. See, as well, his “Chiasmus in Talmudic-Aggadic Narrative,” 183–97. The scholarly discussion between Newman and Fraenkel is beyond the scope of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
44. PS, c. 185 (PG 87:3057-3061). Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, 155–58. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
45. See Newman, “Closing the Circle,” 125. See also Fraenkel, “Chiasmus,” 196n5. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
46. Chadwick has speculated, without being aware of the Jewish story that was not in the Bavli, nor in Kohelet Rabbah, that the Christian story is an adaptation of a Persian folk tale. See Chadwick, "John Moschus,“ 54 (following Ilana Opelt, “Der Edelstein im Bauch des Fisches,” in *Mullus: Festschrift fur Theodor Klauser*, ed. Alfred Stuiber and Alfred Hermann [Münster: Aschendorff, 1964], 268–72): “The location of the storyteller at Samos makes one wonder if Mary had heard echoes of Herodotus' story of Polycrates of Samos throwing his ring into the sea, only to find it in the fish on his dinner-table some days later. On the other hand, the location of the story in Nisibis points to a Persian tale; and a very close parallel in the Thousand and One Nights (no. 946) was acutely noted by Ilona Opelt in 1964 (Mullus, *Festschrift fur Theodor Klauser*, p. 268). However, this seems a bit doubtful. A Thousand and One Nights is a relatively late source and Nisbis, though a part of Persian Empire in that period, has a long history as a Greco-Roman polis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
47. This is probably a picaresque story, given that the badly mannered hero married a wise, though cunning, woman and received a large reward for it. The protagonist, who is a person of good lineage, married a daughter of an artisan. His father-in-law might have made a living producing wreathes or crowns. The latter seems to me to be more plausible here. Regarding the meanings of כלילא see Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 582. As the daughter of a crown-maker, she is well aware of what to do with precious stones and how to get a good price for the product. Guided by her advice he could get a quite significant reward for the stone, and even defeat his father in the competition for righteousness, without, however, any religious motivation in his dedication to the Temple treasury. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
48. See ed. Theodor-Albeck, 91–92. Please use the following format in citing Bereshit Rabbah, including all elements: Bereshit Rabbah, *Va-yer'a*, par. 48:6, to Genesis 18:1 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 2:480). Also note whether this is your translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
49. In only two manuscript versions does an addition appear with the miraculous motif. It is quite certain, however, that this addition was made in the process of transmission by a copyist who knew the Babylonian version of the story. This was already observed by Newman, “Closing the Circle,” 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
50. Ed. Ish-Shalom (Friedmann), 119a–b. Please include as full a citation as possible – see the note regarding Bereshit Rabbah. See also the new edition *Pesiqta Rabbati – A Synoptic Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati* *Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, ed. Rivka Ulmer (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 574–75. This text is from the lost midrash on the Ten Commandments. On the identification of these midrash fragments in Pesikta Rabbati, see Binyamin Elizur, “Pesikta Rabbati: Introductory Chapters” [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2000), 45. For the text under discussion, see Sh. Efrati, “Pesiqta of the Ten Commandments and Pesiqta of Matan Torah: Text, Redaction and Tradition Analysis” ….(forthcoming – I am thankful to SE for sharing with me the draft of his dissertation has this dissertation been submitted? If yes, please provide university and year, as well as full first name). See also the English translation of William Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 2 vols. ( New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 484–85. The translation above is based on the latter, with some minor changes. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
51. See Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 484, and see Efrati, “Pesiqta of the Ten Commandments.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
52. In the current discussion, I leave aside the many differences between the versions of Bereshit Rabbah and PR; these have been discussed in great detail by Efrati. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
53. However, in eastern medieval midrash anthologies, the Midrash Ha-gadol and Sefer Maʿasiyot, these sentences appear with some Aramaic words, but Efrati demonstrated that these are additions taken from another location in Pesikta Rabbati; see Efrati there. On this works see Reuven Kiperwasser, “Midrash ha-Gadol and the Exempla of the Rabbis (Sefer Ma'asiyot) and Midrashic Works on Ecclesiastes: A Comparative Approach” [in Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 75 (2006): 409–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
54. Polycrates of Samos in Herodotus, *Histories* 3.42. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
55. Its date is uncertain, but Kālidāsa is often placed in the period between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
56. The legend that Asmodeus once obtained possession of the ring of Solomon and threw it into the sea, and that Solomon was thus deprived of his power until he discovered the ring inside a fish (See Adolf Jellinek, *Beit Hamidrash* [Leipzig: F. Nies, 1853–77], 2:86–87), also has an Arabic parallel. This story is first documented in the book of Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari; see Max Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden: Brill, 1893), 251–52, 271–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
57. The motif of “treasure in the belly of a fish” resembles another motif, of “a coin in the mouth of a fish,” which appears in the New Testament, in Matthew 17:24–27; some of my listeners assumed that maybe it could have implications for the background of the PS story and perhaps even also of the rabbinic “fish” stories. However, the story in Matthew differs from stories of above-mentioned type, not only because the find is inside the bowels of the fish rather than in its mouth, but because in the stories of “a treasure in the belly,” the find is usually a reward for something that the hero did and a miraculous mobilization of divine providence. See William Horbury, “The Temple Tax,” in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernest Bammel and Charles F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 274nn51 and 53. In “the coin in the mouth” story, the sudden appearance of the right amount of money in the mouth of a fish is a confirmation of the magical abilities of the miracle-worker. This motif is relatively rare, and usually attested in medieval literature; see Richard J. Bauckham, "The Coin in the Fish's Mouth," in *Gospel Perspectives 6: The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 252n98, and Robert Eisler, *Orpheus the Fisher: Comparative Studies in Orphic and Early Christian Cult Symbolism* (London: J. M. Watkins, 1921), 100–102. Coins and other small objects could be occasionally found in fish’s mouths, which shifts the emphasis from the miraculous discovery to the wondrous ability of Jesus to predict the event. Bauckham cautiously suggested that the Matthew story was based on some real event of a discovery of a coin in a fish’s mouth, after which the resonance of the event was empowered by the folkloristic motif of the “treasure in the fish’s belly,” widespread in Jewish Galilee; see Bauckham, “The Coin,” 242–43. I think that we can agree that these two different types of fish stories are not identical; this paper is not about the possible relationships between them. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)