Lecture proposal:

Figurative Language in the Age of Persecution:

The Death of Rabbi Yehuda Ben-Baba.

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In my essay I will examine the martyrological tale of Rabbi Yehuda Ben-Baba[[1]](#footnote-0), who was brutally murdered by the Romans after the Bar-Kokhba revolt (136 AD), as a punishment for ordaining five of his disciples as Rabbis – an action that preserved the Jewish faith.

The tales of Ben-Baba deal with how his memory should be preserved as well as emphasize the reverse ratio between the visible reality and the religious utopic ideology. This discrepancy is manifested in the sophisticated use of figurative language which illustrates Ben-Baba. On the one hand, Ben-Baba describes himself after his future death as a "rock that cannot be moved" (meaning a huge, opaque and immovable object). On the other hand, Ben-Baba's body is described after his death from his pursuers' perspective (who stubbed him numerous times), as being "as full of holes as a net" (and as such mobile, transparent and full of holes).

The figurative language guides the reader into two ways of framing reality: the first frame is the visible reality in the world of action, that presents the reader with a clear physical image (Ben-Baba's body full of holes), an image that represents the narrative of the winners – the Romans. Opposite it, appears the image Ben-Baba presents of himself (a rock that cannot be moved).

Later, Ben-Baba's five disciples return to the place of his murder and nail five iron nails in a rock they find in the place of his death. That creates a physical, political, lingual and symbolical realization, combining the figurative language with the world of action.

In my essay I will examine the way Rabbinic literature makes language a monument, and a monument out of language; the way figurative language represent ideological struggles; and the way the Jewish religion faces a catastrophe and interprets it.

1. Ben-Baba's story appears twice in the Babylonian Talmud (Avoda Zara, 8, 72, and Sanhedrin 13, 72 – 14, 71) and has a certain continuation in the Jerusalem Talmud (Hagiga, 3, 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)