
Hasan-Rokem, Galit/Salamon, Hagar/Sabar, Shalom (eds.): *In honorem Tamar Alexander*. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem Studies in Folklore 30). Jerusalem: Magnes Press for The Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies, Faculty of Humanities, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016. xii [English], xx, 273 [Hebrew] pp.

Reviewed by **Dr. Ephraim Nissan**: London, England, U.K. E-Mail: ephraim.nissan@hotmail.co.uk

The *Festschrift* under review celebrates 35 years Tamar Alexander has been joint editor of *Jerusalem Studies in Folklore*, the other joint editor with her being, since foundation, Galit Hasan-Rokem. Tamar Alexander, born in Jerusalem, is especially known for her research into all genres of the folk literature and folklore of Judaeo-Spanish-speaking Sephardic Jews, yet it is not her only area of research. Prizes she was awarded include Spain's Orden del Mérito Civil.

The dedicatory preface and Alexander's publication list are followed with Dina Stein's article *Rabbinic Tales in the Israel Folklore Archives [IFA]: Holy men and Tricksters*. Of IFA's more than 24 000 tales, only 200

revolve round a rabbinic figure (of Late Antiquity). Half of these tales are hagiographic narratives about Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai (Rashbi) and Rabbi Meir, two characters who are associated with religious practices in the present, because their graves are pilgrimage sites.

These tales tell of miraculous interventions of the saintly figures in modern times. Other [late antique] rabbinic figures appear in the rest of the corpus, around 100 tales (vii)

mostly about Rabbi Akiva, tales about whom take place in his own days, and curiously, such that he “is presented as a trickster-like figure or is associated with trickster-like discourse” (vii). Dina Stein “associates these stories about Rabbi Akiva with a recurring tale-type – AT 759 (God’s Justice Vindicated) and offers a generative-poetic account for his prominence in the IFA rabbinic tales, based on Umberto Eco’s model of Cult Movies” (vii).

Quite importantly, Stein reflects that the subversive position of trickster tales, including those about rabbis from the distant past, may reflect the timing of the story-tellers’ performance for the benefit of the archival project in its early days, which was in the nascent years of the State of Israel. “By depicting the rabbis as subversive figures, the story-tellers have been expressing their own attitude toward the hegemonic center”, so their stories “may thus be seen as epitomizing the social-political drama of the archival project itself” (vii), in its own and the State of Israel’s early years.

The next paper is by Osnat Sharon, *Elephant, Leviathan and Nineveh the Great City: Sibbuḅ Rabbi Petachia and Midrash Yona, Printed Side by Side*. She is concerned with the fact that the *sibbuḅ* (“circuit”, “itinerary”) of Petachia was printed in Prague in 1595 together with an exegesis on the biblical book of Jonah. What those two texts in the same booklet share is marvels. “Juxtaposing these texts intensifies the *Sibbuḅ*’s theological framing and brings into focus the Midrash’s special dimension, inviting the reader to perceive it as a travelogue” (viii). I agree: in the early medieval homiletic exegesis digest *Pirḳe de-Rabbi Eliezer*,¹ Jonah saves from Leviathan the Fish inside whose belly he is, by telling Leviathan that he, Jonah, will partake with the other saintly people of Leviathan’s flesh at the Latter-Day banquet, and that he, Jonah, has come to see Leviathan in advance; as proof, Jonah (apparently through the fish’s eye, which is like a glass window) shows Leviathan that he is circumcised, and Leviathan flees far away.² “(Jonah) said to it (i. e. the fish). Behold, I have saved thee from the mouth of Leviathan,

¹ Friedlander, Gerald (ed., trans.): *Pirḳe de Rabbi Eliezer* (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna Translated and Annotated with Introduction and Indices. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., & New York: The Bloch Publishing Company 1916. The relevant passage is on 69–71. Osnat Sharon quotes the passage in Hebrew on 57.

² Not in the sense that other travellers would flee a train compartment they shared with an exhibitionist, but in the sense that Jonah has done like a policeman or public officer showing his badge or similar identification. Through the Covenant of Abraham, Jonah is really connected with the powers that be. Jewish readers, vulnerable in the real world, would have been delighted to find that in the wondrous world undersea, their identity is redoubtable.

show me what is in the sea and in the depths” (Friedlander’s translation). Jonah is then rewarded with a sighting tour underwater (just as Alexander the Great, lowered in a glass submersible, can see underwater).³

The itinerary of Petachia of Regensburg (Ratisbon), a source of wonder for its pre-modern readers, was translated from Hebrew into English by A. Benisch,⁴ whose 1856 *Prefatory Remarks* claimed:

Although a native of Ratisbon, which, at the time, from its numerous congregation distinguished for learning, deserved the epithet of Jewish Athens, yet Petachia, like his brother Yizchak,⁵ lived, according to Zunz, at Prague, from which city he set out on his travels, probably between 1170 and 1180, certainly prior to 1187, since he described the Holy Land as still in the possession of the Crusaders.

The elephant in the title of Osnat Sharon’s paper is the elephant Petachia saw in Nineveh (standing for Mossul), the instrument of carrying out death sentences: once so ordered, the elephant takes a man by means of its ‘lip’ (its trunk), and throws him to his death. Petachia also related that when warriors mount into the ‘constructed city’ (the ‘castle’: cf. Elephant and Castle, a square in London), the elephant ‘extends its lip’ and they climb on it as though it was a bridge. Sharon discusses several passages (descriptions or folktales) in Petachia’s itinerary because of the function of their wondrous features.

The Piropo as a Bridge between Cultures in Tetuan (Northern Morocco), by Nina Pinto-Abecassis,⁶ discusses a facet of the acculturation, under Spanish rule in Tetuan, of Judaeo-Spanish-speaking Jews. That facet is those Jews’ adoption of the Spanish cultural practice of the *piropo* (a witticism or striking remark, usually about body features of a passing woman, flattering or unflattering),⁷ something

3 Pardes, Ilana: Remapping Jonah’s Voyage: Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and Kitto’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*. In: *Comparative Literature* 57,2 (YEAR) 135–157, suggests on 136 that something that the New York-born Herman Melville wrote in his 1851 novel *Moby-Dick* reflected lore from the *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eliezer* account of Jonah inside the fish. She suggests that Melville was aware of the idea that Jonah saw the submarine environment through the window-like eyes of the fish.

4 Benisch, A. (ed., trans.): *Travels of Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon, who, in the latter end of the twelfth century, visited Poland, Russia, Little Tartary, the Crimea, Armenia, Assyria, Syria, the Holy Land, and Greece*. London: Trubner, 1856. Hebrew and English on facing pages. With long endnotes by A. Benisch and W.F. Ainsworth.

5 Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob ha-Lavan (White, Weiss?) was a Tosaphist, i. e. a glossator of the Babylonian Talmud.

6 The paper by Pinto-Abecassis (75–100) is supplemented (on 257–264) by Angy Cohen’s review of her Hebrew book *The Peacock, the Ironed Man and the Half-Woman: Nicknames, Humor and Folklore in the Day-to-Day Speech of Tetuan’s Haketia-Speaking Jews* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2014).

7 Pinto-Abecassis cites webpages dedicated to the *piropo* genre, and one such filename is quite eloquent indeed: “piropos-bonitos-para-conquistar-al-verdadero-amor”. To say the least, it is

that would not have happened in traditional Jewish society. Pinto-Abecasis examines *piropos* documented from Tetuan from the period of the Spanish protectorate (1912–1956) and the next decade, until the city was emptied of its Jews. She considers the poetics, metaphor and humour of those *piropos*, and their function in Tetuan’s urban space, where Christians, Muslim, and Jewish communities co-existed.

The title of the next paper, by Adam Ratzon, begins with an Egyptian proverb. *Al ma yisma’sh kbiru, ya alt tadbiru [Whoever would not listen to elders will not manage in life]: A Literary-Cultural Reading of the Proverbs and Personal Narratives of an Egyptian-Israeli Woman* discusses proverbs the author heard from his grandmother – born in Cairo in 1930, and who has been an Israeli nearly 60 years – as well as her life experience as she related it. Having surveyed Jewish life in mid-twentieth-century Cairo, Ratzon “analyzes twelve proverbs within their biographical and narrative contexts, while addressing three themes: nostalgia and glorification of the past; family relations; and fate, or what the elderly narrator calls *maktub*,⁸ referring mainly to family tragedies” (x).

Jacqueline Laznow is the author of the paper ‘*I didn’t know I wanted to be a rabbi, there was no name for what I wanted to be*’: *Life Stories of Women Rabbis Living in Israel*. “Israel’s non-Orthodox movements did not begin to ordain women until twenty years after the first woman rabbi was ordained in the United States” (x). “The Israeli cultural context, with its characteristic polyphony, constitutes a unique background for the formation of a new tradition that seeks to become institutionalised” (xi). In Laznow’s article, she set to “analyze and interpret Israeli women rabbis’ shared experiences as extracted from their life stories. Analyzing these stories using the narrative-package model revealed their commonalities with Vladimir Propp’s fairy tale narrative structure” (xi). As an aside I am making here: at (Orthodox) rabbinic courts, in family law cases, there exists now the lawyer role of *to’énet rabbanit*, literally “rabbinic arguer (f.)”. This only spans a specialised jurisprudential role of a rabbi, while not the congregational or pastoral role. In Judaism and Islam, unlike with Catholic priests, to what a rabbi or a qāḍi can celebrate no sacramental value accrues from the very fact of his being a rabbi or a qāḍi: in principle, a layman could officiate instead, even though custom discourages, say, a wedding being celebrated by other than a rabbi. [At the proof corrections stage, I am able to report that in May 2018, in London, for the first time a woman Orthodox rabbi was ordained.]

not a cultural practice that would be applauded by polite, educated members of the public present-day Britain, where ‘wolf whistles’ tend to be stereotypically ascribed to construction workers, expected to be coarse.

⁸ Literally, an Arabic past participle for ‘written’, here a deparicipial noun.

Laznow's paper is the last one under the rubric *Articles*, and is followed with the only item under the rubric *Towards a History of Folklore*, namely, Meir Nizri's *Israel⁹ and the Sabbath as Bride and Groom in Various Sabbath Hymns*. It is an article, but it is a detailed survey (an exemplifying rather than an exhaustive one) of occurrences of the motif, ending with a tabulation.¹⁰ Nizri identified eleven elements of analogy between a real-life wedding and the symbolic marriage between Israel the groom and Sabbath the bride, as found in such hymns. I would like to signal, in the Levantine Hebrew hymn for the Feast of Tabernacles, *Sukká ve-Luláv* ('A Booth and a Palm-Branch'), King David being likened to a beautiful bride: according to the sixth (and penultimate) stanza, "The myrtle alludes to the three Patriarchs" (i. e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), as there are three myrtle branches; "Moses and Aaron are [the two] boughs of willow. / David for the *etróg* is a beautiful bride" (this idiosyncratic metaphor, *kalla kelula*, stands for 'a perfect match' in the allegory). The tradition is involved, about the Seven Guests (*'ushpizin*), biblical characters, one for each of the seven evening banquets in the booth.

Four book reviews, mostly long ones, conclude the volume. Typos are rare. On p. xx, "in print" should be "in press". This *Festschrift* doubles as a journal issue, and its high quality is what we have come to expect of that journal, in part thanks to Tamar Alexander. Therefore, the Jubilarian has good reasons to be doubly satisfied.