

Rabbinic Discourse on Divination in the Babylonian Talmud

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Introduction

Divination is a label given, both in the ancient and modern world, to a group of human-made interpretive techniques through which a client would expect to obtain hidden knowledge about past, present or future events. Divination was common throughout the ancient world and references to it in ancient literature are plentiful; rabbinic literature is no exception. Types of divination which are mentioned in rabbinic literature, either in passing or which are attested in extended narratives, include oneiromancy (dream interpretation), astrology (the interpretation of the celestial and heavenly bodies), belomancy (divination by arrows), ornithomancy (the interpretation of the flight and cries of birds), augury (divination based on the behavior of animals), lecanomancy (oil divination based on the patterns oil formed when put in water), necromancy (divination through consultation of the dead), sortilege (the drawing of lots), bibliomancy (divination based on the interpretation of biblical verses), and cledonomancy (divination based on chance utterances or events including the *bat kol*).

Divination assumes that one can receive omens or guidance from a divinity or other supernatural being through various means. It is often employed to legitimate certain courses of action or to solve a particular problem. Divination does not necessarily solve a given problem directly; rather, it can be a way of redirecting a given problem from the

realm of the gods, the past, or the future into the present everyday world where it can be better dealt with.¹ In so far as it was used to legitimate certain courses of action in the ancient world, it gives the modern reader information concerning what situations in a given society required legitimating and what sort of societal and personal stresses were greatest for a person in that society.²

This dissertation will address the rabbis' discourse on the various manifestations of four of the forms of divination which occur in the Bavli: oneiromancy, bibliomancy, cledonancy and necromancy. It will deal primarily with the rabbis' discourse on divination in the Bavli: how divination is legislated; how it is depicted in *aggadah*; how this discourse is involved in the construction of their identity and authority as rabbis; and how this discourse informs us about the issue much pre-occupying current scholarship of the extent to which Babylonia and the Eastern Roman Empire were part of a shared cultural continuum. While it is impossible to say that rabbinic literature portrays the rabbis as having a singular view of divination, due to the fact that it is composed of the often contradictory sayings of many individuals over several centuries and was composed in different geographical regions, one can identify certain trends in the depiction of these practices.

Prior Scholarship

While the references to divination in rabbinic literature are plentiful, the scholarly attention to this topic, with the exception of dreams, has been sparse at best.³ Even the

¹ Johnston, "Divining Divination," 22.

² Johnston, "Divining Divination," 23.

³ Since most works on divination in rabbinic literature have been topical, a more extensive summary of the current research on these topics will be included with each dissertation chapter. There is also a significant

topic of dreams, on which numerous articles and books have been written, has not been fully addressed. Additionally, works have usually only focused on one type of divination (or a limited treatment thereof) and to date there is no single work which has attempted a comprehensive survey of all the references to divination in rabbinic literature. Several of the types of divination that this dissertation will address, including necromancy, bibliomancy, and cledonancy, have either not previously been addressed in scholarly literature or less than a handful of works (mainly articles and book chapters) have even mentioned these topics. Despite the lack of a comprehensive study of divination in rabbinic literature, the current scholarly consensus is that rabbinic literature shows an ambivalent attitude towards these practices.⁴ This dissertation will show that this is not in fact the case and by doing so, it will further enhance our understanding of these previously neglected forms of divination.

The lack of scholarly interest in ancient Jewish divination is not unique. In general, the study of divination in the ancient world has lagged behind interest in religion and magic. One reason for this is that over the past century many scholars have held the mistaken notion that there is a dichotomy between religion and magic, either defining magic as distinct from religion or defining magic and religion as two ends to a continuum.⁵ The fact that different aspects of divination appear to belong to both the

amount of scholarly literature on the topic of Jewish astrology; however, that topic is beyond the scope of the current study.

⁴ See for example Swartz, "Divination," 157-59.

⁵ This view is based on anthropological works such as Tylor, *Primitive Culture*; Frazer, *New Golden Bough*; Malinowski, *Magic*. For an extended discussion of scholarship propagating this distinction see Styers, *Making Magic*. In contrast to this method, many scholars have sought other ways to define magic in the ancient world. See, for example, Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, who sought an *emic* definition for magic by noting how the various Greek and Latin terminology related to magical practices changes meaning over time. Alternatively, H. S. Versnel, also focusing on the Greco-Roman world, challenges the notion that a clear-cut distinction should be made between the categories "magic" and "religion" and instead proposes a classification system without clear-cut borders noting that since both categories have

category of magic and that of religion results in divination being placed at either end of the continuum (but generally closer to the side of magic), which in turn has resulted in its neglect among scholars.⁶ Another reason for scholarly neglect is that there has been a lack of universally applicable anthropological theories on divination since the majority of anthropological literature from the early and mid-twentieth century either consisted of collections of information rather than analysis or focused on the specifics of particular societies.⁷ A further reason for its scholarly neglect is that many scholars viewed divination and magic as “superstition” instead of legitimate religious practices and thus unworthy of exploration.⁸

There has been one scholarly attempt to address trends in the rabbis’ treatment of divination by Yuval Harari. However, he both generalized across rabbinic literature and attempted to categorize the rabbis’ treatment of various forms of divination according to Greco-Roman categories. More specifically, he argued that the rabbis treat divination in a manner similar to Cicero’s categorization in *de Divinatione*. Cicero, in *de Divinatione*, makes a distinction between *naturalis divinatio* (I, 34-71) and *artificiosa divinatio* (I, 11-

recourse to supernatural elements it is impossible to completely delineate the two. He suggests a definition based on family resemblances, where objects in the same category share some, but not necessarily all, of a collection of “common sense” features (“Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” 186-87). Gideon Bohak, focusing on Jewish literature, argues that it is impossible to uncover an *emic* definition for magic in ancient Jewish literature since it is dependent on historic context, though it is possible to extract how the rabbis defined magic. Rather, in his work he uses an *etic* definition of magic and focuses on magical texts and artifacts rather than practices (*Ancient Jewish Magic*, 3-4).

⁶ When scholars have constructed this type of continuum, exactly which aspects of divination have belonged to each category has depended on the culture. For example, certain divinatory practices which were admired for their rationality, such as the augurs at Rome, had been incorporated into Greek and Roman institutions. However, the expectation of the revelation of hidden knowledge and the fact that divinatory practices were not externally verifiable could be considered irrational aspects of divination. See Johnston, “Divining Divination,” 6-8.

⁷ See Halliday, *Greek Divination* for an example of a collection of information on divination with little analysis. See Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft*, for an anthropological study focused on the specifics of a particular society.

⁸ For a summary of scholars in the history of the study of magic who have held this notion see Styers, *Making Magic*.

33). *Artificiosa divinatio* are methods which are dependent upon conjecture or events which were already observed and recorded. These would include methods such as extispicy (divining by means of entrails), augury, dream interpretation, and other omens or signs. *Naturalis divinatio* would be those methods which occur on account of one's own reasoning. Harari argues that in the Hellenistic world and in rabbinic literature, methods of divination are classified into two groups, inductive divination and intuitive divination. Inductive divination is divination according to signals and signs and would include astrology and dreams. Intuitive divination is divination by special psychic powers and would include those who by their nature were agents of secret knowledge: sages, children and fools, necromancers and those who consult demons and angels.⁹ Thus, his category of inductive divination coheres with Cicero's *artificiosa divinatio* and intuitive divination with *naturalis divinatio*. While the rabbis do address these different methods of divination, there is no place in the Bavli where the rabbis make this particular distinction either in terms of categories or in their treatment of these practices.

The Bavli's Discourse on Divination

This dissertation focuses on the discourse on divination in the Bavli and seeks to determine how the rabbis in that corpus treat divination. It further seeks to determine how this discourse informs us about both rabbinic constructions of power and authority and the connections between their discourse on divination and the culture of Babylonia and the Eastern Roman Empire. This is done without the imposition of Hellenistic models onto their ideas; however, this dissertation does relate the rabbis discourse on divination to both "biblical precedents" and other "antecedents" in earlier Jewish literature.

⁹ Harari, *Early Jewish Magic*, 313-14; "Opening the Heart," 303-5.

By the time of the rabbis, the Hebrew Bible had become a closed, authoritative corpus of texts. The rabbis would not only have been aware of how the Hebrew Bible treats various forms of divination, but they would have considered material from the Hebrew Bible to be authoritative precedents to their own ideas. Material from Jewish writings outside of the Hebrew Bible, however, would not have held the same authority for the rabbis. Due to the lack of authority of these other texts, while certain types of divination under discussion may have had Jewish antecedents, but not biblical precedents, we cannot be certain whether or not the rabbis were influenced by them.

This dissertation argues that the legislation on these forms of divination in the Bavli follows biblical precedent when it exists. So, practices permitted in the Hebrew Bible continue to be permitted and those that are prohibited remain prohibited. When there is no biblical precedent, the practice is generally treated as though it is permitted. However, the way these forms of divination are depicted in *aggadah* does not cohere with the manner in which they are legislated nor with how they are depicted in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, while the Hebrew Bible has both positive and negative depictions of permitted forms of divination but only negative depictions of prohibited forms of divination, at times in the Bavli prohibited practices are depicted positively and permitted practices are depicted negatively. Whether or not these practices are permitted or prohibited and depicted positively or negatively, the efficacy of these forms of divination is never entirely discounted in the Bavli.

Two of the methods of divination under consideration, namely oneiromancy and necromancy, are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, while bibliomancy and cledonancy are not. Oneiromancy is an accepted method of divination in the Hebrew Bible while

necromancy is explicitly prohibited as a practice of non-Israelites. This dissertation will argue that the rabbis continue to explicitly prohibit necromancy which is prohibited in the Hebrew Bible and permit oneiromancy which is permitted in the Hebrew Bible. They also permit bibliomancy and cledonancy which have no biblical precedent. Furthermore, this dissertation will address the distinction the rabbis make between the categories נחש “divination” and סימן “sign.” While the category נחש is biblically prohibited, the Hebrew Bible does not mention the category סימן. It will be argued that in the Bavli, the rabbis correlate the category נחש with prohibited forms of divination and סימן with permitted forms, most explicitly so with those methods of divination which also do not have a biblical precedent.

The Hebrew Bible tends to depict permitted forms of divination positively in conjunction with the Israelite prophets and patriarchs, but negatively when performed by false prophets, and always depicts prohibited forms of divination negatively. Whether or not the practice is permitted or prohibited in the Bavli, the rabbis tend to positively (or at least neutrally) depict these forms of divination when they are performed by a rabbi who is not functioning as a professional diviner. The rabbis, however, tend to negatively depict these forms of divination when they are either performed by a professional diviner or by a non-rabbi. Thus, the way that these various forms of divination are depicted, regardless of whether or not they are permitted or prohibited, serves to define one as an insider or an outsider vis-à-vis the rabbis.

While the rabbis’ legislation on divination differs from the manner in which it is depicted, both ultimately serve as a manner through which the rabbis constructed themselves as the leading authorities who continued to have a connection to the heavenly

realm. By depicting the practice of divination in a positive manner only among the rabbis, they delegitimize non-rabbinic diviners. In addition, the rabbis often transformed their practice of divination into methods of study based on scripture and thus analogous to the Oral Torah. By depicting the practice of divination by non-rabbis negatively while rabbinizing their own practice of divination, the rabbis depict the superiority of rabbinic knowledge, especially that of esoteric knowledge. In this way, the rabbis were consolidating divine knowledge as their own provenance, which they valorized and viewed as sources of their power and authority. The rabbis, however, were not unique in the valorization of knowledge and the concept of power emanating from divine or esoteric knowledge in Sasanian Babylonia.

While Jews had been a religious minority in Babylonia for a long period of time, starting in the third century CE we see the rise of other religious minorities in predominantly Zoroastrian Persia. In the mid-3rd century CE during the reign of Shapur I, many subjects from the Eastern Roman Empire were deported into Mesopotamia, Syria and Persia.¹⁰ This deportation hastened the transmission of material from Palestine to Babylonia and we see in the discourse on divination in the Bavli that at times it interacts with Palestinian material, Jewish or otherwise. Not only do the rabbis display their knowledge of many methods of divination which were prevalent throughout the ancient world, but at times they interact directly with Palestinian divinatory methods they do not advocate and at other times themes and motifs from Greco-Roman literature can be found in narratives featuring rabbis dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. The deportation by Shapur I also brought many Christians from the Eastern provinces and was a contributing factor in the conversion of Armenia and Georgia to Christianity in the early 4th century

¹⁰ Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 4-8; Kettenhofen, "Deportations," 298-99.

CE. Not only was Shapur I's reign witness to a growing Christian population, but also to the rise of Manichaeism. Due to the protection of Mani by Shapur I, during this period, Manichaeism spread not only throughout the Sasanian Empire, but also into the Roman Empire.

The valorization of esoteric knowledge as a source of religious power was prevalent amongst these religions.¹¹ Manichaeism was a universal gnostic religion which, like all gnostic movements, held that knowledge leads to salvation. However, for the Manichaeans, unlike the other traditions, this knowledge did not revolve around scripture. Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism each believed in something hidden from our lives by a barrier akin to a curtain that was capable of being lifted from time-to-time by certain specially endowed individuals.¹² The rabbinic valorization of study was connected with rabbinic study houses or academies, which served as a source of authority and power in the Babylonian rabbinic community.¹³ Likewise, Adam Becker has shown a similar development in Eastern-Syriac Christianity consisting of the establishment of formal "schools" by the late fifth and early sixth centuries, most notably the school in Nisibis.¹⁴ Additionally, the authority and influence of the Persian magi stemmed from the fact that they possessed esoteric knowledge which was redacted into the Avesta during the Talmudic period.¹⁵ The Pahlavi books use the term *rāz* "secret" in an esoteric sense,

¹¹ See Levinson, "Enchanting Rabbis," 90-92 for a discussion of knowledge as a source of power in these cultures in relation to magic.

¹² Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 74.

¹³ See Rubenstein, "Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy," 55-68 and *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 16-38 who argues that this valorization of study is connected to the emergence of rabbinic academies in mid-fifth and sixth century CE Babylonia. Kalmin, "Rabbinic Traditions," 21-50; "Jewish Literature," 17-53 and *Jewish Babylonia*, 19-101; argues, however, that the Babylonian Amoraim valorize Torah study to a greater extent than Palestinian Amoraim without relegating it as a late phenomenon.

¹⁴ Becker, *Fear of God*, 30, 38-39 and 98-112. See also 77-97 for the establishment of the School of Nisibis and 41-76 for the less formalized "School of the Persians" as a precedent for the School of Nisibis.

¹⁵ Becker, *Fear of God*, 32-38; Stratton, "Imagining Power," 384-85 and *Naming the Witch*, 164.

referring to knowledge which is held not to be divulged to the general public.¹⁶ Similar concepts exist in Judaism in that certain topics should not be discussed outside of rabbinic circles or even within them if one is not properly trained.¹⁷

While the Zoroastrians did not have knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and the Manichaeans would have rejected it as an evil teaching, the Eastern-Syriac Christians would have had knowledge of it and their own interpretive techniques. While the Zoroastrians and the Jews did not adhere to the same scripture, they had a similar interpretive framework. The *zand* was a technique of interpreting Zoroastrian scriptures into the vernacular.¹⁸ Furthermore, the Zoroastrians held the notion that the only way to study the sacred texts, the Avesta and the *zand*, was through memorization and oral recitation, though a written text of the Avesta likely existed by the end of the Sasanian period.¹⁹ This is similar to the rabbinic study of Scripture, Mishnah and Talmud. However, studying the Avesta and the *zand* never became a major act of religious devotion in Zoroastrianism in the way that it was amongst the rabbis.²⁰ This was due to the fact that the dissemination of knowledge was seen by both the Zoroastrian priesthood and the court as potentially harmful.²¹

Thus, the rabbis were living as a religious minority in predominantly Zoroastrian Persia amongst other religious groups who also considered knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge, to be a source of religious power and some of whom also had

¹⁶ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 74-76.

¹⁷ For instance, certain esoteric topics such as the creation of the world were off limits. See for example *m. Hag. 2:1* which limits the study and discussion of the laws on incest (Lev 18), the story of creation (Gen 1-2), Ezekiel's vision of the chariot (Ezek 1-3) and the four matters (the questions: What is above? What is beneath? What was before time? And what will be hereafter?).

¹⁸ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 77-78.

¹⁹ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 116-17.

²⁰ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 79.

²¹ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 80.

knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures or utilized similar interpretive techniques as the rabbis did. Through the rabbis' discourse on divination in the Bavli we see one way that the Babylonian rabbis bounded off their knowledge and authority from the surrounding culture. They did this by negatively depicting the practice of divination by non-rabbis and professional diviners. Furthermore, they depicted their own use of divination in a positive manner and at times show that their interpretive and divinatory techniques are superior to those of non-rabbis. And finally, their divinatory techniques often were rabbinized in that they utilized a knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic interpretive techniques. Thus, the rabbis constructed themselves as the leading authorities with a continuing connection to the heavenly realm and they constructed divination in a manner such that it could only be properly utilized by one with rabbinic knowledge.

Methodology

Historically, scholars working on rabbinic literature have followed the view which considered rabbinic texts and attributions to rabbis to be reliable historical sources. Through a critical analysis of the text, these scholars would peel back the later redactional layers, which were often considered to be identifiable by content such as miraculous events and contradictions in the text, in order to find the "historical kernel," which would then be the focus of their studies. Where multiple versions of a given account existed, they considered the different versions to be reliable accounts of the same historical event. In the 1970s, this idea was challenged by Jacob Neusner. He argued that the different versions of a given story were irreconcilably contradictory and that no methodology could be applied to them in order to distinguish history from fiction. Through a structuralist approach to the texts, Neusner concluded that biographical

accounts in rabbinic texts were fictional stories created by late Babylonian editors for didactic and theological purposes.²² Neusner's theory, however, has been refuted. It is frequently possible to distinguish between the layers in a text.²³ Most scholars today, while they acknowledge that historical information can be obtained from rabbinic texts, they do not believe that it is possible to uncover the historical kernel or to do biography.

Like the majority of current scholarship on rabbinic literature, the methodology used in this dissertation to investigate the individual rabbinic texts adopts neither of the above approaches to the text and rather falls somewhere in the middle. This work is not concerned with uncovering the individual opinions of particular rabbis on divination nor does it assume that rabbinic accounts of divination reflect actual historical occasions. Rather, it focuses on the trends apparent in the depiction of divination in the Bavli. While the amount of discussion of various types of divination seems to allow for the possibility that some of the rabbis either practiced divination or knew (non-)rabbinic people who did, and their knowledge of various divinatory techniques which were utilized elsewhere in the ancient world is addressed to a limited extent, this work is not primarily concerned with discerning the actual rabbinic or non-rabbinic practices of divination from rabbinic literature.²⁴

Both literary analysis and source criticism are utilized in order to analyze the various texts containing divinatory material. Literary analysis focuses on how structure, wordplay, syntax, repetition, and other uses of language serve to create meaning in the text in a method akin to that employed by Jeffrey Rubenstein in *Talmudic Stories*. Source

²² Neusner, *Making the Classics*.

²³ See Kalmin, *Sage*, 2-3, 10-13; "Formation and Character," 844-47; Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction*, 4-5; Cohen, *Synoptic Problem*; Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, 10-16.

²⁴ It will also not be concerned with correlating the information from rabbinic literature with material evidence attesting to Jewish divinatory practices during late antiquity.

criticism, by which I mean discovering the different sources for a given text, the dating of those sources and the methods by which the text obtained its form, is employed when parallel and possibly antecedent sources exist for a particular narrative. When layers can be determined in a given text, I distinguish between the later anonymous editorial layer and the earlier attributed materials. At times this allows us to see distinctions between the views on divination in earlier material when compared with that of the anonymous authors. This shows that the Talmud's later editors retained information which did not necessarily cohere with their own viewpoints. The earlier attributed materials allows for determinations of the geographical and chronological provenance of the rabbis who are either quoted or depicted in the narrative. Concentrating on these markers facilitates the distinction between Palestinian and Babylonian traditions, as well as the possibility of dating traditions to a particular chronological period. I do acknowledge, however, that these markers are not always reliable. Rather, I am drawing distinctions based on larger trends which are made apparent by these markers. This in turn allows for the elucidation of the historical and social context(s) in which the rabbinic discourse on that form of divination should be situated.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter focuses on a different type of divination or several related types. Each chapter addresses the following issues to the extent to which they are applicable: (1) Biblical depictions and how the legislation and depiction of divination in the Bavli compares with them; (2) how the form of divination is legislated in the Bavli; (3) how the form of divination is depicted in *aggadah*; (4) how the legislation on and depiction of the form of divination compares; and (5) the efficacy of divination. However, with each form

of divination, the manner in which this plays out differs to some extent. Furthermore, while several forms of divination under discussion only have a single example of a non-rabbi performing that type of divination and thus at times we cannot say anything about trends with respect to individual forms of divination, when looking at these forms combined we can see that trends pertaining to rabbis versus non-rabbis exist in the discourse on divination in the Bavli. These trends show that overall, the depiction of divination in the Bavli does not cohere with legislation on it. Furthermore, the Bavli tends to positively depict rabbis performing divination when they are not acting as a professional diviner and tends to negatively depict non-rabbis and professional diviners who perform divination.

Chapter two focuses on the topic of oneiromancy. It predominantly focuses on the extended discourse on dreams in *b. Ber. 55a-57b* (the Bavli Dreambook) with the discussion of other passages when relevant. Dream interpretation has precedents in the Hebrew Bible. In both the Hebrew Bible and the Bavli, dream interpretation is permitted as an accepted form of divination. The Hebrew Bible tends to depict dream interpretation positively except when linked to false prophets. In the Bavli Dreambook, however, narratives which parody the Palestinian dream interpreter and those who consult them are juxtaposed with a particularly rabbinic method of dream interpretation. Instead of recourse to professional interpreters, the rabbis advocate that dreams need to be dispelled by the individual dreamer of any possible negative significance and that this should be accomplished by the individual, often by means of scriptural verses. By utilizing scriptural verses and midrashic exegetical techniques, the rabbis make dreams and dream interpretation analogous to the Written Torah and Oral Torah respectively, and

promulgate a method of dream interpretation of which they are the sole arbiters in their cultural context.

Chapter three focuses on the topic of the *bat kol*. The *bat kol* is a somewhat enigmatic term which either functions as a divine revelatory utterance or as a chance utterance in the Bavli. It will be argued that the efficacy of the *bat kol* (whether it is functioning as a divine revelatory utterance or a chance utterance) is only questioned in certain cases dealing with whether or not it can determine halakhah; however, in each case its efficacy is assumed by at least some rabbis. The fact that its efficacy in determining halakhah is questioned is due to the fact that since it is an alternative form of continuing revelation, it is in tension with the concept that the rabbis had full control of the Oral Torah. This chapter will further argue that when the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context, the rabbis depict it in a positive/neutral light except in the case where it is received by a non-rabbi.²⁵ In these instances, the rabbis mentioned in the passages consist of Palestinian Tannaim or Palestinian Amoraim dating to the 3rd or early 4th century CE couched within larger narratives involving Babylonian Amoraim dating to the 4th and early 5th centuries CE. This may be evidence for the Palestinian origin of this use of the *bat kol* and evidence for the manifestation of Palestinian materials in Babylonia from the 4th century CE on.

Chapter four will focus on the topics of bibliomancy, divination based on biblical verses, and cledonancy, divination based on chance utterances, methods of divination which do not have biblical precedents. This chapter will deal with three different methods of bibliomancy and two different methods of cledonancy (other than the *bat kol*). The three different methods of bibliomancy consist of opening a book to a random verse,

²⁵ The only instance in which the *bat kol* is received by a non-rabbi in a divinatory context is in *b. BB* 3b.

obtaining a verse from a child which is then interpreted, or interpreting a verse which randomly came to mind. The method of using a verse recited by a child takes one of two forms. Either a request is made for the child to recite the last verse that he learned in school, or a child happens to be overheard reciting a verse. The methods of cledonomanancy consist of interpreting the speech of a bird or the last words of a dying man. This chapter will argue that the rabbis always depict bibliomanancy and cledonomanancy positively and as efficacious and that they consider them to be within the category סימן and thus not part of the category נחש, which is biblically prohibited. While these methods of divination are generally depicted positively, the depiction of bibliomanancy is problematized when it involves a Palestinian figure rather than a Babylonian rabbi and cledonomanancy likewise when it is performed by a diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge. These forms of divination, however, are only depicted as having a negative outcome when they are performed by a figure who is not considered part of the category “rabbi.”

Chapter 5 will deal with the topics of necromancy, divination by means of the dead, and incubation, a ritual which is performed in order to coerce the dead to appear in a dream and provide hidden knowledge. This chapter will argue that while the rabbis generally do not question the efficacy of necromancy and incubation, these practices are prohibited based on biblical precedent and are legislated in a manner similar to magic. However, the rabbis tend to negatively depict these practices when they are performed by non-rabbis but, despite their being prohibited, they tend to depict them in a positive/neutral fashion when they are performed by rabbis. Furthermore, the Bavli tends

not to show non-rabbis as actually performing necromancy.²⁶ In other words, the conversation with the ghost is not depicted. Rabbis, however, are depicted as performing necromancy and the knowledge obtained by the consultation is related, often through direct discourse with the dead, though the praxis is not related in any detail.

²⁶ There is one exception to this and it will be argued that it reflects a Palestinian, rather than Babylonian, attitude.

CHAPTER II

Oneiromancy

Introduction

Dreams and the interpretation of dreams (oneiromancy) are found in a variety of Jewish sources, from the Bible to medieval dream manuals, including rabbinic literature. This chapter focuses predominantly on the most concentrated discussion of dreams and their interpretation in rabbinic literature, namely the Bavli Dreambook, *b. Ber. 55a-57b*, with a discussion of other passages when relevant. That dreams have some sort of potential meaning and that the fulfillment of a dream is dependent upon its interpretation is accepted in the Bavli in all but a few cases. This chapter will argue that in both the Hebrew Bible and the Bavli, dream interpretation is permitted as an accepted form of divination. However, the fact that it is permitted does not mean that dream interpretation is always depicted positively in either corpus. In the Hebrew Bible, dream interpretation is depicted positively except when it is linked to false prophets. The Bavli Dreambook, however, juxtaposes the negative depiction of professional dream interpretation, which it views as a Palestinian practice, with a particularly rabbinic method of dream interpretation which it advocates. Professional dream interpreters are discounted by means of stories which parody the Palestinian dream interpreter. Those who consult professional dream interpreters are also likewise parodied or otherwise marginalized. Instead of recourse to professional interpreters, the rabbis advocate that dreams need to

be dispelled by the individual dreamer of any possible negative significance and that this should be accomplished by the individual, often by means of scriptural verses. By doing this, the Babylonian rabbis, who are living among others who have differing interpretations of scripture and within a cultural context which venerates knowledge, transformed dream interpretation into a method of study based on scripture and thus analogous to the Oral Torah and they identified themselves as the sole arbiters of this scriptural remedy for dreams.

History of Scholarship

Scholarly attention to the topic of dreams in rabbinic literature has focused on a variety of aspects. One aspect of interest to scholars since the early 20th century has been the similarities between the interpretation of dreams in rabbinic literature and Greco-Roman sources, in particular with the dreambook of Artemidorus.²⁷ Another early (and relatively current) interest of scholars with respect to Rabbinic dream interpretation has been the relationship between rabbinic dream theory and Freud's psychoanalytic dream theory. This interest has taken one of two forms. Either, scholars have been interested in the similarities and differences between the rabbis' approaches to the interpretation of dreams and Freud's theories, or, they have attempted to psychoanalyze the rabbis (or at times they have done both).²⁸ Additional works have focused on one of the dreambooks,

²⁷ For the earliest discussion of the similarities between Artemidorus' *Onirocriticon* and the major dream compilations of the rabbis, y. *MS* 4:6; Lam. R. 1:1; and primarily *b. Ber.* 55a-57b, see Alexander, "Bavli Berakhot," 241-44 and "Quid Athenis et Hierosolymis," 117-19; Lewy, "Zu dem Traumbuche," 398-419. For a comparison of dream interpretation in Greco-Roman culture with that of Babylonian culture see Lorand, "Dream Interpretation."

²⁸ For similarities and differences in the rabbis' and Freud's interpretation of dreams, often focusing on the sexual content of dreams in *b. Ber.* 55a-57b, see Lauer, "Des Wesen des Traumes," 459-69; Bakan, *Sigmund Freud*, 257-68; Frieden, *Freud's Dream*; Haddad, *L'Enfant Illégitime*, 207-21. For a psychoanalysis of the conversation between R. Ishmael and the *min* in *b. Ber.* 56b see Cohen, "Über

by which I mean the extended discussions of dreams in *y. MS 4:6*;²⁹ *Lam. R. 1:1*;³⁰ and *b. Ber. 55a-57b*.³¹ However, the most pertinent works on dreams in rabbinic literature for the following discussion have been those which have focused on its connection with Midrash.

At its core, Midrash is an exegesis of biblical verses.³² Most often it is concerned with obvious problems in the text, such as definitions of words, irregular syntax, and gaps in the context of the text.³³ Following David Stern's definition:

A gap is a deliberately withheld piece of information in a narrative—(1) a missing link in a series of events; (2) an absent cause or motive; (3) a failure to offer satisfactory explanations for an occurrence in a story; (4) a contradiction in the text that challenges the audience's understanding of the narrative; (5) an unexplained departure from norms.³⁴

Many different types of midrashic techniques were used in order to fill in or explain, and in the process change the meaning of, these biblical gaps.³⁵ The fact that the exegete was concerned not with allegory, but rather with verses, allowed the collection of many different solutions to the same problem in a given text, even if these solutions contradicted one another; all were considered "adequate 'smoothings-over.'"³⁶

Traumdeutung," 117-21; Velikovsky, "Psychoanalytische Ahnungen," 66-69; Frieden, *Freud's Dream*, 85-86.

²⁹ See Hasan-Rokem, "Communication with the Dead"; Ulmer, "Semiotics."

³⁰ Hasan-Rokem, "Folkloristic Context," discusses the relationship between dream interpretation in *Lam. R.* and folklore, arguing that dream interpretation is similar to riddle stories.

³¹ See Fishbane, "Aspects of Jewish Magic," 32-33; Schoenfeld, "Madness and Prophecy"; Koet, "Sag lieber," 140-41; Fishbane, "Every Dream," 187; Alexander, "Bavli Berakhot"; Kalmin, "Dreams"; Zelletin, "Interpretation of Dreams" for discussions of various aspects of the Bavli Dreambook.

³² Kugel, "Two Introductions," 92.

³³ Kugel, "Two Introductions," 93.

³⁴ Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 74-75.

³⁵ For the use of the *mashal* as a means of filling in gaps in the biblical narrative see Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 74-82.

³⁶ Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 94.

Divinatory techniques, like midrashic exegesis, also rely on the use of semiotic gaps which allow for the interpretation of a given divinatory response in the context of the specific circumstances of the client.

The trend in scholarship focusing on connections between oneirocritica and Midrash began with Saul Liebermann, who discussed the similarities between the hermeneutic rules used in *aggadah*, such as symbols and allegories, paronomasia, gematria, *athbash*, *notarikon*, and those used in oneirocritica by the rabbis. He argued that the exegetical techniques of gematria and *notarikon* were in fact imported into the Midrash from the oneirocritica.³⁷ More recently, Philip Alexander, in his discussion of the Bavli Dreambook, argued that the rabbis saw a connection between the dream text and the Written Torah, on the one hand, and the oneirocritica and the Oral Torah, on the other hand, and that this could account for one of the enigmatic statements in the Dreambook, namely, that “all dreams follow the mouth” (כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה). He further argues on the basis of rabbinic theories regarding scripture that just as scripture allows for the possibility of multiple and potentially contradictory but equally valid interpretations by the rabbinic interpreter, the dream-text allows for the same when interpreted by the dream interpreter.³⁸ Also, Eric Alvstad has argued similarly, noting that just as the interpreter of scripture in a midrashic reading makes use of ambiguities in the text, such as redundant statements, contradictions, and narrative gaps, so does the interpreter of a dream text.³⁹

³⁷ Liebermann, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 70-78.

³⁸ Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 236-38.

³⁹ Alvstad, “Oneirocritics and Midrash,” 140-41.

Biblical Precedents

Oneiromancy is present in a variety of texts in the Hebrew Bible. There is no place where dream interpretation per se is explicitly legislated against and the attitude towards dreams and dream interpretation is positive when done by true prophets or the patriarchs. In fact, in Num 12:6-8, dreams are specifically mentioned as one of the avenues through which God speaks to prophets. In general, with a few exceptions, throughout the Hebrew Bible dreams are considered to be a legitimate avenue through which revelation occurs and Israelite prophets are depicted as superior dream interpreters.⁴⁰ There are, however, several instances in which dream interpretation is denounced when it is linked to false prophets pretending to be true prophets.⁴¹ This denunciation of dream interpretation performed by false prophets is an implicit understanding of its status as a legitimate form of revelation; hence, while this is a negative attitude towards dream interpretation in this particular context, it is not a negative attitude in general towards the practice.

A different attitude towards dream interpretation occurs in a few passages in the prophetic works and wisdom literature. Here, we see an attitude which considers dreams to be devoid of substance upon waking; they are a fleeting experience.⁴² This attitude may be connected with the idea that dream content is a product of the internal thoughts of the dreamer. This is most apparent in Isa 29:7-8 which includes statements about a

⁴⁰ Furthermore, dreams are one of the legitimate means of divination which Saul tries in 1 Sam 28 before his recourse to necromancy. There are numerous narrative accounts of dreams functioning as a form of revelation from God in the Hebrew Bible. Instances include Jacob's dreams in Gen 28 and 31 and Solomon's dream in 1 Kgs 3. For examples of Israelites functioning as superior dream interpreters see Joseph functioning as an interpreter of the chief cupbearer and chief baker and then Pharaoh's dreams in Gen 40-41 and Daniel both recalling and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Dan 2.

⁴¹ Deut 13:1-6 is a warning against prophets or those who divine by dreams who tell the Israelites to worship other gods. Instances also occur in the prophetic texts. For example, Jer 23:25; 27:9-10; 29:8-9.

⁴² We see this in Isa 29:7-8; Ps 73:20; Job 20:8.

hungry or thirsty person eating or drinking in their dream and then realizing upon waking that it was not real. Overall, however, the Hebrew Bible depicts dreams as a form of revelation when they are interpreted through the proper channels.

The Bavli Dreambook

While there are various references to dreams throughout rabbinic literature, there are also three “dreambooks,” extended narratives on the topic of dreams. The longest of these narratives is the Bavli Dreambook, *b. Ber.* 55a-57b. There are, however, two Palestinian antecedents, *Lam. R.* 1:1 and *y. MS* 4:6, which were reworked by the author of the Bavli Dreambook along with some material uniquely his own into an extended discussion of dreams with a purposeful structure.⁴³ Certain types of material which are relatively unique to the Bavli include methods for remedying dreams and interpretation by means of scriptural verses.

The Dreambook has a tripartite structure with each part uniquely contributing to its overall message. The first part contains general pronouncements about positive and negative dreams, what is possible regarding their interpretation, and several methods that enable one to obtain a good dream. The second part presents a series of episodes, in which rabbis function as dream interpreters for both rabbis and non-rabbis, which serve to provide examples which discount the role of the professional dream interpreter and those who consult them. The third part presents a series of *omina*, lists of objects or events seen in a dream and their meanings.⁴⁴

⁴³ Henceforth, the Bavli Dreambook will be referred to as the Dreambook except in instances where it is necessary to distinguish it from these Palestinian narratives.

⁴⁴ See Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 231-32. The tripartite structure is as follows: (1) 55a beginning with the statements of Rav Hisda concerning dreams; (2) 56a beginning with בר הדיא מפשר; (3) 56b beginning with אמר רבי חנינא הרואה באר בחלום and ends on 57b with בר מעפרא וחדללא. See also Koet, “Sag lieber,” 136.

While each part of the Dreambook has a separate emphasis, there are various connections between the sections. Both the first and the third section of the Dreambook focus on individualized methods of ensuring a positive dream. Furthermore, many of the *omina* from the third part of the Dreambook have connections with the dream content in the narratives from the second part. The following discussion will focus on and highlight these connections between the various parts of the Dreambook in order to show how these disparate sections work together to promote an overall attitude towards oneiromancy. It will be shown that when the emphases of these three sections of the Dreambook are combined, it is revealed that the message of the Dreambook as a whole is that the fulfillment of a dream is dependent upon its interpretation so dreams must be dispelled of potential negative significance and the Babylonian Amoraim advocate that this should be done individually, often through interpretation by means of scriptural verses, rather than by means of a professional dream interpreter.⁴⁵ This will be done through a discussion first of the multiplicity of attitudes towards dreams presented in the Dreambook followed by the methods advocated for dream interpretation in the first and third sections. This will be followed by a discussion of the manner in which the rabbis parody the professional dream interpreter in the middle of the Dreambook, focusing on the elements which have connections with material elsewhere in the Dreambook.

Alternatively, Avraham Weiss argues for a four-part structure: (1) 55a beginning with the statements of Rav Hisda concerning dreams; (2) 55b beginning with אמר רבי ביזנא בר זבדא; (3) 56b beginning with אמר רבי שלום; (4) 57b beginning with חנינא הרואה באר בחלום שלושה נכנסין לגוף (Weiss, *Al ha-Yetsirah ha-Sifrutit*, 266-69). See also Fishbane, "Every Dream," 184; Stemberger, "Traum," 11-14. See Kalmin, "Dreams," 73-77 for a chronological survey of the *omina* in the third part of the Dreambook.

⁴⁵ See Kalmin, "Dreams," 73.

Section One of the Dreambook

In the first part of the Dreambook, the rabbis deal with the inherent meaning of dreams, the origin and meaning of dream content, the dependence of a dream's meaning upon its interpretation and methods to make sure that a dream turns out well for the dreamer. It is in this section of the Dreambook that its author sets up the fact that a dream is dependent upon its interpretation, something which is then both confirmed and subverted in the narratives of dream interpretation in the second part of the Dreambook. Furthermore, this section when combined with the third section of the Dreambook serves to show the preferred individualized method(s) of dream interpretation advocated by the author, which are contrasted with the narratives of professional dream interpretation in the middle of the Dreambook.

Potential Meaning of Dreams

As in the Hebrew Bible, the Bavli contains a variety of attitudes towards both the potential meaning of dreams and dream interpretation. The concept that dreams have some sort of inherent meaning is what underlies oneiromancy and is also in part what fuels the rabbis' anxiety about the potential negative significance of dreams. The rabbis not only considered dream interpretation to be potentially troublesome, but dream content as well, especially when the content itself was negative. So, the rabbis' discussion of the potential meaning of dreams informs us not only of the differing attitudes towards their prognosticatory value, but also about the rabbis' anxiety over one having negative manifest dream content. As we will see later on, the rabbis deal with the issue of negative dream content both by linking the meaning of a dream to its interpretation as well as

through various individualized methods which remedy dreams of their negative significance.

That dreams have some sort of potential meaning is accepted in the Bavli in all but a few cases. In three accounts involving Tannaim, dreams are said not to have any import. In two of these accounts this statement is in the name of R. Meir⁴⁶ and in the other it is in the name of the rabbis.⁴⁷ Additionally, there is another instance in which the anonymous commentator, discussing a story involving Tannaim, states that the dream mentioned did not mean anything, but was just sent in order to appease the person.⁴⁸

In the Dreambook in particular, while it does discuss the efficacy of certain types of dreams, it does not at any point discount their efficacy in its entirety; however, statements questioning the potential meaning of certain types of dreams or the source of dream content both open and close this section of the Dreambook.⁴⁹ The Dreambook opens on *b. Ber. 55a* with a series of statements by Rav Hisda concerning the meaning of dreams. Rav Hisda's first statement, "any dream but not a fast," is a bit opaque. It is unclear whether he means a dream of one fasting or a dream which occurs while one is fasting. What can be determined from the context of this statement, however, is that he is questioning the prognosticatory value of this type of dream. This is apparent from the fact that Rav Hisda's subsequent statements all have to do with dreams being interpreted and their contents fulfilled. Related to this statement by Rav Hisda is another which occurs in both *b. Shab. 11a* and *b. Taan. 12b* which also concerns dreams and fasting. There it is related by Raba b. Mehasia in the name of R. Hama b. Gorias in Rab's name that "a fast is

⁴⁶ *b. Git. 52a; b. Hor. 13b-14a.*

⁴⁷ *b. Sanh. 30a.*

⁴⁸ *b. Ber. 27b-28a.*

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that all of the statements on this topic are either in the name of or corroborated by Babylonian Amoraim.

as strong (יפה) against a dream as fire against scraps.” To this Rav Hisda responds that this is so as long as a fast occurs on the same day as the dream. Just as fire consumes scraps so that they are no more, so also fasting ensures that the dream has no import. While we should always be cautious in reading disparate passages from the Bavli together, it is possible here that both passages do indicate that fasting causes a dream not to have any sort of prognosticatory value.

At the end of this section of the Dreambook, the potential meaning of dreams is again questioned, this time by the concept that a dream’s content stems from one’s own thoughts, or rather from the day’s residue, which is stated by R. Samuel b. Nahmani in the name of R. Yohanan. Three different proofs are then given for this statement, two from scripture and one in the name of Raba, as well as two narratives which exemplify this concept. Both of the scriptural prooftexts are from the account of Daniel interpreting the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar in which he relates that Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams are related to his own thoughts.⁵⁰ Raba’s proof for this concept, on the other hand, is based on the fact that a person is never shown things he does not think of in a dream.⁵¹ Following these statements are two narratives in which rabbis foretell the contents of Caesar’s and King Shapur’s dreams the following night, exemplifying this principle.

In addition to these instances of questioning, this section of the Dreambook also includes an extended commentary on positive and negative dreams, often referring to the dream content itself rather than to interpretation, which also serves to question the potential meaning of dreams, especially that of negative dream content. At the opening of the Dreambook, Rav Hisda makes a distinction between positive and negative dream

⁵⁰ Dan 2:29-30.

⁵¹ He states that “a person is never shown a date palm of gold nor an elephant entering the eye of a needle,” two things a person does not think of since they are impossible in reality.

content, to which the author of the Dreambook then juxtaposes related teachings in the name of other rabbis. The first related teaching is that a dream is never entirely fulfilled, only partially so, since a dream always contains some senseless content. Furthermore, it is related that it may take up to 22 years for a dream to be fulfilled. The source for both the teaching regarding partial fulfillment and the length of time it may take is from the biblical precedent of Joseph's dreams.⁵²

There are two narrative sections in this first part of the Dreambook which reveal the anxiety of the rabbis concerning the fact that a righteous person can have negative dreams. The first of these narratives deals with the question of whether a good man can have good dreams and a bad man, bad dreams. It reads as follows:⁵³

Rav Huna said, "A good dream is not shown to a good man, and a evil dream is not shown to a evil man." A baraita is also taught thus: All the years of David, he did not see a good dream, and all the years of Ahitophel he did not see a evil dream. But it is written, 'No evil will befall you' (Ps 91:10). And R. Hisda said R. Jeremiah bar Abba said, "That neither bad dreams nor evil thoughts will confound you." 'And a plague will not come near your tent' (Ps 91:10). "That you will not find your wife in a doubtful state of *niddah* at the time that you come from the road." Rather, he [the good man] does not see [the evil dream], others see [it] about him. If he does not see [it], is it an advantage? But has not R. Zeira said, "Whoever sleeps seven (שבעה) days without a dream is called evil, as it is written, 'he will rest sated (שבע), he will not be visited by evil' (Prov 19:23)." Do not read *sabe* 'a, rather *sheva* '. Rather, so he says, "[a good man] saw [a dream] but he did not know what he saw [when he awakened]."

This passage opens with a statement by Rav Huna that a good person does not see a good dream nor a bad person a bad dream and this statement is bolstered both by a baraita exemplifying this statement as well as a scriptural proof-text, the first half of which is also interpreted in this manner. A statement then is introduced which contrasts with the previous statement, namely that a good person does not see a bad dream; rather, other

⁵² Gen 40-41.

⁵³ The Soncino and Schottenstein English translations were consulted in conjunction with my translations of the Bavli throughout this dissertation.

people see it about him. A rhetorical question then asks whether it is any advantage to a person not to see a bad dream. A contradiction in the name of R. Zeira is then introduced which states that whomever goes seven days without a dream is evil, which is based on a paranomastic interpretation of שבע, a pun based on similar roots, in Prov 19:23 which understands this term not as “sated” but “seven,” thus indicating that one who rests seven days will not be visited by evil.⁵⁴ A resolution to the difficulty raised concerning whether a good man can see an evil dream is then resolved with the argument that the good man sees the dream, but he does not remember it. This statement can be interpreted in two ways. The righteous man had a positive dream during the night. In the morning either he did not remember the dream, or his recollection of the dream was different upon waking. Thus, in this case the anxiety caused by a good man having negative dream content is resolved by means of arguing that it is indeed possible, but he does not remember it upon waking.

A different means of resolving the issue of a righteous person having negative dream content is stated later in the first part of the Dreambook in the name of Samuel.

The passage reads as follows:

Samuel, when he would see an evil dream, he would say, “‘Dreams speak falsely’ (Zech 10:2).” When he would have a good dream, he would say, “Do ‘dreams speak falsely’? As it is written, ‘In a dream I will speak with him’ (Num 12:6).” Raba pointed out a contradiction. “It is written, ‘In a dream I will speak with him’ (Num 12:6), but it is written ‘Dreams speak falsely’ (Zech 10:2).” There is no difficulty. Here, by means of an angel. There, by means of a demon.

In this passage Samuel is depicted as discounting the efficacy of evil dreams while acknowledging good dreams by means of scriptural verses. Raba then points out a contradiction between these verses since one states that dreams speak falsely while the

⁵⁴ This statement by R. Zeira is also given in his name by R. Jonah in *b. Ber.* 14a.

other attests to the divine origin of dream content. The author resolves this contradiction by stating that the verses refer to different cases and thus are in fact not contradictory. The author implies that good dreams come from angels while bad dreams are caused by demons. In contrast to these instances which question the potential meaning of dreams, the majority of the Dreambook is concerned with the elucidation of acceptable versus unacceptable interpretive techniques.

Dependence of a Dream's Meaning Upon its Interpretation

In contrast to the abovementioned statements which question the potential meaning of dreams, the first section of the Dreambook also contains an extended discussion linking a dream's meaning with the interpretation given to it. The notion that the fulfillment and meaning of a dream is dependent upon the interpretation given to it comes from the statement כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה "all dreams follow the mouth."⁵⁵ This statement allows for the possibility of multiple contradictory but equally valid interpretations of dream content. Since it gives power over signification of dreams to the interpreter, which in the wrong hands could be subject to abuse, it forms the basis of both the methods promulgated by the rabbis and plays a role in discounting professional dream interpreters. As we will see, the rabbis link this statement with another, namely, חלמא דלא חלמא דלא מקריא "A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that has not been read." It will be argued that the term פשר should be understood in this statement both with its exegetical and magical connotations, revealing that the rabbis view dreams as

⁵⁵ Frieden, *Freud's Dream*, 78-79; Alexander, "Bavli Berakhot," 234-38; Zellentin, "Interpretation of Dreams," 98-99; Weiss, "Science, Folklore and Rationality," 2. See especially Harari, who argues that this turns the dream into an exegetical tool, which in turn "transferred the centre of gravity of the interpretive discourse from dream symbols ... to the interpreter" (Harari, "Sages and the Occult," 556).

something which must be remedied of their possible negative significance and they often advocate that this should be done by means of scriptural verses.

The fact that the statement כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה allows for the possibility of multiple but equally valid interpretations of dream content is clear from exempla in the Dreambook. There are stories in the first part of the Dreambook which exemplify the multiplicity of interpretations of a single dream, all of which come to fruition. For example, there is a brief narrative in *b. Ber.* 55b in which R. Bena'ah recounts that he had the same dream interpreted by 24 different dream interpreters in Jerusalem. Each interpreter gave a different interpretation and they all came to fruition according to the principle כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה. Additionally, this statement plays a role in the Bar Hedyā narrative where the dangers of this principle are made clear. In that narrative, Raba and Abaye each dream the same dreams and go to Bar Hedyā to have them interpreted. Bar Hedyā interprets the dreams positively for Abaye because he pays and negatively for Raba because he does not and several misfortunes befall Raba. Raba is depicted as being ignorant of the fact that Bar Hedyā is the cause of his misfortune until he and Bar Hedyā are traveling in a boat together and a book falls from Bar Hedyā's bag in which it is written כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה.⁵⁶

Connected with this principle, we see the notion that dreams need to be dispelled of their possible negative significance in the statement made by Rav Hisda, חלמא דלא מקריא “A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that has not been read.” As previously discussed, some scholars have noted the exegetical implications of

⁵⁶ The implications of this principle in both of these narratives will be discussed further in the section on the second part of the Dreambook.

this statement and the connection the interpretation of dreams has to Midrash.⁵⁷ Others have interpreted this statement as meaning that the rabbis thought that a dream would have no effect unless it was interpreted; it would be like a letter no one reads.⁵⁸ This analogy ignores the fact that a letter still has meaning even if the recipient does not bother to learn its contents. Alternatively, it has been suggested that, like a letter, the text carries a message, but that message is both discovered and invented through its interpretation.⁵⁹

These approaches, however, fail to take into account additional meanings of the root פשר beyond its exegetical implications as well as the various methods contained in the first part of the Dreambook for ensuring that a good person has a “good” dream.⁶⁰ As A. Leo Oppenheim noted in his work on the Assyrian Dreambook, the root פשר, in a variety of Semitic languages, including Babylonian Aramaic, has a range of English translations which include interpreting a dream and breaking a spell.⁶¹ For example, we see the use of this term to mean breaking a spell in a story from *b. Sanh. 67b*.⁶²

Ze'iri happened to come to Alexandria of Egypt. He bought a donkey. When he happened to give it water to drink, it (the spell) was broken (פשר) and [the donkey] became a plank bridge of אוסקניתא wood. They said to him, “If you were not Ze'iri, we would not reimburse you. Is there anyone who buys something here and does not examine it with water?”

⁵⁷ For the connection between dream interpretation and Midrash see Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 70-78; Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 236-38; Alvstad, “Oneirocritics and Midrash,” 140-41; Tigay, “Early Technique,” 169-89. See Niehoff, “Dream,” 58-84 for the connection between dream interpretation and Peshar Habbakuk.

⁵⁸ See Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 235 and Fishbane, “Every Dream,” 184-85 who, however, goes on to say that dreams that cause concern can be remedied instead of being interpreted.

⁵⁹ See Schoenfeld, “Madness and Prophecy,” 234 who argues that an unread letter still carries a message; however, the act of reading that letter both discovers and invents the meaning of the text. See also Löwinger, *Traum*, 25.

⁶⁰ See Kalmin, “Dreams,” 70-72 for a discussion of some of these methods and their connection with the additional meanings of the root פשר noted by Oppenheim.

⁶¹ Oppenheim, “Interpretation of Dreams,” 218-20.

⁶² Immediately following this story another example occurs which also uses the term פשר to mean breaking a spell.

In this story, a spell had caused a plank bridge to appear to look like a donkey. Ze'iri purchased the donkey thinking it was real; however, when the donkey touched water, the spell was broken (פשר) and the supposed donkey turned back into a plank bridge.

A complete understanding of the term פשר in the statement חלמא דלא מפשר כאגרתא דלא מקריא with the dual usage as both an exegetical term and a term connoting that one must dispel dreams – that they somehow need to be broken or remedied of their possible negative significance through their interpretation – is the key to understanding the implications of the methods of interpretation advocated by the rabbis.⁶³ They view that the inherent indeterminacy of the dream content needs to be dispelled of its negative significance and oriented in a way which will produce good fortune for the dreamer and they advocate doing so by a method particular to their social context, namely, exegesis.⁶⁴ While the most prominent method of interpretation advocated by the rabbis involves the use of scripture, it is not the only method they promulgate for ensuring that a good person has a “good” dream. Unlike the previous discussion of positive and negative dreams, which referred solely to dream content, here, having a “good” dream refers to having a good interpretation or outcome.⁶⁵

⁶³ The various meanings of the term פשר as outlined by Oppenheim have been discussed and connected to both this statement and הפה אחר הלכות הולכים אחר הפה by Stemberger. See Stemberger, “Traum,” 26-34.

⁶⁴ Heimlich argues that all divination has inherent indeterminacy, not randomness, and that the purpose of divination is not to tame chance, but rather to orient oneself towards fortune. He further argues that members of a community use particular conventions for reading hidden patterns in divination and that these conventions allow the members of the community to orient themselves socially (Heimlich, “Darwin’s Fortune,” 173-77).

⁶⁵ See Koet, “Sag lieber,” who discusses the rabbinic methods for ensuring good dreams; however, he does not associate them with this dual understanding of the term פשר. Stemberger, “Traum,” 12 mentions the magical implications of these methods.

Methods for Obtaining a Good Dream

Included in the first section of the Dreambook are at least three different methods for ensuring good dreams. The reason for doing so is likely connected with the issue that righteous men are capable of having negative dreams as discussed above. However, the discussion earlier in the Dreambook on good vs. bad dreams focused on the dream content itself and the issues inherent in that, whereas these methods for ensuring that one has a good dream could either function as a means to transform the dream content into something positive or to ensure a positive meaning or interpretation for the dream.

One method for ensuring a good dream was through a supplicatory ritual prayer. An example of this is the dream ritual in *b. Ber.* 55b, which consists of a supplication to be said during the *Shmoneh Esrei* in order to counteract negative dreams.⁶⁶

Master of the Universe, I am yours and my dreams are yours. I dreamt a dream but I do not know what it is, whether I dreamt about myself, or whether my companions dreamt about me, or whether I dreamt about others. If they are good [dreams], strengthen them and reinforce them like the dreams of Joseph. But if they need healing, heal them like the waters of Marah by means of Moses, our teacher, and like Miriam from her leprosy, and like Hezekiah from his illness, and like the waters of Jericho by means of Elisha. And just as you changed the curse of the wicked Balaam into a blessing, so change all my dreams into [something] good for me.

Here, the dreamer asks that if his dreams are good they should be reinforced like Joseph's dreams. However, if they are not good, he asks for them either to be healed like Moses healed the waters of Marah or to be changed into something good like the curse of Balaam was changed into a blessing. Schoenfeld, in her discussion of this passage, argues that

Bringing together stories about curses, dreams, and healing in the same ritual is an example of 'joining text to text' that allows for the substitution of the implications

⁶⁶ A similar instance of the use of prayer to ensure good dreams occurs in *b. Ber.* 60b. There, however, the prayer is stated upon going to sleep.

of one text with another. If dreams are a revelation they cannot be healed, but if they are an illness they can, and if they are a curse they can be changed into a blessing.⁶⁷

Thus, this prayer both provides a manner through which a good dream can function like the predictive dreams of the Hebrew Bible while also providing a manner through which bad dreams can be remedied.⁶⁸

The first part of the Dreambook also contains several other methods for ensuring a good dream. One method was to have a dream interpreted (פטר) or rather טיבנו “made good” in the presence of three people (*b. Ber.* 55b).⁶⁹ Connected with this method of ensuring that dreams are good is the recitation of verses that could give the manifest dream content a positive latent meaning. One example of this is the prescription of the recitation of three verses of transformation, three of redemption and three of peace (*b. Ber.* 55b).⁷⁰ As we will see, this final method has strong connections with the content of the third section of the Dreambook.

Section Three of the Dreambook

It has been noted that the third part of the Dreambook has the appearance of a sort of professional lexicon of dreams and their interpretations. Like in other dream manuals, and in particular Artemidorus’, a multiplicity of interpretations are given for different dream visions and sometimes these are connected with variations in the manifest dream

⁶⁷ Schoenfeld, “Madness and Prophecy,” 229.

⁶⁸ See also Koet, “Sag lieber,” 140-41; Stemberger, “Traum,” 17-18 and 31-32. Fishbane, “Every Dream,” 187 alternatively says that this is a ritual that enables a distressed person to cope rather than one that affects the dream’s content.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of this method of dispelling dreams see Freiden, *Freud’s Dream*, 77; Fishbane, “Every Dream,” 186-87; Löwinger, *Traum*, 33; Koet, “Sag lieber,” 139-40; Kalmin, “Dreams,” 71-72.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of this method of dispelling dreams see Löwinger, *Traum*, 33; Koet, “Sag lieber,” 139-40.

content.⁷¹ This lexicon is, however, particularly rabbinic in that for the most part the latent meaning of the dreams is derived through the exegesis of biblical passages.

With respect to several dream images that are connected to both positive and negative verses, the rabbis explicitly prescribe that one should recite a particular verse upon waking before another comes to mind. For example,

If one sees an ox in a dream, he should rise early and say, “‘His firstborn ox, majesty is his’ (Deut 33:17),” before another verse precedes it, ‘When an ox gores a man (Exod 21:28)’ (*b. Ber.* 56b).

This is so that the dream will become realized according to the positive interpretation, rather than the negative, which in this example is death. There are several instances of connections between particular *omina* mentioned in this section of the Dreambook and the narratives in the second part of the Dreambook. This content and the possible significance of this juxtaposition will be discussed along with those stories in the following section.

Section Two of the Dreambook

The second part of the Dreambook presents a series of episodes in which rabbis function as dream interpreters for both rabbis and non-rabbis which serve to contrast with the individualized methods promulgated in the first and third sections. A series of four different episodes are narrated, namely, Raba and Abaye before Bar Hedyā, Ben Dama before R. Ishmael, Bar Kappara before Rabbi, and a *min* before R. Ishmael. While the accounts of Bar Hedyā and R. Ishmael and the *min* consist of extended narratives, the two accounts between them are brief. The two extended narratives serve to discount the role

⁷¹ For similarities between the Bavli Dreambook and Artemidorus’ *Onirocritica* see Alexander, “Quid Athenis et Hierosolymis,” 117-19 and “Bavli Berakhot,” 241-44; Lewy, “Zu dem Traumbuche,” 398-419. See Kalmin, “Dreams,” 73-77 for some possible citations of dream manuals in the Bavli Dreambook.

of the professional dream interpreter and those who consult them. They both contain seemingly innocuous dream content which is subverted by the dream interpreter. In contrast, the two brief narratives between them consist of rabbis interpreting negative dream content in a positive manner for the dreamers. Thus they serve as another example of making negative dream content good and, in contrast with the extended narratives, they show the multiplicity of attitudes towards those functioning as dream interpreters within the Dreambook itself. However, given the extended nature of both the Bar Hedyā narrative and that of R. Ishmael and the *min*, it is clear that the attitude presented in these narratives towards dream interpreters is the predominant one in the text.

Given the fact that the two middle narratives are relatively brief along with the fact that the Bar Hedyā narrative has been dealt with in detail by many scholars, this section will focus primarily on the narrative of R. Ishmael and the *min*. The Bar Hedyā story will be briefly discussed in order to show how it serves to parody the professional dream interpreter and to discuss the connections it has with other content in the Dreambook. The discussion of the narrative of R. Ishmael and the *min* will be more extensive, showing how it both parodies the professional dream interpreter and uses a *min* as an “othering” technique, but still with an eye to parallels it has with other content in the Dreambook.

Bar Hedyā

The first narrative in this section of the Dreambook consists of Abaye and Raba, two Babylonian Amoraim, being depicted as consulting Bar Hedyā, a corrupt rabbi who

is characterized as a professional dream interpreter.⁷² The narrative begins by Raba and Abaye each dreaming the same dream, consisting in all but one case with Deuteronomic curses, and Bar Hedyā interpreting the dreams positively for Abaye since he pays and negatively for Raba since he does not.⁷³ The following day, both Raba and Abaye again come before Bar Hedyā, this time not reporting dreams about scriptural verses, but rather about various objects. Unlike the scriptural dreams Raba and Abaye bring to Bar Hedyā on the first day, several of the dreams about day-to-day objects have parallels with the *omina* in the third section of the Dreambook.⁷⁴ For instance, they both dream about asses, pomegranates and palm trees, all of which are also mentioned in the third part of the Dreambook.⁷⁵ Later, Raba goes to Bar Hedyā alone, yet he does not realize that Bar Hedyā is the cause of all the misfortunes which befall him until he and Bar Hedyā are traveling in a boat together and a book falls from Bar Hedyā's bag in which it is written הפה כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה "all dreams follow the mouth." Ultimately, the results of this consultation proves tragic for all involved, exemplifying the inherent dangers of this principle when in the wrong hands. Raba loses his wife on account of a negative interpretation Bar Hedyā makes since Raba does not pay him. Abaye dies on account of an interpretation made after Raba pays him. And Bar Hedyā is executed by the Romans on account of his corrupt practice amongst them.

⁷² According to Kalmin, Bar Hedyā was likely a marginal Babylonian Amora contemporaneous with Raba and Abaye who spent time in Palestine (Kalmin, "Dreams," 67-69).

⁷³ All of the scriptural verses come from Deuteronomy with one exception from Ecclesiastes.

⁷⁴ While the recitation of scriptural verses serving as meaningful dream content does not occur elsewhere in the Dreambook, there are instances of scriptural verses in dreams elsewhere in the Bavli; however, they do not involve either curses from Deuteronomy or verses from Ecclesiastes as those in the Bar Hedyā narrative do. For examples of the recitation of scriptural verses in dreams see *b. Hul.* 133a; *b. Sanh.* 81b-82a, 82b; *b. Yeb.* 93a-b.

⁷⁵ In general there is no pattern or seeming significance to these parallels in dream content. Pomegranates, however, in both instances are interpreted in reference to business.

Holger Zellentin argues that this narrative serves to parody the professional dream interpreter, much of the material from the Yerushalmi's Dreambook, as well as the figure of Raba in order both to reinforce the doctrine that all dreams follow their interpretation and to serve as a warning of potential abuse of this doctrine.⁷⁶ I agree with Zellentin's account that this narrative serves both to parody the professional dream interpreter as well as much of the material from the Yerushalmi's Dreambook; however, his argument about the inner rabbinic satire of the figure of Raba is based on a misunderstanding of the meaning of statements attributed to Raba elsewhere in the Dreambook.

A critique of Zellentin's argument that this narrative parodies Raba will both highlight the distinction the Dreambook makes between dream content and dream interpretation and show that despite the potential indeterminacy of the doctrine "all dreams follow the mouth," the author of the Dreambook does in fact limit it to those interpretations that have a connection with the dream content. This limitation is important for understanding the individualized methods which the rabbis promulgate because the methods are universally connected with the dream content in some fashion. Zellentin's argument about the parody of Raba stems from the viewpoint attributed to Raba in two passages from the first section of the Dreambook, both of which were briefly discussed above – the first passage in conjunction with the issue of a righteous person having negative dream content and the second in conjunction with the doctrine "all dreams follow the mouth."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Zellentin, "Interpretation of Dreams," 95-136.

⁷⁷ Both occur on *b. Ber.* 55b.

In the first passage, Samuel argues that evil dreams speak falsely while acknowledging good dreams, by means of Zech 10:2 and Num 12:6 respectively.⁷⁸ Raba points out the contradiction between these verses in that Num 12:6 attests to the divine origin of dream content while Zech 10:2 states that dreams speak falsely. The anonymous author, however, resolves this contradiction by implying that good dreams come from angels while bad dreams come from demons.

Zellentin argues that the fact that Raba is depicted as neither agreeing with the viewpoint of Samuel nor the author of the Dreambook, both of which show that one can accept a positive dream while discounting negative ones, helps to illustrate the irony of the Bar Hedy narrative and conjectures that had he accepted this opinion he would have avoided much suffering by not consulting a dream interpreter in the first place.⁷⁹

However, these passages are attributing different concepts to Raba. In *b. Ber. 55a*, Zellentin claims that Raba is depicted as holding the view that one cannot discount negative dream content while at the same time accepting positive dream content.

However, the passage only tells us that he does not accept that one can discount negative dream content while accepting positive dream content on the basis of contradictory verses. Perhaps if the verses did not contradict one another, he would have accepted Samuel's opinion. This questions whether or not this passage is intended to satirize Raba as Zellentin conjectures. The Bar Hedy narrative, on the other hand, is a commentary on the danger of dream interpretation by unscrupulous interpreters on account of the doctrine that "all dreams follow the mouth," of which Raba is depicted as being unaware. Given

⁷⁸ See the Potential Meaning of Dreams Section.

⁷⁹ Zellentin, "Interpretation of Dreams," 131-33.

that these passages are addressing different issues, this questions whether the passage in *b. Ber. 55a* indeed contributes to our understanding of the Bar Hedyā narrative.

The second passage Zellentin discusses immediately follows that one in the narrative and it, like the Bar Hedyā narrative, deals with the statement כל ההלמות הולכים אחר הפה. The narrative reads as follows:

R. Bizna bar Zavda said R. Akiba said R. Panda said Rav Nahum said R. Birayim said in the name of a certain elder. And who is he? R. Bena'ah. "There were twenty-four interpreters of dreams in Jerusalem. Once I dreamt a dream and I went to all of them. And what this one interpreted for me was not what that one interpreted for me but all of them were realized for me. This fulfills that which was written, 'All dreams follow the mouth (כל ההלמות הולכים אחר הפה).'" Do you mean to say that 'all dreams follow the mouth' is Scriptural? Yes, like that which R. Eleazar [said]. For R. Eleazar said, "Whence is it proven that all dreams follow the mouth? As it is written, 'And it was, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened' (Gen 41:13)." Raba said, "But this is when he interprets it as a reflection of his dream, as it is written, 'He gave an interpretation according to his dream' (Gen 41:12)."

In this passage, R. Bena'ah has a dream interpreted by twenty-four dream interpreters, who each interpret the dream differently, and in each case the dream is fulfilled in conjunction with the doctrine that 'all dreams follow the mouth', which is introduced as though it is a scriptural verse. The author of the narrative then asks whether or not 'all dreams follow the mouth' is indeed scriptural. His answer indicates that its intent is, according to R. Eleazar's interpretation of Gen 41. Raba, however, is here depicted as limiting the doctrine 'all dreams follow the mouth' to the case where the interpretation reflects the dream content. Zellentin argues that Raba, by limiting the doctrine's implications, is affirming that a "dream is the source of its mantic power while the interpretation merely reveals it," a position with which he argues the author of the Dreambook takes issue.⁸⁰ He argues that the author of the Dreambook is satirizing Raba

⁸⁰ Zellentin, "Interpretation of Dreams," 135.

since he does not think that the doctrine ‘all dreams follow the mouth’ is true.⁸¹ However, throughout the Dreambook the interpretation of dreams is universally connected with the dream content in some fashion, showing that the author of the Dreambook himself would limit the doctrine ‘all dream follow the mouth’ to those interpretations which have a connection with the dream content. Hence, Raba is actually limiting the doctrine’s implications to the manner in which it is employed throughout the Dreambook. So, while, yes, the Bar Hedyā narrative is depicting Raba in a manner in which he does not seem to understand this doctrine, perhaps the irony of this depiction is its contrast with other depictions of Raba in the Dreambook, rather than in conjunction with them.

R. Ishmael and the *min*

The final account in this section of the Dreambook consists of a dialogue between R. Ishmael, a Tannaitic rabbi, and a certain *min*. In this dialogue, a *min* describes the manifest content which appears in his dreams for which R. Ishmael then gives the latent meaning.⁸² It will be argued that the Babylonian storyteller chose to depict R. Ishmael in dialogue with a *min* in order both to parody the professional dream interpreter and in order to warn that to consult a professional dream interpreter is to act like a *min*, someone who is considered a “heretic” vis-à-vis the Babylonian rabbis.

⁸¹ Zellentin, “Interpretation of Dreams,” 136.

⁸² I am using Freudian terminology here as a means of expressing the distinction between the dream content and its interpretation because it is heuristically useful, not because I am attempting to psychoanalyze the *min*. For an explanation of Freud’s definition of manifest and latent dream content see Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*. For similarities and differences in the rabbis’ and Freud’s interpretation of dreams, often focusing on the sexual content of dreams in *b. Ber.* 55a-57b, see Lauer, “Des Wesen des Traumes,” 459-69; Bakan, *Sigmund Freud*, 257-68; Frieden, *Freud's Dream*; Haddad, *L'Enfant Illégitime*, 207-21. For a psychoanalysis of the conversation between R. Ishmael and the *min* in *b. Ber.* 56b see Cohen, “Über Traumdeutung,” 117-21; Velikovsky, “Psychoanalytische Ahnungen,” 66-69; Frieden, *Freud's Dream*, 85-86.

The basic structure of the conversation between R. Ishmael and the *min* consists of a series of eleven dreams recited by the *min* and interpreted by R. Ishmael. For each dream, R. Ishmael interprets the innocuous manifest content as referring to an evil deed the *min* committed in the past. This is followed by an admission by the *min* that R. Ishmael's interpretations are true except with respect to the final dream. Subsequently, a random woman appears who proves that the final interpretation is true as well. Then, the discussion between the *min* and R. Ishmael resumes for one last dream, whose interpretation is also proved to be true. In each case, the manifest content of these dreams is interpreted either based on what these symbols could mean according to analogies, popular custom and general oneirocritical values, or unspecified biblical verses. Some of the manifest content and certain of the interpretive techniques have parallels elsewhere in the Dreambook or are evidence that the author of the narrative reworked Palestinian material in order to parody the professional dream interpreter. The text reads as follows:⁸³

A certain *min*⁸⁴ said to R. Ishmael, "I saw [in a dream] that I was pouring oil on olives." He (R. Ishmael) said to him, "He had sex with his mother." He said to him, "I saw [in a dream] that a star was plucked for me." He said to him, "You stole an Israelite."⁸⁵ He said to him, "I saw [in a dream] that I swallowed a star." He said to him, "You sold an Israelite and you consumed the profit from him." He said to him, "I saw [in a dream] eyes⁸⁶ that were kissing one another." He said to him, "He had sex with his sister."⁸⁷ He said to him, "I saw [in a dream] that I kissed the moon." He said to him, "He had sex

⁸³ *b. Ber.* 56b. The manuscripts contain variations in spelling, order of dreams, and occasionally dream content. I consulted the following manuscripts: Oxford Opp. Add. Fol. 23, Florence II-I-7, Munich 95, Paris 671, Cambridge TS F1 (1) 41 and F2 (2) 59 and the Soncino print.

⁸⁴ All of the manuscripts state מינא. The Soncino print contains the alternative spelling מינאה. The Vilna edition has been subject to self-censorship on the part of the editors, on account of which the terms סדוקי (Sadducee) or כרתי (Samaritan) were often substituted for the term *min*.

⁸⁵ Oxford, Munich and Florence alternatively give the dream's interpretation as "You killed a son of Israel."

⁸⁶ Oxford, Florence, Munich and Paris all specify "two eyes."

⁸⁷ The imagery of two eyes signifying first degree male and female relatives has a parallel in Artemidorus' *Onirocritica* (I, 26) which states, "The right eye, on the one hand, signifies a son, a brother and a father, the left eye, on the other hand, [signifies] a daughter, a sister and a mother." This parallel with Artemidorus has previously been noted in Alexander, "Bavli Berakhot," 242; Lorand, "Dream Interpretation," 157; Lewy, "Zu dem Traumbuche," 399.

with a wife of an Israelite.”⁸⁸ He said to him, “I saw [in a dream] that I was walking in the shade of a myrtle.” He said to him, “He had sex with a betrothed (מאורסה) maiden.” He said to him, “I saw [in a dream] the shade⁸⁹ above me, but it was below me.” He said to him, “Your bed is reversed.” He said to him, “I saw [in a dream] ravens that were going around his bed.” He said to him, “Your wife prostituted herself with many men.” He said to him, “I saw [in a dream] doves going around his bed.” He said to him, “You have made many women unclean.” He said to him, “I saw [in a dream] that he seized two doves and they flew away.” He said to him, “You have married two women and dismissed them without a bill of divorce.” He said to him, “I saw [in a dream] that I was peeling eggs.” He said to him, “You were stripping corpses.” He said to him, “All of these are in me except for this which is not.” Meanwhile a woman came and said to him, “This cloak which [you] are wearing is that of such and such a man who is dead and you stripped him.” He (the *min*) said to him (R. Ishmael), “I saw [in a dream] that some people said to me ‘Your father bequeathed money to you in Cappadocia (קפודקיא).’” He said to him, “Do you have money in Cappadocia?” He said to him, “No.” [He said to him,] “Did your father go to Cappadocia?” He said to him, “No.” [He said to him,] “If this be so, *kappa* is a beam and *deka*⁹⁰ is ten. Go, see the *kappa* [beam] that is at the head of ten because it is full of coins.” He went, he found that it was full of coins.

In three of the interpretations, we see that the author reworked Palestinian material in his depiction. While R. Ishmael interprets the plucking and the swallowing of a star in the second and third dreams as the *min* having stolen and sold an Israelite, several of the manuscripts interpret the plucking of a star as the *min* having killed an Israelite.⁹¹ What is recorded in those manuscripts are versions of the Bavli that likely reflect the text’s Palestinian origin, versions of which have been preserved in *y. MS 4:6*

⁸⁸ Oxford, Florence, Munich, Paris and the Soncino print all state that the dream’s interpretation is “He had sex with the wife of [another] man.”

⁸⁹ Oxford, Florence, Paris and Cambridge F1 (1) 41 specify that it was a shade of myrtle.

⁹⁰ Several variant readings of this term occur in the manuscripts. Oxford רקיא, Florence דוקא, Munich דקאי and Paris דוקיאה.

⁹¹ The Paris manuscript conflates these two dreams reading “I saw a star that was seized for me. He said to him, ‘You killed an Israelite and you consumed the profit from him.’” Lewy, “Zu dem Traumbuche,” 401 sees a connection between these dreams and Artemidorus’ *Onir.* (II, 36) “Nor does it seem to be good to steal stars [in a dream]; For the most part the ones having seen this dream become temple robbers” and “Yet truly it does not seem to be good to eat stars [in a dream] ... it predicts death for the rest [of men].”

and Lam. R. 1:1.⁹² In each of those versions, the manifest content of plucking a star is interpreted as having the latent meaning that the dreamer (whose identity is unspecified in those versions) killed many Jews.⁹³ Additionally, each of the Palestinian versions of this story gives an explicit scriptural justification for the interpretation. In contrast to the Bavli where interpretation is often connected with Scripture, this is the only place where this happens in Palestinian texts. The verses they utilize are ‘A star rises from Jacob’ (Num 24:17) in *y. MS* 4:6 and ‘Look toward heaven and count the stars’ (Gen 15:5) in Lam. R. 1:1. Both of these verses, either through Jacob or Abraham, associate the term “star” with Israel. It is likely that either one or both of these scriptural justifications are implied in the Babylonian version.

We also see the use of the biblical text as the unspecified backdrop in the fifth dream, which involves the manifest content of the act of kissing. That the act of kissing can have sexual implications is clear from the statement in Gen. R. 70:12 that “every kiss is of obscenity except three: the kiss of high office, the kiss of meeting again and the kiss of parting.” In the fifth dream, the act of kissing the moon is interpreted as being symbolic of having sex with a wife of an Israelite, or according to the manuscript tradition the wife of another man. The dream of Joseph from Gen 37:9-10 may be the unspecified backdrop to this. There, the sun represents Joseph’s father, the moon his mother and the eleven stars his brothers. The act of kissing the moon, which according to this verse represents the wife of another man, would then symbolize sex with the woman. It is interesting to note that the author of the Dreambook does not depict R. Ishmael utilizing scriptural verses in his interpretations despite the fact that in the one case there

⁹² Alternatively, it is possible that the versions in *y. MS* 4:6 and Lam. R. 1:1 were emended to correspond with the Bavli, though this is less likely.

⁹³ For a discussion of the version of this dream in *y. MS* see Ulmer, “Semiotics,” 315-17.

was a Palestinian precedent. This was likely done in order to further distinguish his actions from the rabbinic methods of dream interpretation promulgated in the Dreambook, which often utilized scripture.

The final dream, which unlike the previous dreams is interpreted as something positive, also reworks Palestinian material. After the *min* recounts his final dream about his father having bequeathed money to him in Cappadocia, R. Ishmael inquires whether or not the *min*'s father has ever been there. When the *min* replies “No,” R. Ishmael knows that the dream does not literally mean what it appears to say and thus he interprets the dream by means of *notarikon*. The term Cappadocia contains a polyvalence of meanings evident when one takes into consideration the various meanings of the two parts of the word. In Greek κάππα means “twenty” and is the tenth letter of the alphabet. Additionally, in Greek δέκα means “ten,” δοκός means “beam” and δόκια (the plural of δόκιον) means “beams.” However, the meaning of *kappa* as beams is not possible in Greek.⁹⁴ In the Bavli Dreambook’s version of this narrative, R. Ishmael understands *kappa* to refer to a beam and *deka* to refer to the number ten and thus tells the *min* that he will find his father’s money under the tenth beam. Philip Alexander argues that the significance of rendering the meaning of the dream in terms of Greek may imply “that the heretic was a Greek speaker, and so Rabbi Ishmael reasonably resorted to the dreamer’s mother tongue in order to decode his dream.”⁹⁵ However, the source material for this dream also contains explanations in Greek. This is evident in its Palestinian parallels, namely, *y. MS* 4:6, *Lam. R.* 1:1 and *Gen. R.* 68:12, each of which is within an

⁹⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1398, 1337 suggests נשק meaning “carrying pole,” but as Alexander notes in “Bavli Berakhot,” 240 n.22 the fit is not very good. To further complicate matters, when one looks at the variant readings of נשק in the manuscripts, many of the terms used come much closer to transliterations of the Greek words that mean “beam.”

⁹⁵ Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 241.

independent narrative context which neither designates the dreamer as a *min* nor R.

Ishmael as the interpreter. The editor of the text most likely retained the explanation from the Palestinian material.⁹⁶

So what we have are a series of dreams that represent the *min*'s past bad actions which almost universally should cause him to incur the death penalty juxtaposed with a story in which the *min* is seemingly rewarded when R. Ishmael's interpretation of his final dream allows him to acquire an indeterminate sum of money. The transgressive nature of the *min*'s actions is clear from the fact that sexual relations with one's mother, sister, or another man's wife are all forbidden in the Hebrew Bible and in most cases would incur the death penalty.⁹⁷ Additionally, sexual relations with one's mother, a betrothed maiden, or another man's wife, and stealing and selling an Israelite are all discussed in the section dealing with the death penalty in Mishnah *Sanhedrin*.⁹⁸

Regarding this juxtaposition, Richard Kalmin notes that the "portrayal of a rabbi rewarding a wicked heretic is, to put it mildly, uncharacteristic of ancient rabbinic texts" and he takes this as evidence that the Bavli's narrative is "a conflation of originally independent traditions."⁹⁹

In addition to portraying the dreamer as having committed heinous acts, the choice of the term *min* as an "othering" technique is significant for our understanding of how this dialogue serves to denigrate those who consult professional dream interpreters due to the polyvalence of the term. At a minimum, the term *min* refers to someone who

⁹⁶ In *y. MS* 4:6, Lam. R. 1:1 and Gen. R. 68:12 an unspecified person comes before R. Yosi b. Halafta. For a discussion of the parallel in *y. MS* 4:6 see Ulmer, "Semiotics," 309-11. See Hasan-Rokem, "Folkloristic Context," 94-95 for the version in *y. MS* 4:6 and 102-3 for the version in Lam. R. 1:1.

⁹⁷ Lev 18:7, 9; 20:10-11, 17.

⁹⁸ *m. Sanh.* 7:4, 9; 11:1.

⁹⁹ Kalmin, "Dreams," 64. Weiss, '*Al ha-Yetsirah ha-Sifrutit*, 264-70; Alexander, "Bavli Berakhot," 231 and Fishbane, "Every Dream," 177 argue that the Bavli Dreambook originally was a separate document that was later incorporated into the Talmud.

would have been considered a “heretic” vis-à-vis the beliefs of the rabbis. Attempts to uncover the meaning of the term are hampered due to the fact that the derivation of the term is uncertain as well as self-censorship on the part of the editors, on account of which the terms צדוקי (Sadducee) or כותי (Samaritan) were often substituted for the term *min*.¹⁰⁰ However, in most cases, by consulting manuscripts it is possible to determine whether Sadducee or Samaritan is correct or whether a *min* is in fact depicted in the text. Types of “heretics” that scholars have identified as the referent of the term *min* include gentile Christians, Jewish Christians, Gnostics, non-rabbinic Jews, heretical rabbis, imperial officials, as well as others. Most scholars now argue that the term *min* is used to designate an indeterminate category of people differentiated from the rabbis. One who would be designated as a *min*, on the one hand, has similarities with the rabbis (including knowledge of scripture) and, on the other hand, differs from the rabbis (especially with regard to the interpretation of scripture, theological viewpoints and practices).¹⁰¹

There are several instances in the Bavli of stereotyped encounters between a *min* and a rabbi, one of which we will see in Chapter 5 in conjunction with the issue of how long the dead have knowledge of the living. Like the dialogue in the Dreambook, the dialogue in the majority of these passages is between a *min* and a Palestinian rabbi and they usually begin with the statement that “a certain *min*” or “some *minim*” come before rabbi so and so and ask a question. However, the topic of the questions and the apparent intent of the *min* in asking them is different than in our dialogue. In these passages, the questions posed by the *min* are almost always about the meaning of a particular scriptural

¹⁰⁰ See Herford, *Christianity*; Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd ed., s.v. “Min”; Kimelman, “Birkat Ha-Minim,” 2:226-44; Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew*.

¹⁰¹ See Goodman, “Function of *Minim*,” 163-73; Kalmin, “Christians and Heretics,” 155-69; Bohak, “Magical means,” 267; Vistozky, “Goys ‘א’ n’t Us,” 299-313; Lachs, “Rabbi Abbahu,” 197-212; Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 109-12; Hayes, “Displaced Self-Perceptions,” 261 n.30-31 and 261-82.

passage or theological issue. The *min* is depicted as asking these questions in the hopes of outsmarting the rabbi; however, in each case the rabbi proves himself superior in knowledge and in the interpretation of scripture thereby marginalizing the particular heretical challenge brought forth by the *min*.¹⁰²

The dialogue in the Dreambook appears in certain ways to be quite different than these other stereotyped encounters; however, it has a similar function, namely, to marginalize the actions of the *min*. The most obvious difference is that the *min* in the Dreambook is not depicted as attempting to outsmart the rabbi; rather, the *min* is depicted as coming to a rabbi on account of the knowledge he has as a dream interpreter. In fact, the *min* in the Dreambook is acting in a manner in which rabbis were likewise depicted in the Bar Hedyā story. This parallel is quite apt since the term *min* refers to someone who has scriptural knowledge, albeit an incorrect understanding of it, and thus could refer to either a non-rabbi or a rabbi who holds an incorrect viewpoint.

When one takes into account the depiction of the dreamer as a *min*, it is clear that this dialogue serves as a sort of warning about the dangers of consulting professional dream interpreters. The storyteller chose to use a term which has a polyvalence of meanings which would allow it to refer to anyone, including a rabbi, who believes in the efficacy of professional dream interpreters and who chooses that method of dream interpretation over the more individualized methods advocated by the Dreambook.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Examples include *b. Ber.* 10a (R. Abbahu); *b. Git.* 57a (R. Hanania); *b. Hul.* 84a (Raba), 87a (R. Yehuda ha-Nasi); *b. Sanh.* 37a (R. Kahana), 38b (R. Idith), 38b (R. Ishmael b. Jose), 39a-b (R. Abbahu), 39a-b (R. Abina), 98b-99a (R. Abbahu), 106b (R. Hanina), *b. Shab.* 152b-153a (R. Abbahu). There are additionally instances in which a *min* is said to pester a rabbi about the interpretation of verses but no dialogue is depicted (*b. AZ* 4a-b=*b. Ber.* 7a=*b. Sanh.* 105b).

¹⁰³ It is possible that the term *min* has an intended referent in the dialogue. The content of the tenth dream refers to dismissing two women without providing them with a זָּרָה , which suggests that the *min* could be identified as a Jew (Miller, "Minim of Sepphoris," 396-97). However, if the storyteller or editor wanted to make this identification explicit there is other terminology he could have employed.

Thus this dialogue warns that to consult a professional dream interpreter is to act like a *min*, as one who has an incorrect understanding of how one should go about dream interpretation and hence is seen as a “heretic” vis-à-vis the Babylonian rabbis.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, this encounter between a *min* and a rabbi serves a purpose similar to other stock encounters, namely, to marginalize a particular viewpoint or practice as that of the “other.”

Connections Between the R. Ishmael Narrative and *omina* from the Dreambook

Both the manifest content and the latent meaning of dreams from the R. Ishmael narrative have parallels with *omina* from the third section of the Dreambook. Among these parallel dreams in the third section of the Dreambook are four which contain transgressive erotic manifest content which are remedied of their negative significance by a positive interpretation of the latent meaning of the dream.¹⁰⁵ Presumably these dreams were dreamt by rabbis themselves, or at least represent rabbinic dreams, since it is not otherwise stated who the dreamer is. The manifest content of these particular dreams is an inversion of the latent meaning of certain dreams of the *min* in the R. Ishmael narrative. Additionally, the other instances of manifest content which are most pertinent are those which contain parallels with the R. Ishmael narrative and these inversions. The majority of these particular instances utilize scriptural verses in order to interpret dreams as indicating rabbinic ideals.

The four dreams containing transgressive erotic content form a continuous section. As we will see, they are remedied of their negative significance and given a

¹⁰⁴ Accounts in which rabbis are accused of being a *min* occur in the Bavli. For example, see the narrative involving R. Eliezer in *b. AZ* 16b-17a.

¹⁰⁵ On the problem of incestuous dreams portending a positive future see Grottanelli, “Mantic Meaning,” 143-68.

positive interpretation often through various midrashic exegetical techniques applied to scriptural verses, a particularly rabbinic method of dream interpretation. They read as follows:¹⁰⁶

If one has sex with his mother in a dream – he may hope to obtain understanding, as it is written, ‘For if you call out to understanding [or: For you will call understanding mother] (כי אם לבינה תקרא)’ (Prov 2:3). If one has sex with a betrothed maiden in a dream – he may hope to obtain Torah, as it is written, ‘Moses commanded Torah to us, an inheritance (מורשה) of the assembly of Jacob’ (Deut 33:4). Do not read מורשה [inheritance], rather מאורשה [betrothed]. If one has sex with his sister in a dream – he may hope to obtain wisdom, as it is written, ‘Say to wisdom, “You are my sister”’ (Prov 7:4). If one has sex with the wife of [another] man in a dream – he may be assured that he is a son of the World to Come, but only in the case that he did not know her and did not think of her in the evening.

The first three of these dreams are interpreted using a scriptural proof-text. In the first dream, the rabbis employ the hermeneutical rule of *paronomasia* to the proof-text Prov 2:3 כי אם לבינה תקרא. According to the vocalization in the Hebrew Bible it reads, “For if you call out to understanding.” The rabbis, however, understand the word אם not as *im* “if” but rather *em* “mother.” The verse then serves as a link between mother and understanding reading: “For you will call understanding mother.”¹⁰⁷

In the second dream, the rabbis employ the hermeneutical rule אל תקרי “Do not read” as well as *paronomasia* in order to properly understand the proof-text תורה צוה-לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב “Moses commanded the Torah to us, an inheritance of the assembly of Jacob.” The rabbis indicate the key term מורשה “inheritance” should be read as מאורשה

¹⁰⁶ *b. Ber. 57a.*

¹⁰⁷ Stemberger, “Traum,” 34-36 argues that originally ancient mythic tradition held that having sex with one’s mother or sister had a positive meaning; however, by the time the Talmud was written, this was no longer in unison with the prevailing morality. So, the rabbis had to consult Biblical verses in order to give a positive meaning to these incest dreams. Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 242 discusses this dream in conjunction with a parallel from Artemidorus’ *Onir.* (I, 79), which states that one’s trade can be called his “mother.” Alexander argues that the study of Torah is the rabbis’ craft and hence sees a link there with wisdom and argues that the scriptural proof-text was a later development after this connection was made. See also Bakan, *Sigmund Freud*, 260; Frieden, *Freud’s Dream*, 84; Lorand, “Dream Interpretation,” 156 for a discussion of this dream.

“betrothed,” thus understanding the verse as “Moses commanded Torah to us, the betrothed of the assembly of Jacob.” The verse is elucidating the Torah as “the betrothed of the assembly of Jacob,” allowing the manifest content of having sex with (i.e. obtaining) a betrothed maiden to be symbolic for the latent meaning of obtaining Torah in this dream.¹⁰⁸

Unlike the previous dreams, the interpretation of the fourth dream does not utilize a scriptural verse; however, it is likewise interpreted in terms of rabbinic ideals. In that dream, the stated latent meaning has the qualification that this is only the case if he did not know the woman and did not think of her in the evening.¹⁰⁹ In other words, this dream is only prophetic if it does not stem from the day’s residue.¹¹⁰ While a scriptural justification is not used, Artemidorus’ *Onir.* (I, 78) provides an almost exact parallel:

To have sexual intercourse with a woman with whom one is familiar and on intimate terms, if one should see the dream being attracted to and desiring the woman, it prophesies nothing on account of [his] desire having been heightened; But if he should not desire the woman, it is good for him, whenever the woman is wealthy; At any rate, the man will do something profitable near the woman or through the woman whom he saw.

In each of the above cases, the rabbis viewed the sexually transgressive manifest content of the dreams as symbolic and turned the dreams into something positive. Each of the dream interpretations given equates these dreams with a quality that the rabbis held most dear, namely, understanding, wisdom, Torah, and a place in the World to Come. Interestingly, one of the interpretations given for these erotic dreams is also attributed to manifest content which is similar to the manifest content in one the *min*’s dreams. There

¹⁰⁸ Liebermann, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 75 notes that this exact scriptural passage and wordplay occurs in another instance in rabbinic literature, namely, *Sifre Deut.* 345 in which this verse is interpreted as meaning that the Torah is betrothed to Israel. See Frieden, *Freud’s Dream*, 84 for a discussion of this dream.

¹⁰⁹ See Lorand, “Dream Interpretation,” 156; Stemberger, “Traum,” 7 for a discussion of this dream.

¹¹⁰ For an explanation of dreams stemming from the day’s residue and its connection with ancient dream interpretation see Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 41-55.

is a dream in which olive oil is seen; however, the qualification that it is being poured on olives, like in the *min*'s dream, is not given. Rather, olive oil is interpreted as indicating the light of the Torah.¹¹¹ Also, there is other manifest content, both erotic and non-erotic which is also interpreted as having these types of positive qualities. This manifest content includes that of a goose, reed, and a well. The dream involving the manifest content of a goose contains two parts, one non-erotic and the other erotic. The Dreambook interprets seeing a goose in a dream as indicating wisdom, while having sex with it indicates that one will become the head of an academy.¹¹² The content involving a reed or a well, however, is non-erotic. A singular reed in a dream is interpreted as indicating wisdom, while reeds are interpreted as indicating understanding. A well, likewise, is interpreted as indicating wisdom. In each of these cases, with the exception of having sex with a goose, the interpretation is based on a scriptural verse. As we saw above, most of the dreams involving sexually transgressive manifest content were likewise understood by means of scriptural verses. Thus, the Dreambook depicts methods which would “solve” or “remedy” dreams, especially those whose content surely would have caused anxiety, by interpreting the latent meaning of these dreams in terms of rabbinic ideals, often doing so through the use of scriptural verses. The use of scriptural verses is significant in that it raises the dream content to the level of scripture, which transfers the interpretation of dreams into the realm of rabbinic competence as scriptural exegetes.¹¹³

¹¹¹ *b. Ber.* 57a.

¹¹² *b. Ber.* 57a.

¹¹³ Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 248.

Conclusion

As we have seen, in the Bavli there are a multiplicity of attitudes towards dreams and dream interpreters as there was in the Hebrew Bible. In the Bavli, as in the Hebrew Bible, the efficacy of dreams in certain contexts is questioned and both contain an attitude that dreams can be a product of one's own thoughts and therefore are not prophetic. However, the predominant attitude in both is that dreams are a form of revelation and that they need to be interpreted in order for their significance to be understood. While both compilations permit dream interpretation, in the Bavli, the rabbis advocate individualized methods of dream interpretation rather than recourse to professional dream interpreters. This attitude is most apparent in the Bavli Dreambook.

The Bavli Dreambook consists of stories that discount the professional dream interpreter and warn of the dangers of consulting them juxtaposed in the middle of differing accounts of individualized methods with which to "remedy" dreams of their possible negative significance, whether by ritual supplication, or more often than not through scriptural verses. The rabbis considered both dream content and dream interpretation to be potentially troublesome. The concern with negative manifest content is apparent both from the commentary in the first section of the Dreambook on positive and negative dreams as well as from the rabbis' positive interpretations of this type of content in the third section. The negative potential of dream interpretation, rather, is made apparent through the Bar Hedyā narrative, in which Bar Hedyā is depicted as a corrupt interpreter of dreams who subverts innocuous dream content on the basis of the doctrine "all dreams follow the mouth," which allows for the possibility of multiple contradictory but equally valid interpretations of the dream content. In order to circumvent these

potential problems, instead of recourse to a professional dream interpreter, the Babylonian rabbis advocate a particularly rabbinic method of dream interpretation, which is often, but not exclusively, connected with scriptural verses and often utilizes midrashic exegetical techniques which put the dream text on par with the Written Torah and its interpretation on par with the Oral Torah. The interpretation of dreams using scriptural verses is for the most part unique to the Bavli Dreambook. In fact, in the dreambooks in the Yerushalmi and Lam. R., the only dream interpreted by means of a biblical verse is the manifest content of plucking a star, which was discussed above. Furthermore, by using scriptural verses, these methods of dream interpretation effectively limit the doctrine “all dreams follow the mouth” to those interpretations which have a connection with the manifest content itself.

The anxiety of negative manifest content and the connection of dream content with interpretation are most apparent from the account of R. Ishmael and the *min* and the parallel erotic manifest content from the third section of the Dreambook. When we look at these instances of manifest sexual content in connection with the story of R. Ishmael and the *min*, we see that with respect to dreams involving serious transgressions, the rabbis interpret the transgressive manifest content of their own dreams as having a positive latent meaning, while depicting the “other” as having dreams with an innocuous manifest content and a transgressive latent meaning. Even more so, the rabbis depict the transgressive manifest sexual content of their own dreams as having latent meanings of acquiring wisdom, understanding, Torah, and a place in the World to Come – in other words, as rabbinic ideals and the bases of their identity as rabbis. At the same time, through this inversion of manifest content and latent meaning, the rabbis displaced their

own anxieties about deviant behavior by depicting this as the behavior of the “other.” However, it is not just any “other” that they are using; rather, the dreamer is depicted as a *min*.

The use of the category *min*, as opposed to specifying the identity of the dreamer, is significant. The term *min* is used by the rabbis to designate an indiscriminate category of outsiders, whether Jew or non-Jew, bounded off from the rabbis. The term *min* is employed in this narrative in order to warn that to consult a professional dream interpreter is to act like a *min*, as one whose views on dream interpretation would be considered heretical by the Babylonian rabbis, thus marginalizing this practice as that of the “other.” Furthermore, while it is possible that the Babylonian rabbis are polemicizing solely against Jews who believe in the efficacy of professional dream interpreters instead of opting for the more individualized methods promulgated in the Dreambook, the *min* here could stand for a non-Jew as well who holds this viewpoint. The use of this ambiguous category which can stand for Jew, Christian, and gentile alike is significant given the environment in which the Babylonian rabbis were living.

Both Jews and Christians were religious minorities in Babylonia. However, one important cultural element connected them with the Persians in Sasanian Babylonia, namely, knowledge as a source of religious power.¹¹⁴ As is clear from the previous discussion of rabbinic dreams, many of their interpretations are connected with the valorization of knowledge and learning. Scholars have noted that this valorization of study, which was connected with rabbinic study houses or academies, served as a source

¹¹⁴ See Levinson, “Enchanting Rabbis,” 90-92 for a discussion of knowledge as a source of power in these cultures in relation to magic.

of authority and power in the Babylonian rabbinic community.¹¹⁵ A similar development occurred in Eastern-Syriac Christianity with the establishment of formal “schools” by the late fifth and early sixth centuries.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the authority and influence of the Persian magi stemmed from the fact that they possessed esoteric knowledge which was redacted into the Avesta during the Talmudic period.¹¹⁷

Thus, the Babylonian rabbis were living within a cultural context which venerated knowledge. While the Zoroastrian magi would not have knowledge of Scripture, the Eastern-Syriac Christians would. The rabbis are advocating for an individualized scriptural remedy for dreams; however, they are not the only ones in their cultural context who venerate knowledge of scripture. In the middle section of the Dreambook, the Bar Hedya narrative and the account of R. Ishmael and the *min* are juxtaposed. In the former, rabbis are depicted as coming to harm on account of coming before an unscrupulous dream interpreter. In the latter, a *min*, who is depicted in most stock encounters as having an incorrect knowledge of Scripture, comes before a dream interpreter who reveals all his past bad actions, thus depicting the “other” as having an incredibly dubious character. These two accounts of negative dream interpretation involving dreamers with scriptural knowledge are further juxtaposed with various scriptural remedies for dreams. By doing this, the Dreambook discounts any rabbis or non-rabbis with scriptural knowledge who believe in the efficacy of professional dream interpretation while allowing the

¹¹⁵ See Rubenstein, “Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy,” 55-68 and *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 16-38 who argues that this valorization of study is connected to the emergence of rabbinic academies in mid-fifth and sixth century Babylonia. Kalmin, “Rabbinic Traditions,” 21-50; “Jewish Literature,” 17-53 and *Jewish Babylonia*, 19-101 argues, however, that the Babylonian Amoraim valorize Torah study to a greater extent than Palestinian Amoraim without relegating it as a late phenomenon.

¹¹⁶ Becker, *Fear of God*, 30, 38-39 and 98-112.

¹¹⁷ Becker, *Fear of God*, 32-38; Stratton, “Imagining Power,” 384-85 and *Naming the Witch*, 164.

Babylonian rabbis to identify themselves as the sole arbiters of this scriptural remedy for dreams.

Chapter III

Bat Kol

Introduction

The phrase *bat kol* is a somewhat enigmatic term which occurs over 100 times in the Bavli in various contexts. At a minimum it should be understood as a “voice” or “sound.”¹¹⁸ It is the technical term for a revelatory voice heard on earth, though at times it should not be understood as a revelatory voice, but rather as an “echo” or “sound” of indeterminate origin.¹¹⁹ While it is not explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, and thus there is no exact biblical precedent, it is one method by which the rabbis have access to continuing revelation.¹²⁰ In the Bavli, depending on how it functions, the *bat kol* has two manners of access to the divine realm, either as a divine revelatory utterance or as a chance utterance and sometimes as both.¹²¹ It will be argued that the efficacy of the *bat kol* (whether it is functioning as a divine revelatory utterance or a chance utterance) is only questioned in certain cases dealing with the determination of halakhah; however, in each case its efficacy is assumed by at least some rabbis. In these cases, the questioning of the *bat kol*'s efficacy is a product of the tension between the concepts of continuing revelation and Oral Torah in the Bavli. When the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory

¹¹⁸ Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 250.

¹¹⁹ Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum*, 273-77.

¹²⁰ Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease,” 39-40.

¹²¹ This distinction has previously been noted by Harari (Harari, “Sages and the Occult,” 544 esp. n.112); however, he does not connect it with the differing introductory formulas.

context, the rabbis depict it in a positive/neutral light except in the case where it is received by a non-rabbi. By only depicting the receipt of the *bat kol* by a non-rabbi in a negative light, the Bavli de-legitimizes non-rabbinic diviners, while at the same time, by positively depicting its receipt by rabbis and questioning its efficacy in determining halakhah, it is a way in which the rabbis consolidate divine knowledge as their own provenance. Furthermore, the narratives involving the use of the *bat kol* in a divinatory context consist of Palestinian Tannaim or Palestinian Amoraim dating to the 3rd or early 4th century CE couched within larger narratives involving Babylonian Amoraim dating to the 4th and early 5th centuries CE. This may be evidence for the Palestinian origin of this use of the *bat kol* and evidence for the manifestation of Palestinian materials in Babylonia from the 4th century CE on.

The distinction between the function of the *bat kol* as either a divine revelatory utterance or as a chance utterance is often marked in the Bavli by the introductory formula which is used to introduce the *bat kol*. In the vast majority of passages in the Bavli, the *bat kol* functions as a divine revelatory utterance and is introduced by the formula ויצתה בת קול ואמרה “a *bat kol* came forth and said.” The fact that the *bat kol* is depicted as having its own volition combined with the fact that what it says often is in the first person implies that it is a divine revelatory utterance. In certain contexts, however, the *bat kol* takes the form of a φήμη (“voice” often referring to a “prophetic voice” or “voice from heaven”) or κληδών (“omen”).¹²² In these cases, certain other formulas such as ושמעו בת קול אומרת “they heard a *bat kol* saying” and היו משתמשים/ן בבת קול “they would consult a *bat kol*” are used, which imply chance utterances that happen to be overheard.

¹²² Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 194.

When the *bat kol* is interpreted in these contexts, it functions as a sort of cledonomancy, divination based on a chance utterance.

Of the many ways the *bat kol* functions in the Bavli,¹²³ several involve the use of the *bat kol* in divination or the juxtaposition of the *bat kol* with other methods of divination. There are two instances where the *bat kol* is juxtaposed with another method of divination, one of which is bibliomanancy and it will therefore be discussed in the next chapter.¹²⁴ That the *bat kol* is juxtaposed with bibliomanancy is not surprising given that in several cases, the *bat kol* is interpreted in a manner similar to biblical verses or is used as a means through which to interpret biblical verses.¹²⁵ In a handful of other instances, the *bat kol* occurs on its own in a divinatory context. In four of these cases it is treated as though it is a chance utterance.¹²⁶ In other instances, the *bat kol* functions as an oracle which is interpreted in a manner which foretells the future.¹²⁷

¹²³ The *bat kol* functions in the following manners in the discourse of the Bavli: (1) passages which comment directly on it as a form of continuing revelation (*b. Sanh.* 11a; *b. Sof.* 48b; *b. Yoma* 9b); (2) passages which discuss its validity in determining halakhah (*b. Ber.* 51b-52a; *b. BM* 59a-b; *b. Erub.* 14b; *b. Yeb.* 14a, 122a); (3) a rabbi requests a response from God, a *bat kol* answers, and this interchange is followed by a story which proves that the *bat kol*'s statement is true (*b. BM* 85b; *b. Ket.* 104a); (4) the *bat kol* is cited by a rabbi as part of a halakhic discussion (*b. Hul.* 86a; *b. MQ* 18b; *b. Sanh.* 22a; *b. Shab.* 14b, 88a; *b. Sof.* 2a); (5) the *bat kol* is cited by a rabbi as part of the exegesis of a biblical verse (*b. Ber.* 17b; *b. Sanh.* 102a); (6) the *bat kol* is cited by a rabbi as part of a first person aggadic narrative (*b. BB* 73b-74a; *b. Ber.* 3a; *b. Hag.* 14b; *b. Taan.* 24b-25a); (7) a rabbi questions what a *bat kol* said in a certain instance (*b. Hag.* 13a; *b. Pes.* 94a-b); (8) the *bat kol* is the last definitive word in the exegesis of the verse and hence it is the final determinant of how the verse is to be understood (*b. Meg.* 12a; *b. MQ* 16b; *b. Sof.* 10b, 21a); (9) the *bat kol* makes a statement about a verse which is then interpreted in order to make its significance for the understanding of the verse apparent (*b. Meg.* 29a; *b. Sanh.* 39b, 94a; *b. Shab.* 56a-b; *b. Yoma* 22b); (10) in an aggadic narrative a *bat kol* comes forth in response to a perceived or explicit statement or an intended action of a person, often that of a rabbi (*b. BB* 3b, 58a, 73b; *b. BM* 85b; *b. Hag.* 15a; *b. Hor.* 12a; *b. Hul.* 87a; *b. Ker.* 5b; *b. Meg.* 3a; *b. RH* 21b; *b. Sanh.* 96b, 99b; *b. Shab.* 33a-b); (11) a *bat kol* comes forth in an aggadic narrative and designates life in the world to come for a certain person or persons, often for those who have shown that they are repentant (*b. AZ* 10b, 17a, 18a; *b. Ber.* 61b; *b. Erub.* 54b; *b. Ket.* 103b; *b. MQ* 9a; *b. Taan.* 29a); (12) the *bat kol* is cited as the last definitive word in a narrative and what it says indicates how the narrative is meant to be understood (*b. BB* 74a-b; *b. BM* 85a; *b. Ber.* 12b; *b. Git.* 57b; *b. Ket.* 77b; *b. Men.* 53b; *b. Sanh.* 104b; *b. Shab.* 149b).

¹²⁴ *b. Hag.* 15a-b and *b. BM* 86a.

¹²⁵ See Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum*, 280-303 for a study of the relationship between the *bat kol* and scriptural citations in rabbinic literature.

¹²⁶ *b. BB* 3b, 73b-74a; *b. Ber.* 3a; *b. Meg.* 32a.

¹²⁷ *b. Sanh.* 11a, 94a; *b. Sof.* 48b; *b. Yoma* 9b.

This chapter will open with a discussion of *b. Erub.* 13b, which elucidates the *bat kol* as the instrument through which the multiplicity of interpretations for any given halakhic ruling, and thus the Oral Torah, is legitimated. Subsequently, it will address the questioning of the *bat kol*'s efficacy in determining halakhah and how this is a product of the tension between the concepts of continuing revelation and Oral Torah in the Bavli. This will be followed by a discussion of a selection of passages in which the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context.

History of Research

Very few scholarly works to date have been devoted to this topic. The only extended treatments of the *bat kol* are a collection of *bat kol* texts from throughout rabbinic literature with German translations and an accompanying book which traces revelatory voices, including the *bat kol*, through their development from the Hebrew Bible to the Pseudepigrapha, Hellenistic Jewish writings, targumim and rabbinic literature, both by Peter Kuhn.¹²⁸ Additionally, there are a small handful of articles which deal with the topic.¹²⁹

Kuhn's study of the *bat kol* in rabbinic literature, however, is not exhaustive. Kuhn neither deals with the treatment of the *bat kol* in the differing rabbinic corpuses, due to the sparsity of references in some of them, nor with a comprehensive view of how it is utilized throughout rabbinic literature; rather, he addresses what are in his view a few important questions related to the *bat kol* traditions.¹³⁰ His work on the *bat kol*, therefore,

¹²⁸ See Kuhn, *Bat Qol and Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum*.

¹²⁹ For the history of research on this topic through 1989 see Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum*, 256-73. See also more recently, Costa, "Littérature Apocalyptique." For some functions of the *bat kol* in midrashim see Hayes, "Midrashic Career I" and "Midrashic Career II."

¹³⁰ Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum*, 255-56.

focuses on the relationship between the *bat kol* in rabbinic literature and earlier antecedents in Biblical and Second Temple literature, the relationship between the *bat kol* and scriptural citations, and an extended study of *t. Sot.* 13:3-6. While he does recognize that the *bat kol* sometimes functions in a different manner than as a revelatory voice and sees the connection between the *bat kol* and divination in *y. Shab.* 8c, he does not address the divinatory function of the *bat kol* in any detail and does not address this function in the Bavli at all.

Revelatory Voices from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature

The term *bat kol* does not appear in the Hebrew Bible nor in Second Temple literature; however, there are references to a revelatory voice (קול) in these texts. There are a number of references in the Hebrew Bible in which an unseen voice (קול), either explicitly said to be that of God or intimated to be so, reveals information to a prophet.¹³¹ There are also instances in which an unseen voice is heard giving directions.¹³² While none of the abovementioned instances involve divination, in Dan 4:28ff a voice from heaven (קול מן שמיא) occurs in conjunction with a divinatory context; however, the voice is not involved in divination. There, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream which Daniel tells him both the contents of and its meaning. He informs Nebuchadnezzar that he will be driven away from all people, but for a time he will remain king. Daniel then gives him advice about how to prolong his remaining time as king; however, Nebuchadnezzar does not heed this advice. As a result of this, a voice from heaven comes forth and restates the punishment which Daniel had previously told Nebuchadnezzar was the interpretation of his dream, and the punishment was immediately carried out on him. Similar non-

¹³¹ Num 7:89; Deut 4:12; 1 Kgs 19:12ff.; Ezek 1:28ff.; Job 4:12-16.

¹³² Isa 40:3, 6; Dan 8:16.

divinatory uses of an unseen voice also occur in Second Temple literature. In this literature, there are also instances in which a voice, which is either directly said to be or supposed to be understood as that of God, speaks to the protagonist of the narrative, usually a prophet.¹³³ There are also instances in these texts in which an unseen voice, also meant to be understood as the voice of God, is simply overheard, but is not utilized in a divinatory context.¹³⁴

So, we see the use of a voice which is removed from an unseen speaker in a variety of narrative contexts. In a few cases it seems like the voice is overheard in a similar manner to a chance utterance; however, even in these cases it is directly said to be or at least intimated to be the voice of God, and hence it is meant to be understood as a revelatory utterance. Furthermore, in none of these instances are the contents of what the voice says interpreted in any manner. Scholars have conjectured that the use of the *bat kol* in rabbinic literature developed from these earlier instances in which a revelatory voice was removed from the speaker.¹³⁵ While it is likely the antecedent for the function of the *bat kol* as a divine revelatory utterance, we do not see a direct precedent for the *bat kol's* function as a sort of cledonancy; hence, we can view it as a particularly rabbinic method of divination.

Bat Kol and Halakhah

The relationship between the *bat kol* and halakhah is a bit paradoxical. On the one hand, in *b. Erub.* 13b, it is the means through which the multiplicity of halakhic interpretations and thus the Oral Torah is legitimated, while in other passages such as *b.*

¹³³ Baruch 13:1ff., 22:1ff.; Apoc. of Abraham 8:1ff., 9:1ff., 19:1ff.; Testament of Job 3ff.; Pseudo-Philo, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, 53:1-7.

¹³⁴ Baruch 8:1ff.; Pseudo-Philo, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, 28:8.

¹³⁵ See Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum*, 279-80; Costa, "Littérature Apocalyptique."

BM 59a-b, its authority in determining halakhah is questioned since it would rival the rabbis' status as the sole arbiters of the Oral Torah. However, in each case, its authority is accepted by at least some rabbis.¹³⁶ We saw in the previous chapter with respect to dream interpretation that the rabbis often transformed their practice of divination into methods of study based on scripture and thus analogous to the Oral Torah. With respect to the *bat kol*, however, we see contrasting depictions in these texts which it will be argued are a result of the tension between the concepts of continuing revelation and Oral Torah in the Bavli. However, despite these competing depictions, the *bat kol* is used as a method of continuing revelation in other contexts and as a method of divination. A dispute between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel in *b. Erub.* 13b is the context in which the *bat kol* both legitimates the multiplicity of rulings for a given legal topic and determines that the halakhah is according to Bet Hillel. The passage reads as follows:

R. Abba said Samuel said: For three years Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel disputed. These said, "The halakhah is according to us" and those said, "the halakhah is according to us." A *bat kol* came forth and said, "Both are the words of the living God, but the halakhah is according to Bet Hillel." Since "Both are the words of the living God" on account of what was Bet Hillel entitled to have the halakhah fixed according to them? Because they were pleasing and humble and they studied their words and the words of Bet Shammai and not only that but they mentioned the words of Bet Shammai before their words as that which we learnt: One who had his head and his majority in the Sukkah, but his table in the house: Bet Shammai declares [that the booth is] invalid and Bet Hillel declares [it] valid. Bet Hillel said to Bet Shammai, "Did it not so happen that the elders of Bet Shammai and the elders of Bet Hillel went to visit R. Yohanan b. Hahoranith and they found him sitting with his head and the greater [part of his body] in the Sukkah but his table in the house?" Bet Shammai said to them, "From there is proof?" Also they said to him, "If you conducted [yourself] so, you have never fulfilled the commandment of Sukkah." This teaches you that anyone who

¹³⁶ Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 151-201 argues that the polysemy present in this and the following narrative are products of the anonymous Talmudic editors of 5th-6th century CE Babylonia. The concept of the multiplicity of halakhic interpretations is not, however, first intimated in these late texts. Fraade, "Rabbinic Polysemy" shows that the Tannaitic Midrashic collections as well as the Mishnah and Tosefta commonly present multiple halakhic interpretations which, like the Bavli, both create and solve disagreement and are editorially joined in dialogue with one another. However, these early instances do not involve the *bat kol*. See also Kalmin, "Review Essay of Daniel Boyarin's, *Border Lines*."

humbles himself, the Holy One Blessed Be He elevates him and anyone who elevates himself, the Holy One Blessed Be He humbles him. Anyone who goes around [searching] for greatness, greatness flees from him, and anyone who flees from greatness, greatness goes around after him. And anyone who forces time, time forces him, and anyone who yields to time, time stands [still] for him.

This passage opens with the fact that Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai have been disputing for three years over whose ruling the halakhah follows. From the outset then, we are informed of the fact that there is a multiplicity of different rulings which are possible for a given legal topic and each side is claiming that their rulings are correct. After three years a *bat kol* comes forth and states that both of their rulings are “the words of the living God,” though the halakhah is according to Bet Hillel. The fact that both are “the words of the living God” indicates that both positions represent embodiments of Torah and thus even though the halakhah is ruled as being according to Bet Hillel, the views of Bet Shammai cannot be entirely ruled out.¹³⁷ Additionally, the use of the *bat kol* affirms that this debate is divinely sanctioned.¹³⁸ It is then asked why Bet Hillel deserved to have the halakhah fixed according to them when both are the words of the living God. The answer given is that Bet Hillel were pleasing, humble, and they mentioned the words of Bet Shammai before their words. This is followed by a story in which Bet Hillel mentions the words of Bet Shammai before their own and exemplifies that those who humble themselves will be elevated. In other words, the reason given that the halakhah is according to Bet Hillel is not a legal one; rather, it is an ethical consideration.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Sagi, “Both are the Words of the Living God,” 132-36; Kolbrener, “Chiseled from all Sides,” 283. Kimelman further argues that reasons for this plurality may be that different positions are valid in different times or circumstances or that it is necessary for the understanding of divine truth since it cannot be encompassed by a single human perspective (Kimelman, “Judaism and Pluralism,” 136-38).

¹³⁸ For an argument regarding the *bat kol* showing that the debate is divinely sanctioned see Kolbrener, “Chiseled from all Sides,” 283.

¹³⁹ Kolbrener, “Chiseled from all Sides,” 295.

Most importantly this passage legitimates the multiplicity of possible interpretations for any given halakhic ruling. And even more interesting is the fact that the *bat kol* is used as the avenue through which this legitimation takes place. In essence, it both informs us that halakhah is decided through dispute between sages and that this dispute and the subsequent outcome are divinely sanctioned. Since halakhic disputes are primarily over issues which are not fully explicated in the Torah, the differing opinions are all considered Oral Torah – “words of the living God.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, both those opinions which are accepted and those which are rejected constitute continuous revelation by means of Oral Torah.

In several other passages, however, the ability of the *bat kol* to determine halakhah is questioned. It will be argued that this is a result of the tension between the concepts of continuing revelation and Oral Torah in the Bavli. The questioning of the ability of the *bat kol* to determine halakhah is often posited in terms of a debate between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai and cites the fact that the halakhah follows Bet Hillel based on the *bat kol* from *b. Erub.* 13b.¹⁴¹ However, there is an instance in which the ability of the *bat kol* to determine halakhah is questioned, but it is not specifically depicted as involving these two houses. This is the famous story of the Oven of Akhnai in *b. BM* 59a-b. Here, because it was already stated thus in the Torah, the concept that the halakhah follows the majority trumps the ruling made by the *bat kol*, but not without repercussions.

The relevant portion reads as follows:

¹⁴⁰ See Safrai, “Halakhah,” 173-74 for the significance of dispute in the creation of both *halakhah* and Oral Torah.

¹⁴¹ *b. Ber.* 51b-52a; *b. Erub.* 6b-7a; *b. Yeb.* 14a. In *b. Yeb.* 122a, it is questioned whether a *bat kol* may be used as evidence according to which a woman may remarry after the death of her husband. While this passage is not framed in terms of a dispute, the opinion that it is permissible is attributed to Bet Hillel and the contrary to Bet Shammai. Halivni, “Reflections,” 125 argues that references to heavenly interventions are not decisive in halakhic matters, but we see from here and *b. Erub.* 13b above that that is not the case in all instances.

- A. We have learned there: They cut segments and sand was put between each segment. R. Eliezer declares clean and the sages declare unclean. And this is the oven of Akhnai. Why Akhnai? Rab Judah said Samuel said that they surrounded this with words like a snake (עכנא) and declared it unclean.
- B. [A Tanna] taught: On that day, R. Eliezer replied all the replies in the world but they did not accept [them] from him. He said to them, “If the halakhah is according to me, let this carob-tree prove it.” The carob-tree uprooted from its place 100 cubits, but some say 400 cubits. They said to him, “Proof is not brought from the carob-tree.” He went back and said to them, “If the halakha is according to me, let the canal of water prove it.” The canal of water turned around behind them. They said to him, “Proof is not brought from a canal of water.” He went back and said to them, “If the halakha is according to me, let the walls of the Bet ha-Midrash prove it.” The walls of the Bet ha-Midrash inclined to fall. R. Joshua rebuked them. He said to them, “If Torah scholars are prevailing over one another in halakha, what do you have to do with it?” They did not fall on account of the glory of R. Joshua and they did not restore on account of the glory of R. Eliezer and they are still inclined but standing. He went back and said to them, “If the halakha is according to me, let it be proved from heaven.” A *bat kol* came forth and said, “Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer for the halakha is according to him in every place?” R. Joshua stood upon his legs and said, “‘It is not in heaven’ (Deut 30:12).” What is [the meaning of] ‘It is not in heaven’? R. Jeremiah said, “That the Torah was already given from Mt. Sinai. We do not consider a *bat kol* since it was already written on Mt. Sinai in the Torah ‘To incline after the majority’ (Exod 23:2).”
- C. R. Natan found Elijah. He said to him, “What did the Holy One Blessed Be He do in that hour?” He said to him, “He laughed and said ‘My sons have defeated me. My sons have defeated me.’”
- D. They said, “That day all the clean objects R. Eliezer had declared clean were brought and they burned them in fire and they spoke against him and they cursed him (נמנו עליו וברכוהו). And they said, “Who will go and inform him?” R. Akiba said to them, “I will go lest a man who is not worthy go and inform him and destroy the whole world.” What did R. Akiba do? He put on black [clothing] and wrapped himself in black [clothing] and sat before him at a distance of four cubits. R. Eliezer said to him, “Akiba, what is the difference between this day and [other] days?” He said to him, “My master, it seems to me that [your] companions keep aloof from you.” Also he rent his garments and took off his shoes and took off and sat on the ground, his eyes dripping with tears. The world was smitten: A third with respect to olives, a third to wheat and a third to barley. And there are some who say also the dough in the hands of women fermented.

In this narrative, a legal dispute is presented over whether an oven, which was cut into segments and sand has been placed between the segments, is susceptible to uncleanness. In this narrative, R. Eliezer declares that the oven is clean while the sages

declare that it is unclean. A baraita is then given which states that R. Eliezer attempted to convince the Sages that his opinion was correct by every legitimate means, but to no avail. He then resorted to magical means to try to convince them.¹⁴² Subsequently, he asks that it be proved from heaven if the halakhah is according to him. A *bat kol* comes forth and attests that this is the case. To this, R. Joshua quotes Deut 30:12 ‘It is not in heaven.’ The anonymous commentator then asks, “What is the meaning of ‘It is not in heaven?’” to which R. Jeremiah responds that the Torah is not in heaven since it was already given on Mt. Sinai. And it is stated that they do not follow a *bat kol* since in the Torah it states ‘To incline after the majority’ (Exod 23:2). Thus, the halakhah is not in heaven; rather, it has been given to the majority according to the Torah. Ultimately, R. Eliezer loses out to the majority and in fact God agrees with this decision as is evidenced by his laughing and stating that “My sons have defeated me.” R. Eliezer, however, had not been rejected by God, only by man. While God had agreed with the sages that by divine decree they should follow the majority in matters of halakhah, the subsequent destruction which R. Eliezer is able to bring upon the world questions whether God agreed with the sages’ decision to excommunicate him on this account.

Scholars have promulgated numerous theories as to why the *bat kol* is rejected as proof that the halakhah is according to R. Eliezer. Arguments as to why this is the case include the fact that some scholars have viewed the role of the *bat kol* in this narrative as being in opposition to the other passages where the *bat kol* is depicted as a continuing

¹⁴² Two of these magical means have parallels in *b. Sanh.* The act of the carob-tree uprooting itself is reminiscent of R. Eliezer teaching R. Akiba the planting and harvesting of cucumbers in *b. Sanh.* 68a. Additionally, the water of the canal reversing itself is similar to R. Akiba bringing forth the river Sabbath as proof that it was the Sabbath in *b. Sanh.* 65b.

means of revelation.¹⁴³ These scholars argue that this narrative exemplifies a rejection of the ability of the *bat kol* to show that the halakhah is according to such and such a sage. Some scholars argue that R. Eliezer was not excommunicated because he disagreed with the majority, rather, it was the fact that he resorted to magical means in order to attempt to convince them that he was correct.¹⁴⁴ Other scholars even argue on the basis of the dating of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua as opposed to Hillel and Shammai that this rejection of the *bat kol* occurred at a later date than the ruling preserved in *b. Erub.* 13b.¹⁴⁵ One should note, however, that R. Joshua's rejection of the *bat kol* is not preserved in any Tannaitic compilations. While it is quoted in *baraitot* in the Bavli, it is possible that they are not really preserving a tannaitic tradition.

It is not what the text says, however, but how it goes about saying it which shows that the *bat kol* was rejected as proof because of the tension between continuing revelation and Oral Torah in the Bavli. According to Daniel Boyarin, R. Joshua, by using the citation 'It is not in heaven' in a radically different manner than in its original context is making a claim about interpretation while at the same time creating Oral Torah. In other words, "in the form of narrative it *represents* the structural possibility which creates a space for Oral Torah."¹⁴⁶ In its original context, the verse indicates that the ability of humans to perform the commandments of the Torah is not in heaven, i.e. it is not out of the reach of human beings. Here, it is likewise being used to say that the Torah is within the reach of human beings, but additionally, that it is now out of reach of its divine

¹⁴³ Costa, "Littérature Apocalyptique," 89-91.

¹⁴⁴ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 32-33.

¹⁴⁵ Gutoff, "Necessary Outlaw," 741-43.

¹⁴⁶ Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 35.

author.¹⁴⁷ In other words, the ability to interpret the text is entirely within human competence. The question which remains, however, is how to deduce the correct interpretation according to halakhah. In the *sugya* it is specifically asked what is the meaning of the expression “It is not in heaven,” to which it is stated that the Torah is not in heaven since it was already given on Mt. Sinai. Furthermore, a proof-text from the Torah itself is used, namely Exod 23:2 ‘To incline after the majority,’ in order to prove that the halakhah follows the majority. Like the previously cited verse, this too is used in a radically different manner than its original context. In its original context, it is used to state that one shall not follow the majority in evil or in order to pervert justice in a lawsuit. Boyarin argues that R. Jeremiah, “By taking the last clause out of its context, he then derives warrant for the claim that God Himself has authorized the rabbis to overturn even the simple meaning of the Torah, in order to authorize their interpretations by the majority.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, we see in this passage the manner in which the *bat kol* is rejected creates Oral Torah and argues that it was already given in its entirety on Mt. Sinai. Furthermore, this passage legitimates the rabbis as the arbiters of the Oral Torah, but it does so by rejecting the *bat kol*, whereas in the previous passage the Oral Torah was legitimated by the *bat kol*.

Hence, we see the *bat kol* being utilized in an entirely different manner in this text than it was in *b. Erub. 13b*, but that both texts serve the same purpose. Both texts authorize a particular group as determining halakhah while at the same time showing that it is divinely sanctioned as is evidenced at least in part by the *bat kol*. In *b. BM 59a-b*, unlike in *b. Erub. 13b*, the *bat kol* is not used as the final determinant of who the

¹⁴⁷ Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 34-35.

¹⁴⁸ Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 36.

halakhah follows. Rather, the existence of the *bat kol* itself is in contradistinction to the concept that the Torah in its entirety was already revealed at Sinai since it implies the possibility of continuing revelation beyond that which was already revealed at Sinai.¹⁴⁹ In this text, it is the Torah which is the final determinant of who the halakhah follows; however, as the text shows, this is no longer mediated by God, but by the rabbis by means of Oral Torah. Furthermore, unlike *b. Erub. 13b*, the text questions whether the multiplicity of interpretations of a given ruling are all embodiments of Torah through the rejection by the majority of all of R. Eliezer's arguments. However, the text also shows that this viewpoint is not accepted by all of the sages as is evidenced by R. Eliezer calling upon the *bat kol* for proof and the havoc he is able to bring after he is rejected. Thus, some sages accept the possibility of continuing revelation and the efficacy of the *bat kol* in this role, which we will see is further adduced by narratives in which it functions as a sort of clodomancy. However, by calling upon the authority of the *bat kol*, R. Eliezer was in essence denying that the entirety of the Oral Torah originated at Sinai and is rather allowing for additional sources of Oral Torah such as the *bat kol*. Thus, this narrative should be viewed as a commentary on the tension between continuing revelation and the concept that the rabbis had full control of the Oral Torah. In the following section, we will look at various instances where the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context starting with other cases in which it is received by a rabbi.

Bat Kol in a Divinatory Context

In a few passages the *bat kol* occurs in a divinatory context where it is interpreted in a manner which elucidates a type of hidden knowledge. Either the *bat kol* functions as

¹⁴⁹ See Halivni, "Reflections," 123-34.

a type of oracle which predicts the future, or it occurs as a sort of chance utterance and thus as a type of cledonomanancy. In either case, it is interpreted in a way which elucidates its meaning. The majority of the time the *bat kol* is received by a rabbi; however, there is an instance of a divinatory context in which the *bat kol* is received by a non-rabbi. It will be argued that when the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context, the rabbis depict it in a positive/neutral light except in the case where it is received by a non-rabbi.

Bat Kol Received by a Rabbi

There are only a few passages in which a *bat kol* is received by a rabbi in a divinatory context. In these passages we see a variety of formulas used to introduce the *bat kol* including ויצתה בת קול ואמרה “a *bat kol* came forth and said,” נתנה עליהם/ בת קול מן “a *bat kol* from heaven was given to them,” השמים “they heard a *bat kol* saying” and ושמעו בת קול אומרת “they would consult a *bat kol*.” As we will see, the latter formulas introduce chance utterances or omens and this is the only context in which these formulas are used. The first phrase, while it normally introduces a divine revelatory utterance, in the following passages, it is interpreted in a manner which causes the *bat kol*'s words to be taken as an omen. All of these phrases are used in the first set of passages which will be discussed.

There are several instances in the Bavli where a *baraita* from *t. Soṭ.* 13:3-4 is quoted which states that after the deaths of the latter prophets – Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi – the *Ruah ha-Ḳodesh* was removed from Israel, but nevertheless they would make use of a *bat kol* (היו משמיעין להן על בת קול).¹⁵⁰ In the Tosefta, this statement is

¹⁵⁰ *b. Sanh.* 11a; *b. Soṭ.* 48b; *b. Yoma* 9b. Parallels also occur in *Cant. R.* 8:11 and *y. Soṭ.* 9:13, 24b. A different version of the story portion of this *baraita* occurs in *y. Soṭ.* 9:16, 24c; *y. AZ* 3:1, 42c and *y. Hor.* 3:5, 48c in which the *bat kol* twice announces that two people present are worthy of the *Ruah ha-Ḳodesh*.

followed by a story which exemplifies the rabbis listening to a *bat kol*. While the terminology used in the Tosefta allows for the possibility of the use of the *bat kol* as either a divine revelatory utterance or a chance utterance, the terminology is different in the Bavli versions and it is clear there that the *bat kol* is intended to be understood as akin to an oracle and as an instance of *cladonancy*. The text from the Tosefta version reads as follows:

- A. It happened that the sages entered the house of Guria in Jericho and a *bat kol* came forth and said to them (ויצתה בת קול ואמרה),¹⁵¹ “There is a man here who is worthy of the *Ruah ha-Kodesh*, but his generation is not worthy of this.” They set their eyes upon Hillel the elder and when he died they said about him, “Woe for the meek, woe for the pious, the student of Ezra.”
- B. Furthermore, once they were sitting in Yavneh and a *bat kol* came forth and said to them [alt. they heard a *bat kol* saying (וישמעו בת קול ואמרה)],¹⁵² “There is a man here who is worthy of the *Ruah ha-Kodesh*, but his generation is not worthy of this.” And they set their eyes upon Samuel the Little and when he died they said about him, “Woe for the meek, woe for the pious, the student of Hillel.”
- C. Also he said at the time of his death, “Shimon and Ishmael by the sword and their companions by execution and the remainder of the people by plunder. And great disasters will happen after this.” And he said this in Aramaic.
- D. Also about R. Judah b. Baba they desired saying, “The student of Samuel,” but time struck it down.

In this story, in two different instances, the rabbis hear a *bat kol* state that “There is a man here who is worthy of the *Ruah ha-Kodesh*, but his generation is not worthy of this.” The manuscripts and early printings of the Tosefta do not agree on the phrase used to introduce the *bat kol*. According to the Vienna manuscript and the Venice print, the *bat*

In the first case, the *bat kol* names Hillel and the sages deduce Samuel the Little. In the second case, the *bat kol* names Samuel the Little and the sages deduce R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus. This version lacks the “woe” statements at the time of each sage’s death as well as Samuel the Little’s prophecy regarding Rabbah Shimon b. Gamliel and R. Ishmael b. Elisha.

¹⁵¹ Vienna Cod Hebr. 20, Venice 1521 and the Vilna edition. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Or. Col. 1220 (159) reads וישמעו בת קול ואמרה.

¹⁵² Vienna Cod Hebr. 20 and Venice 1521. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Or. Col. 1220 (159) and the Vilna edition read וישמעו בת קול ואמרה.

kol is introduced in both cases by the standard phrase (“a *bat kol* came forth and said”);¹⁵³ however, in the Berlin manuscript, in both cases it states that the rabbis heard a *bat kol*.¹⁵⁴ The Vilna edition has the standard phrase for the first statement and the other phrase for the second statement. This difference in terminology is significant since the standard phrase indicates that the *bat kol* has its own agency, whereas the other phrase could refer to a chance utterance which was overheard by the rabbis in Yavneh. Thus, the first phrase indicates that the *bat kol* is a divine revelatory utterance while the other phrase indicates that it is functioning as a sort of cledonomanancy. No matter which phrase is used, the rabbis are depicted as interpreting this statement through their actions when they set their eyes upon the sage to whom they think this statement refers. Additionally, in each case, this is followed by a “woe” statement said about the sage at the time of his death to mark his worthiness. In the second instance, however, this “woe” statement is followed by a statement by Samuel the Little at the time of his death foretelling the deaths of Rabban Shimon b. Gamliel and R. Ishmael b. Elisha at the hands of the Romans.¹⁵⁵ The last words of a dying man are often considered a type of divination and thus this passage may be juxtaposing two different forms of cledonomanancy.

In *b. Sanh.* 11a and *b. Sof.* 48b, this *baraita* is quoted in full, but not without a few important terminological changes. Both of these texts, as well as *b. Yoma* 9b, substitute *היו משמיעין להן על בת קול* where the Tosefta has *היו משתמשים/ן בבת קול*. Lieberman argues that *להשתמש בבת קול* is awkward in Hebrew and rather “It looks like a literal translation of

¹⁵³ This phrase occurs in *b. AZ* 10b, 17a, 18a; *b. BB* 73b, 74a-b; *b. BM* 59a-b, 85a, 85b, 86a; *b. Ber.* 12b, 61b; *b. Erub.* 13b, 54b; *b. Git.* 57b; *b. Hag.* 13a; *b. Hor.* 12a; *b. Hul.* 87a; *b. Ket.* 77b, 103b, 104a; *b. Mak.* 23b; *b. Meg.* 12a, 29a; *b. Men.* 53b; *b. MQ* 9a, 16b; *b. Sanh.* 22a, 39b, 94a, 96b, 99b, 102a, 104b; *b. Shab.* 14b, 33a-b, 56a-b, 88a, 149b; *b. Sof.* 2a, 10b, 21a; *b. Taan.* 24b-25a, 29a; *b. Yoma* 22b.

¹⁵⁴ Variations of this formula occur in *b. BB* 3b, 73b-74a; *b. Ber.* 3a, 17b.

¹⁵⁵ According to Rashi’s commentary to *b. Sof.* 48b.

the Greek χρῆσθαι (with the Dative) which means both to make use and to consult a god or an oracle” and thus this phrase should be rendered as “to consult a *bat kol*.”¹⁵⁶ That the *bat kol* should be considered akin to an oracle is clear in both *b. Sanh.* 11a and *b. Soṭ.* 48b due to the fact that in the remainder of the baraita the rabbis are depicted as interpreting it through their actions as they do in the Tosefta.

There are also differences between the terminology used in the Bavli version of the story exemplifying the use of the *bat kol* and the version in the Tosefta (sections A-D). The phrase used to introduce the *bat kol* in the Bavli passages does not use either the standard introductory phrase ויצתה בת קול ואמרה nor the phrase that the rabbis heard a *bat kol*, but rather נתנה עליהם/ בת קול מן השמים “a *bat kol* from heaven was given to them.”¹⁵⁷ This particular formula is not used elsewhere in the Bavli to introduce the *bat kol*. Given that the manuscripts are consistent for these passages, it appears that both of the abovementioned changes in terminology were either deliberately made when this baraita was quoted in the Bavli or a different version of this baraita was known in Babylonia than those recorded in the Tosefta. Since the first phrase (היו משתמשים/ בבת קול) especially implies that the *bat kol* is to be interpreted in this passage as a sort of oracle, one could argue that this differing terminology was used to highlight the divinatory function of the *bat kol* in this narrative.

What is particularly interesting, however, is that all of the formulas for introducing a *bat kol* are employed at varying times with regard to this narrative. In the context of the narrative, however, this makes sense. One can view the *bat kol*'s statement that “There is a man here who is worthy of the *Ruah ha-Kodesh*” as a divine revelatory

¹⁵⁶ Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 195.

¹⁵⁷ Vatican Ebr. 110-111 for *b. Soṭ.* 48b lacks “from heaven” for the first instance only.

utterance which attests to this fact and reveals it to those who are present. Additionally, due to the fact that the *bat kol* itself does not reveal who the “man” is, one can also view it as a chance utterance which is heard by the rabbis present who then interpret who it refers to by means of their actions. While the manuscript variants for the Tosefta allow for either understanding, the Bavli clearly views this passage as an instance of *cledomancy*.

It is also clear in *b. Meg.* 32a that the *bat kol* is depicted as a chance utterance since this is explicated by the particular verse that provides the scriptural basis for its consultation. Here, as expected, the question pertaining to the *bat kol* is formulated in a manner which implies that it is to be understood as an oracle, namely, *היו משתמשים/ן בבת קול*. The passage in *b. Meg.* 32a reads as follows:

And R. Shefatiah said R. Yohanan said, “From where [is it derived] that [we] consult a *bat kol*? As it is written, ‘Your ears will hear a word from behind you saying, [“This is the way, walk in it”]’ (Isa 30:21).” It applies only [in a case] that one hears the voice of a man in town and the voice of a woman in a field and provided that it says “yes, yes” and provided that it says “no, no.”

The verse Isa 30:21 defines the *bat kol* as a chance utterance which one would hear spoken behind him.¹⁵⁸ We see here that a qualification is directly placed upon the nature of the *bat kol*, namely, that one is only to make use of it in the case where one hears the voice of a man in town or the voice of a woman in a field and that it is confirmed through repetition. However, the context implies that a *bat kol* can be taken as a sign that something is fortuitous or not when it consists of a chance utterance stating either yes or no. While this certainly limits the scope of a *bat kol* as an omen, we do not see the rabbis eliminating its efficacy. Furthermore, while the nature of the valid form of response of

¹⁵⁸ There is a passage in *y. Shab.* 6:9, 8c in which Isa 30:21 is also given as the scriptural basis for a *bat kol* which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

the *bat kol* in itself does not require interpretation in order to be understood, it would fall to the one who consults it to accurately determine to what it refers.

In another passage, namely *b. Sanh.* 94a, we see that the *bat kol* functions not as a chance utterance and thus as a form of clodomancy, but rather as a type of oracle in a manner similar to that intimated by the opening phrase of *b. Sanh.* 11a, *b. Sof.* 48b, *b. Yoma* 9b and *t. Sof.* 13:3 above; however, it does not use either the phrase *היו משתמשים/ן* *היו משמיעין להן על בת קול* or *בבת קול* as those texts do. That it is an oracle is apparent not only from the content of the narrative, but also by the fact that the *bat kol* is not introduced by means of an introductory formula indicating a chance utterance; rather, the standard introductory formula for introducing a *bat kol* is used (*יצתה בת קול ואמרה*). Furthermore, the import of the *bat kol*'s statement is interpreted by the rabbis in order to reveal its meaning. In this text it lays out what precedes the coming of the Messiah which is directly interpreted by a rabbi. It reads as follows:

- A. 'For the increase (*למרבה*) of the dominion and for peace there is no end' (Isa 9:6). R. Tanhum said, "Bar Kappara expounded in Sepphoris, on account of what is every *mem* that is in the middle of a word open and this is closed? The Holy One Blessed Be He wanted to make Hezekiah the Messiah and Senacherib Gog and Magog."
- B. The divine attribute of Justice said before the Holy One Blessed Be He, "Lord of the World, if you did not make David, King of Israel who said how many songs and praises before you, Messiah you would make Hezekiah, for whom you made all those miraculous events and he did not say a song before you, Messiah? Therefore it was closed."
- C. Immediately the earth opened and said before him, "Lord of the World, let me say before you a song instead of this righteous man and make him Messiah." It opened and said a song before him, as it is written, 'From the end of the earth we have heard songs, beauty to the righteous, etc.' (Isa 24:16). The Prince of the World said to him, "Lord of the World, it did his desire for this righteous man."
- D. A *bat kol* came forth and said, "'My secret is mine, my secret is mine' (Isa 24:16)." The prophet said, "'Woe to me, woe to me,' (Isa 24:16) until when [must we wait]?" A *bat kol* came forth and said, "'Tracherous men act treacherously, in treachery have the treacherous dealers acted treacherously' (Isa 24:16)." Raba said and some say R. Isaac [said], "Until robbers and robbers of robbers come."

R. Tanhum argues that the *mem* is closed in this verse due to the fact that God wanted to make Hezekiah the Messiah. The divine attribute of Justice, however, objected since Hezekiah had not sung praises for God. In section C we see that the earth intercedes on behalf of Hezekiah and sings a song on his behalf. A *bat kol* then comes forth and rejects the earth's intercession quoting Isa 24:16 'my secret is mine.' Costa argues that the *bat kol* is emphasizing here the fact that the time of the coming of the Messiah must remain hidden and that it is God's choice alone when it happens. Consequently the prophet Isaiah laments and the *bat kol* again comes in response. As opposed to restating the initial interdiction, however, the *bat kol* now lays out the phases which will proceed the coming of the Messiah in the form of an oracle.¹⁵⁹ This is interpreted by either Raba or R. Isaac as meaning that the time of the coming of the Messiah will remain secret until Israel's enemies and their enemies' enemies will be destroyed.¹⁶⁰

As we have seen, when the *bat kol* is received by a rabbi in a divinatory context, unlike its use with respect to the determination of halakhah, it is always considered to be efficacious. When it occurs in this context in the Bavli, it either functions as an oracle or as a chance utterance and thus as a form of cledonancy. In either case, it is interpreted in a way which elucidates its meaning. As we will see in the next section, when the *bat kol* is received by a non-rabbi, it also functions as a form of cledonancy. However, there, while the *bat kol* is still considered to be efficacious, the import of the *bat kol* is misunderstood and thus it hints at the fact that oracles are not always what they appear to be and that it is up to the interpreter to correctly gauge their meaning.

¹⁵⁹ Costa, "Littérature Apocalyptique," 78.

¹⁶⁰ Soncino ed. *b. Sanh.* 94a n.17.

Bat Kol Received by a Non-Rabbi

In the single narrative in the Bavli in which the *bat kol* is received by a non-rabbi in a divinatory context, namely *b. BB* 3b, the *bat kol* functions as a type of *cledomancy*. This text consists of an aggadic narrative about King Herod, who ruled Judea from 37 to 4 BCE. It occurs following a halakhic discussion of R. Hisda's statement that "A person should not tear down a synagogue until he has built another synagogue." The figure of Herod is introduced in a question directed at R. Hisda's statement which asks how this could be the case when Baba ben Buta caused Herod to take counsel to tear down the Temple. While the *bat kol* is efficacious for Herod in this passage, the narrative serves to depict both Herod and his marriage to the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II, Mariamne in a negative light. It reads as follows:¹⁶¹

- A. Herod was the slave of the house of the Hasmoneans. He lusted after a [Hasmonean] girl. One day he heard a *bat kol*¹⁶² say, "Every slave that rebels now will succeed." [Herod] killed all of his masters but left [alive] the girl. When this girl saw that [Herod] wanted to marry her, she went up to the roof and cried out. She said, "Whoever says, 'I am descended from the Hasmonean house' is a slave, for I am the only Hasmonean left and I am about to fall from the roof to the ground."
- B. [Herod] hid her for seven years in honey. Some say he had sex with her, others say he didn't have sex with her. Those who say that he had sex with her [think] he hid her to satisfy himself sexually. Those who say he didn't have sex with her [think] he hid her so that [people] would say he married a princess.
- C. [Herod] said, "Who interprets, 'Be sure to set [as king] over yourself one of your people' (Deut 17:15) [thereby excluding me]? The rabbis." [Herod] killed all of the rabbis. He left [alive] Baba ben Buta to take counsel from him. He crowned him with a garland of lizards and put out his eyes.
- D. One day [Herod] came and sat before [Baba]. [Herod] said, "Did the master [i.e. Baba] see what that evil slave [Herod] did? [Baba] said to [Herod], "What shall I do to him?" [Herod] said to him, "Let the master curse him." [Baba] said to him, "[It is written], 'Even in your thoughts don't curse a king' (Eccl 10:20)." [Herod] said to him, "He is not a king." [Baba] said to him, "Even if he is only a rich man, it is written, 'and do not curse the rich man in private' (Eccl 10:20)." [Herod said to him,] "And if he is a prince it is written, 'Do not curse a prince of your people'

¹⁶¹ The translation for this passage follows Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 50-51 with minor variations.

¹⁶² Munich 95, Florence 9-I-II read שמע קלא; Escorial G-I-3 reads שמע קלאמר.

(Exod 22:27), this refers to [a prince] who behaves like one of your people, and this one does not behave like one of your people.” [Baba] said to [Herod], “I am afraid of him.” [Herod] said to him, “No one will tell him, for you and I sit here alone.” [Baba] said to him, “It is written, ‘For a bird of the air may carry the utterance, and a winged creature may repeat the word’ (Eccl 10:20).”

- E. [Herod] said to him, “I am he. Had I known that the rabbis were so discreet, I would not have killed them. What is my solution?” [Baba] said to him, “You extinguished the light of the world, [the rabbis], as it is written, ‘For commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light’ (Prov 6:23), go and busy yourself with the light of the world, [the Temple], as it is written, ‘And all the nations shall be illuminated by [the Temple]’ (Isa 2:2)...” [Herod] said to [Baba], “I am afraid of the government.” [Baba] said to him, “Send a messenger [to the government]. [The messenger] will travel for a year, tarry for a year, and return for a year. In the meantime you can tear down [the Temple] and build it up again.”
- F. [Herod] did this. [The Romans] sent to him, “If you haven’t torn it down already, don’t tear it down. And if you have [already] torn it down, don’t rebuild it. And if you have [already] torn it down and rebuilt it, those who do evil, after they seek counsel. If your weapons are upon you, your [genealogical] book is here: ‘Neither a king nor the son of a king.’ Herod, [slave], your [free] country becomes a colony.”

In this narrative, Herod hears a *bat kol* which he takes as a sign and interprets it with respect to his current circumstances. While not all of the manuscripts contain the phrase *bat kol*, they all agree that Herod heard a voice of indeterminate origin which he then takes as a sign. So, at the very least we can say that a form of *cladonancy* occurs here and that at times it has been understood to involve a *bat kol*.¹⁶³ Herod understands from the words of the *bat kol* that if he, a slave, were to rebel at that time he would succeed in his rebellion and become king. His particular form of rebellion is hinted at in the first sentence of the narrative, that he lusts after a certain girl from the house of the Hasmonians, who he would not be able to marry as he is a slave. But, by marrying her after wiping out her entire family, he would *de facto* become king. The girl, however,

¹⁶³ In two out of the three instances in which the manuscripts do not mention a *bat kol*, they state that he heard a voice (קולא). It is possible that in these instances the scribe either accidentally passed over the *bat kol* or that he did not understand the technical term and deliberately changed the text. The third manuscript, while it also refers to a statement originating from an unseen/unstated source (שמעיהו שקאמר), is significantly different from the other manuscripts and it is unclear how it would have come about except as an alternative version of the narrative.

thwarts his plans by shouting from a rooftop that from this point forward, anyone claiming to be a Hasmonean is a slave and then killing herself, thus preventing a legitimate marriage. On account of this, Herod hid her and two different reasons for this action are given. The first is that he hid her in order to have sex with her and gratify his desires. The second reason is that he hid her so that it would be rumored that he married the daughter of a king. So, not only does the Hasmonean girl prevent his legitimate marriage, but Herod's own actions in hiding the body betray his insecurity about his kingship. Furthermore, the rabbis and the Roman Empire both denounce his status as king in the remainder of the narrative.¹⁶⁴ So, while the *bat kol* is efficacious for Herod, the narrative depicts Herod as an illegitimate king.

There are several parallels between the contents of this narrative and narratives from Greco-Roman literature. This narrative is similar to a type of Greco-Roman erotic narrative found in a wide array of Greco-Roman literary works, but most prominently in Parthenius' *The Love Romances*.¹⁶⁵ It involves: (1) a character who is irresistibly attractive to a person who should not be attracted to him/her; (2) the attraction is always disastrous; (3) frequently the narrative has a national dimension involving an act of national treason or betrayal.¹⁶⁶ As we see in our narrative, Herod is irresistibly attracted to a Hasmonean princess to whom he should not be attracted because she would not be obtainable by a slave. While for a time his rebellious actions are beneficial for him in that he becomes king for a time, ultimately they result in his illegitimate kingship ending and Judea becoming a Roman colony. Through this we see the aspect of his national betrayal

¹⁶⁴ Feintuch, "External Appearance," 95-96.

¹⁶⁵ See Stern, "Captive Woman," 98-99.

¹⁶⁶ Stern, "Captive Woman," 99.

– not only is he depicted as killing all of the Hasmoneans, but he also is responsible for ending Jewish self-rule.

We also see a different parallel between this narrative and Herodotus. Not only does this narrative serve to question Herod's legitimacy, but also it also questions oracles themselves in a manner reminiscent of Herodotus.¹⁶⁷ The *bat kol* states that "Every slave that rebels now succeeds"; however, it does not state either the exact nature of the rebellion or how exactly the slave will succeed. While Herod did rebel, became free for a time and obtained the girl, at every turn the narrative undercuts this success. The girl outwits his plans and commits suicide, preventing a legitimate marriage. Herod is depicted as hiding the body in order to legitimize his reign. Herod's insecurity about his legitimacy is further shown by his subsequent actions. In section C he kills all the rabbis but one since they expound Deut 17:15 'From the midst of your brothers you shall set up a king over you' and Herod is descended from an Edomite proselyte and hence would not fulfill the requirement of 'your brothers' and be qualified to reign. He also expresses his fear of the Roman Empire in section E. This fear is legitimated in the following section where the message they send back denounces his kingship. So, while the *bat kol's* words were true and Herod did succeed in making himself free for a time, the narrative serves to limit his success. Due to the fact that Herod's decisions and actions are repeatedly depicted as wrong, one could say that Herod's "success" stemming from listening to the *bat kol* did not happen in the manner in which he expected. This is reminiscent of the story of Croesus in Herodotus.

¹⁶⁷ For a discussion of Herodotus and oracles not always being what they appear see Hollman, *Master of Signs*, 102-17; Stoneman, *Ancient Oracles*, 24, 40-45; Kindt, "Delphic Oracle Stories," 39-41; Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion*, 56-57.

In Herodotus it is recounted that Croesus, in attempting to determine whether he should go to war against the Persians, consults the oracle at Delphi. In response to his question concerning this matter he is told that he would destroy a great empire.¹⁶⁸ Croesus makes an assumption that the empire the oracle referred to would be the Persians; however, he is mistaken and his empire is the one that is defeated. Later he sends another messenger to Delphi concerning the validity of the oracle. The response he receives is essentially that he should have made a second inquiry as to which empire the oracle referred and it was his mistake that he misinterpreted the oracle and failed to make the second inquiry.¹⁶⁹ While a second inquiry into the meaning of the *bat kol* would not necessarily be possible in this case and the text does not explicitly state Herod's assumption about the meaning of the text, the narrative undercuts his actions and decisions in a manner which attests to his misunderstanding of the *bat kol*. Furthermore, like Croesus, through this misunderstanding of the *bat kol* Herod loses his empire. By doing this, this narrative, like Herodotus, is likely hinting at the fact that oracles are not always what they appear to be and it is the responsibility of the interpreter to correctly gauge their meaning.

It has previously been noted by scholars that little attention has been paid to the influence of Greco-Roman narratives on rabbinic literature.¹⁷⁰ Those scholars do not argue that the rabbis read a particular narrative and then borrowed directly from it; rather, that there was a process of cultural influence through which a larger pattern of Greco-Roman tales and motifs circulated throughout the ancient world. The adoption of Greco-

¹⁶⁸ Herodotus 1.53-54.

¹⁶⁹ Herodotus 1.91.

¹⁷⁰ Boyarin, "Patron Saint of the Incongruous," 531; Stern, "Captive Woman," 91-92; Levinson, "Tragedy of Romance," 228.

Roman motifs in this narrative likely occurred by the same process. We will see in Chapter 5 that this is not the only instance in which aspects of Greco-Roman narrative impacted accounts of divination in the Bavli.

Conclusion

The *bat kol* is a frequent occurrence in the Bavli which does not have an exact precedent in earlier Jewish literature. There are, however, references to a voice (קול) which is removed from the speaker and which is utilized as a revelatory utterance. There are no precedents though for the use of a voice of this sort in divination. It, like other forms of divination which do not have an exact biblical precedent, is in general treated as a permitted form of continuing revelation. Its efficacy is only questioned in a few cases with respect to the determination of halakhah. Overall, it functions most often as a divine revelatory utterance; however, there are a handful of passages in which it functions as a chance utterance. When this occurs, it is generally marked by the phrasing which introduces the *bat kol*. When the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context, it is depicted positively when a rabbi is the recipient of the *bat kol* and negatively in the sole instance in which the recipient is a non-rabbi. By questioning the ability of the *bat kol* to determine halakhah while at the same time depicting its receipt by non-rabbis in a negative light, and by rabbis in a positive one, the *bat kol* is a method through which the rabbis depict divine knowledge as their sole provenance.

The efficacy of the *bat kol* is only questioned in the context of the determination of halakhah and this is due to the fact that other forms of continuing revelation are in tension with the concept that the rabbis had full control of the Oral Torah. In *b. Erub.* 13b, the *bat kol* is the means through which the halakhah is determined to follow Bet

Hillel instead of Bet Shammai as well as the avenue through which the Oral Torah is legitimated. Despite the determination that the halakhah follows Bet Hillel, the *bat kol* authorizes the statements of both houses as the “words of the living God” and hence as continuing revelation by means of Oral Torah. In *b. BM 59a-b* and the texts which quote from it, however, the *bat kol* is explicitly rejected by both R. Joshua and by the narrative as a whole with respect to determining halakhah. This is due to the fact that the possibility of a continuing direct connection with God by means of the *bat kol* is in contradistinction to the concept that the entire Torah, both written and oral, had been given at Sinai and it contradicts the rabbis’ authority as the sole heirs of the Oral Torah.¹⁷¹ This text, rather, argues that the interpretation of the Torah lies entirely in human hands and that any form of continuing revelation no longer has authority to determine halakhah. Thus, the rabbis question the *bat kol*’s efficacy in the realm of the determination of halakhah in order to delegitimize methods of communication with the divine which would rival their status as the sole arbiters of the Oral Torah. This view of the *bat kol*, however, does not necessarily mean that it cannot legitimately function as a divine revelatory utterance in cases where it does not directly determine halakhah nor does it mean that a *bat kol* cannot legitimately function as a chance utterance. And in fact, both of these functions are legitimated in the Bavli.

Aside from questioning the *bat kol*’s efficacy in relation to the determination of halakhah, the only other instance in which it is depicted negatively is when it is received by a non-rabbi in a divinatory context; however, it is depicted positively when received by a rabbi in a divinatory context. By doing this, the rabbis delegitimize the possibility of

¹⁷¹ We saw this tension above in *b. BM 59a-b*, in which the majority held to this concept of the Oral Torah while R. Eliezer allowed for the possibility of other methods of continuing revelation.

a direct connection to the divine realm for non-rabbis while at the same time defining their authority vis-à-vis competing groups. The sole account in the Bavli involving the receipt of a *bat kol* by a non-rabbi is *b. BB 3b*. In this text, while the *bat kol* is not depicted as lying to Herod and its efficacy is not questioned, the entire narrative in which it is contained is constructed in a manner which serves as a warning that oracles are not always what they appear to be and it is up to the interpreter to correctly gauge their meaning and import.

While Herod does in fact “succeed” in obtaining the girl and becomes a free man for a period of time as per the *bat kol*'s statement, throughout the narrative he is depicted as an illegitimate king and the legitimacy of his marriage to a member of the house of the Hasmoneans is questioned. Furthermore, at the end of the narrative he ultimately loses his kingship. Richard Kalmin argues that Babylonian sources tend to negatively depict people claiming Hasmonean descent and that this likely reflects a social reality in which Jews in Babylonian society were claiming Hasmonean descent in order to boost their social position.¹⁷² In fact, certain aspects of this narrative involving Herod parallel the negative depiction of Hasmonean kings elsewhere in the Bavli. For instance, in *b. Ber. 48b*, Yannai is depicted as killing all of the rabbis and then being insulted by Shimon b. Shetah. This is similar to Herod's act of killing all the rabbis but Baba b. Buta and then being tricked by him into tearing down the Temple and rebuilding it while awaiting a response on the matter from the Roman Empire. In each of these cases, someone associated with the Hasmoneans is depicted as being bested by a rabbi. Thus, by delegitimizing Herod as well as others who claim Hasmonean descent, the rabbis are championing their own authority while negatively depicting those who might have

¹⁷² Kalmin, *Sage*, 61-67.

competing claims to authority. Additionally, by questioning the efficacy of the *bat kol* in determining halakhah and negatively depicting its receipt by those who may have competing claims to authority, the rabbis are both delegitimizing the claim that competitors might have access to continuing revelation while at the same time promulgating knowledge, rather than descent, as the proper indicator of suitability to lead the Jewish people.¹⁷³

Furthermore, of particular interest is the fact that in the majority of passages which mention the *bat kol*, whether in a divinatory context or not, the rabbis who receive the *bat kol* are either Tannaim or Amoraim dating to the 3rd or early 4th century CE. There are, however, a few instances which involve 5th century Babylonian Amoraim.¹⁷⁴ In general, both Palestinian and Babylonian Amoraim are named and there does not appear to be any correlation between the chronology or provenance of particular rabbis and the functions of the *bat kol* except when the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context. In those passages, those who receive the *bat kol* tend to be either Tannaim or Amoraim dating to the 3rd or early 4th century CE and are all Palestinian or spent time in Palestine. However, several of these passages are couched in larger narratives in which Babylonian Amoraim dating to the 4th and early 5th century CE are mentioned.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ For example, *b. BB* 73b and *b. Meg.* 29a.

¹⁷⁵ *b. Sanh.* 11a, *b. Sof.* 48b and *b. Yoma* 9b all recite the baraita from *t. Sof.* 13:3-4. In *b. Sof.* 48b, this baraita is cited by R. Nahman b. Isaac, an early 4th cent. Babylonian Amora, in discussion with R. Huna about who constitute the “former prophets.” In *b. Yoma* 9b, however, only the beginning of the baraita is quoted by R. Abba, a 3rd-4th cent. Palestinian Amora who was born in Babylonia in conjunction with Ulla, a 3rd-4th cent. Palestinian Amora, in a response to a narrative about Resh Lakish and Rabbah b. Bar Hanna, two 3rd century Palestinian Amoraim the latter of which was born in Babylonia. The narrative in *b. BB* 73b-74a also involves Rabbah b. Bar Hanna. *b. BB* 3b, *b. Ber.* 3a, and *b. Hag.* 15a-b, the latter of which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter since it also involves bibliomancy, also contain narratives depicting the Tannaitic period. In *b. BB* 3b, however, the context of the narrative is a discussion between Rabina and Rab Ashi, both 4th-early 5th cent. Babylonian Amoraim about R. Hisda, a 3rd-4th cent. Babylonian Amora who cites the tannaitic narrative. In *b. Meg.* 32a, R. Shefatiah relates in the name of R. Yohanan, a 3rd century Palestinian Amora, the biblical justification for the consultation of a *bat kol*. In *b. Sanh.* 94a, R.

The fact that the narratives involving the use of the *bat kol* in a divinatory context almost exclusively involve Palestinian rabbis dating no later than the early 4th century CE is evidence that the use of the *bat kol* in this manner may have primarily been a Palestinian institution which has been preserved in the Bavli.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, the juxtaposition of these Palestinian materials within the context of traditions attributed to later Babylonian Amoraim may be taken as evidence of the manifestation of Palestinian materials in Babylonia from the 4th century CE on.¹⁷⁷ This may also explain the appearance of Greco-Roman motifs in these narratives, which, as we will see in Chapter 5, also occur in conjunction with narratives featuring rabbis dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. As scholars have previously noted, the transmission of material from Palestine to Babylonia in this period was likely hastened by the deportation of subjects from the Eastern Roman Empire by Shapur I into Mesopotamia, Syria and Persia in the mid-3rd century CE.¹⁷⁸ Not only did the deportation by Shapur I bring Jewish Palestinian materials to Babylonia but people and materials from the Eastern Roman Empire. It also brought many Christians to the area and was a contributing factor in the conversion of Armenia and Georgia to Christianity in the early 4th century CE. In addition to the growing Christian population, the 3rd century CE was also witness to the rise of Manichaeism, which, due to Mani's protection by Shapur I, was spreading throughout not only the Sasanian Empire but into the Roman Empire as well. However, both Christianity

Tanhum relates a story in the name of Bar Kappara, a 2nd-3rd cent. Palestinian Amora which Raba or R. Isaac, both 3rd-early 4th cent. Babylonian Amoraim, interprets.

¹⁷⁶ While it is possible that these sources were invented or tampered with by later editors, these sources reflect a general pattern of involvement of Palestinian rabbis in the use of the *bat kol* in a divinatory context. The use of the *bat kol* in a divinatory context is also attested in the Yerushalmi; however, a detailed study of those passages is beyond the scope of this work. This indicates that it is unlikely that the presence of Palestinian rabbis in this context is an invention of the editors of the Bavli.

¹⁷⁷ See Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*.

¹⁷⁸ Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 4-8.

and Manichaeism, along with Judaism, remained minority religions in predominantly Zoroastrian Sasanian Persia. Despite their minority status, it is possible, however, that one reason the rabbis were concerned with the use of the *bat kol* as a means of continuing revelation at this time was due to the claims of both Christianity and Manichaeism to be the final revelation from God.

Chapter IV

Bibliomancy and Cleonomancy

Introduction

This chapter will focus on two types of divination, namely bibliomancy and cleonomancy (other than the *bat kol*), which are related through their reliance on speech acts. Bibliomancy refers to divinatory methods which are based on the interpretation of a biblical verse or verses while cleonomancy refers to divination based on chance utterances which are taken to have meaning independent of the intent of the speaker.¹⁷⁹ Like the *bat kol*, neither of these forms of divination is explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. However, unlike the *bat kol*, there are a few narratives which refer to these forms of divination in Second Temple literature. This chapter will address the distinction the rabbis make between the categories of גזש (“divination”) and סימן (“sign”) since the most explicit passage on this distinction, *b. Hul.* 95a-b, involves two different methods of bibliomancy. It will argue that the rabbis consider bibliomancy and cleonomancy to be within the category סימן and thus not part of the category גזש, which is biblically prohibited, and that in addition to being permitted forms of divination bibliomancy and cleonomancy are always depicted as efficacious.¹⁸⁰ However, the depiction of

¹⁷⁹ See Neusner, *History*, IV.34.

¹⁸⁰ See the discussion of the meaning of these terms in the previous chapter.

bibliomancy which involves the direct request for a verse is problematized when it involves a Palestinian figure, rather than a Babylonian rabbi, and cledonomancy likewise when it is performed by a diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge; however, these forms of divination only have a negative outcome when they are performed by a figure that is not considered part of the category “rabbi.”

Three different methods of bibliomancy and two different methods of cledonomancy are present in rabbinic literature, almost exclusively in the Bavli. The three different methods of bibliomancy consist of opening a book to a random verse,¹⁸¹ obtaining a verse from a child that is then interpreted,¹⁸² or interpreting a verse which randomly came to mind.¹⁸³ The method of using a verse recited by a child takes one of two forms. Either a request is made for the child to recite the last verse that they learned (פסוק לי פסוקיך), or a child happens to be overheard reciting a verse. Within rabbinic literature, all of these bibliomancy techniques are unique to the Bavli with the exception of obtaining a verse from a child. Examples of overhearing a verse also occur in the Yerushalmi and a single example of requesting a child’s last verse occurs in Esther Rabbah. The methods of cledonomancy present in the Bavli consist of interpreting the meaning of the speech of a bird¹⁸⁴ or the last words of a dying man.¹⁸⁵

History of Research

Almost no scholarly research has been devoted to these forms of divination in rabbinic literature. A few scholars have addressed the episode of bibliomancy from the

¹⁸¹ *b. Hul.* 95b.

¹⁸² *b. Hul.* 95b; *b. Hag.* 15a-b; *b. Git.* 56a, 67b-68a; *b. Yoma* 75b.

¹⁸³ *b. Ber.* 55b and 57b.

¹⁸⁴ *b. Git.* 45a.

¹⁸⁵ *b. BB* 58a.

sugya from *b. Hul.* 95b, which will be discussed below.¹⁸⁶ The other passages which will be discussed below have not been addressed in any detail in terms of the form and function of divination which they contain; however, while many of them have been addressed in previous scholarship, it has not been with an explication of these particular forms of divination in mind.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, other scholars have briefly discussed these forms of divination without going into any significant detail concerning either the practices or any of the individual passages in which they are contained.¹⁸⁸

Antecedents from Second Temple Literature

While there are no references to any of these methods of bibliomancy or cledonomanancy in the Hebrew Bible, there are references to one of the methods of bibliomancy in Second Temple literature.¹⁸⁹ There are two references to the method of bibliomancy by means of opening a book to a random verse.¹⁹⁰ The first instance occurs in 1 Macc 3:48 where Judas and his brothers opened the “Book of the Law,” implying the Pentateuch, in order to determine what God wanted them to do about the forthcoming battle against the forces of Antiochus IV. Another reference to the same story occurs in 2 Macc 8:23 where the “Holy Book,” which could have included biblical texts beyond the

¹⁸⁶ Swartz, “Divination,” 158-60; Harari, “Sages,” 548-50; van der Horst, “Sortes”; “Ancient Jewish Bibliomancy,” 13-15; Neusner, *History*, II.137.

¹⁸⁷ For a discussion of *b. Hag.* 15a-b see: Rubenstein, “Elisha ben Abuya”; *Talmudic Stories*, 64-104; Scholem, *Gnosticism*, 14-19; Schäfer, *Hekhalot Studien*, 240-43; Segal, *Two Powers*, 61-63; Morray-Jones, “Hekhalot Literature,” 21; Goshen-Goldstein, *Sinner*, 89-162. For a discussion of *b. Git.* 56a see: Rubenstein, “Bavli Gittin 55b-56a”; *Talmudic Stories*, 139-75; Cohen, “Rabbi Meir”; Bastomsky, “Emperor Nero”; Bacher, *Agada*, II.4-8; Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadah ha-hurban*, 24-28. For a discussion of *b. Git.* 67b-68a see: Heszer, “Slave,” 196-99. For a discussion of *b. Git.* 45a see: Fishbane, “Most Women Engage in Sorcery,” 74-75; Seidel, “Ancient Jewish Magic,” 187-88; Janowitz, *Magic*, 91-92; Ilan, “You Shall Not Suffer a Witch to Live,” 229; Levinson, “Enchanting Rabbis,” 75-83. For a discussion of *b. BB* 58b see: Jacobs, “Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud,” 91-94.

¹⁸⁸ See Neusner, *History*, III.117-18 and IV.341-52; Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 197-98; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic*, 208-18.

¹⁸⁹ It is possible that others may exist; however, they have not been identified in scholarly literature and a detailed study of all of Second Temple literature is beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁹⁰ See van der Horst, “Ancient Jewish Bibliomancy,” 10-12.

Pentateuch such as the Psalms, is likewise consulted with regard to the battle. In each version, bibliomancy serves to inform Judas that God will help him in battle. According to Peter van der Horst, aside from these two instances, all of the other evidence for bibliomancy, not only within Judaism but also Christianity, comes from the 3rd-6th centuries CE.¹⁹¹

Bibliomancy

Three methods of bibliomancy occur in the Bavli, namely, opening a book to a random verse, obtaining a verse from a child which is then interpreted or interpreting a verse which randomly came to mind. The first and last of these methods only occur once in the Bavli, while instances of the use of children in bibliomancy is comparatively much more prevalent.¹⁹² It will be argued that bibliomancy is always depicted as efficacious; however, the method of bibliomancy via a verse requested from a child is problematized when the recipient of the verse involves a Palestinian figure, rather than a Babylonian rabbi. Additionally, this form of bibliomancy is associated with the need for confirmation, either directly or through its use in conjunction with other methods of divination. However, this form of bibliomancy only has a negative outcome in the case where it is performed by a figure that is not considered part of the category “rabbi.” Furthermore, this section will address the distinction between the categories נחש and סימן. It will be argued that the rabbis’ distinction between these categories correlates with methods of divination which they prohibit and permit respectively. The rabbis include those methods of divination which require interpretation into the category of סימן, while

¹⁹¹ van der Horst, “Sortes.”

¹⁹² References to interpreting a verse which randomly came to mind actually occurs in two passages, namely, *b. Ber.* 55b and 57b; however, these are exact parallels of one another.

those which do not necessitate interpretation fall into the category of גזש.¹⁹³ Bibliomancy of any sort would thus be included in the category סימן and permitted.

Children and Prophecy in the Talmud

In the previous chapter, we had discussed a *baraita* which stated that after the deaths of the latter prophets, the *Ruah ha-Kodesh* was removed from Israel, but the sages would still make use of a *bat kol*. A similar type of expression also occurs in the Bavli regarding prophecy after the destruction of the First Temple. In *b. BB* 12a-b, a statement in the name of R. Abdimi from Haifa is quoted and discussed, namely, “From the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the sages.” Following this, a similar statement is given in the name of R. Yohanan which claims that prophecy was given to children and madmen. It and the story that follows reads:

R. Yohanan said, “From the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to madmen and children.” ... What does it mean “to children”? This is like the daughter of R. Hisda who was sitting in the lap of her father and Raba and Rami b. Hama were sitting in front of him. He said to her, “Which of them do you want?” She said to him, “Both of them.” Raba said, “I am last.”

Children have been used as mediums throughout the Mediterranean world. In ancient Greece and Rome, the earliest evidence we have for the use of children as mediums comes from the first century BCE.¹⁹⁴ Children were considered good mediums, i.e. unbiased reporters, because they are unimaginative, relatively closed off to outside

¹⁹³ Harari states that the rabbis derive straight answers to the issue at hand from bibliomancy; however, he does not acknowledge the statement in *b. Hul.* 95b that the answer was not true nor Nero’s interpretation in *b. Git.* 56a nor the misunderstanding of the last verse by Aher in *b. Hag.* 15a-b.

¹⁹⁴ Johnston, “Charming Children,” 98. See also Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 195-98; Brashear, “Greek Magical Papyri,” 3503 and n.51; Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.12.29.

influences and presumed to tell the truth.¹⁹⁵ After R. Yohanan's statement it is asked what it means that prophecy was given "to madmen" and then subsequently what it means that prophecy was given "to children." In all the instances of bibliomancy in the Bavli, it is a boy who is asked for or overheard reciting a verse; however, the particular narrative used in this *sugya* to elucidate how prophecy had been given to children involves a female child. The story involves R. Hisda asking his daughter whether she wants Raba or Rami b. Hama as a husband. His daughter subsequently answers that she wants to marry both of them, to which Raba is quoted as saying that he will be last. And this did in fact occur. While the daughter's answer is simply a statement that she wants to marry both men, the juxtaposition with R. Yohanan's statement by the anonymous author indicates that he intended for her statement to be understood as a prophecy.

Request for a Child's Last Verse

The sole reference to bibliomancy by opening to a random verse as well as one of the most salient examples of bibliomancy by means of requesting a child's last verse occurs in *b. Hul.* 95b. Unlike in the examples that follow, in this narrative, this method of bibliomancy is unconfirmed as well as misinterpreted. The anonymous author, who considers unconfirmed bibliomancy to be unreliable, therefore portrays its use as such in a negative light. This example occurs within a segment of Talmud which comments on the first part of *m. Hul.* 7:2. *m. Hul.* 7 deals with the law of the sinew of the hip (גיד הנשה). This law is based on Gen 32:32-33. According to these verses, because Jacob's hip was wrenched during the struggle with the angel, Israelites are not to eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip. The beginning of *m. Hul.* 7:2, however, states that one may

¹⁹⁵ Johnston, "Charming Children," 107-10.

send this meat to a gentile. The commentary on this Mishnah leads into a dialogue about *terefah* meat. An animal is considered *terefah* if its death was due to injuries or physical defects (that would have ultimately caused its death) no matter whether it was ritually slaughtered before death or not.¹⁹⁶ *Terefah* meat caused by injuries is specifically prohibited in Exod 22:30. In the course of this discussion Rav's views on *terefah* meat are given, which leads into a discussion of when Rav would eat meat (only when it had not been out of sight). What follows is a story about Rav refusing to eat meat, which leads into a discourse about the distinction between the categories נחש "divination," which is prohibited by Lev 19:26, and סימן "sign." The text reads as follows:

- A. Rav was going to the house of R. Hanan, his son-in-law. He saw a ferry-boat coming towards him. He said, "The ferry-boat is coming towards me. It will be a good day because of it." He went and he stood at the door. He examined through the crack of the door. He saw the animal hanging. He knocked at the door. The whole world came out to meet him – even the butchers came. Rav did not raise his eyes from it (the animal). He said to them, "Oh that you would give forbidden [meat] to the children of [my] daughter to eat." Rav did not eat from that meat.
- B. What is the reason? Is it because he lost sight of it? Behold he did not cause [his eyes] to raise. Rather, that he performed נחש.
- C. But did Rav not say, "Any נחש that is not like Eliezer, the servant of Abraham (Gen 24:14), and like Jonathan, son of Saul (1 Sam 14:9-10), is not נחש [as forbidden in Lev 19:26]?"
- D. Rather it was an optional meal and Rav would not derive gratification from an optional meal.
- E. Rav examined by means of a ferry-boat and Samuel examined by means of the book. R. Yohanan examined by means of a school-boy.
- F. During all the years of Rav, R. Yohanan wrote to him, "Our master who is in Babylonia." When his (Rav's) soul rested, he (R. Yohanan) would write to Samuel, "Our colleague who is in Babylonia." He (Samuel) said, "Do I not know of something that I am his master?" He wrote and he sent to him (R. Yohanan) the intercalations of sixty years. He (R. Yohanan) said, "Now he merely knows calculations." He (Samuel) wrote and he sent to him (R. Yohanan) thirteen camel loads of questionable cases of *terefah*. He (R. Yohanan) said, "I have a master in Babylonia. I will go and see him." He said to a school-boy, "Recite for me your verse." He (the school-boy) said to him, "'Now Samuel had died' (1 Sam 28:3)." He (R. Yohanan) said, "Derive from it that the soul of Samuel has left him." But

¹⁹⁶ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Terefah."

it was not so. Samuel had not died. Rather [it was said] in order not to put R. Yohanan to trouble.

G. It was taught: R. Shimon b. Eleazar says, “A house, a child and a woman although not נהש, it is a sign סימן.”

H. Said R. Eleazar, “Only if it was made known three times, as it is written ‘Joseph is no more and Simon is no more and you would take Benjamin’ (Gen 42:36).”

This segment of Talmud consists of four parts, a story about Rav’s refusal to eat meat, Rav’s statement about what constitutes forbidden divination, examples of presumably permitted forms of divination, and the distinction between נהש and סימן. Sections A and B contain a story about Rav and his refusal to eat meat in a case where it has not left his sight. Section A begins with an omen. Rav sees a ferry-boat and pronounces that it is a good day. After the omen of the ferry-boat, Rav went and stood at the door of his son-in-law’s house and he saw an animal hanging there. When everyone came out to meet him, the butchers would have taken their eyes off the meat and the meat could have become impure without their knowing. However, since Rav himself did not lose sight of the meat and knew that it had not become impure it is asked why he did not eat from it. The answer given is that he performed נהש. However, a contradictory statement by Rav himself is then presented which defines נהש in an alternative manner (section C). If one looks at the respective biblical stories mentioned in the statement attributed to Rav, one will see that Eliezer and Jonathan each ask God for a specific sign, which subsequently is given to them and which requires no further interpretation in order to be understood.¹⁹⁷ In

¹⁹⁷ Harari argues that the distinguishing factor is whether or not the event is determined to be taken as an omen before or after its occurrence. If it is predetermined to be an omen it is divination; however, if it is determined to be an omen after the event, it is a “sign.” Thus, he argues that the rabbis distinguish between these categories based on whether one intends to use something for a divinatory purpose. He acknowledges that this distinction is problematic because according to it, “the divination of omens by means of a candle, a hen, or shadows, as R. Ami suggests (b. Hor. 12a), or the interpretation of the howling of dogs (b. BK 60b) would not be included in the category of signs.” Rather, he argues that this is in accordance with the methods prohibited as “Ways of the Amorites” (Harari, “Sages,” 549). I purport that they distinguish between these categories based on whether the event requires interpretation, an argument which does not necessitate a third category which is never directly associated with these methods in the Bavli. Neusner

Gen 24:14 Eliezer asked for a specific sign letting him know who was destined to become the wife of Isaac. In 1 Sam 14:9-10, Jonathan asks for a specific sign in order to know when to attack the Philistines. Rav's statement says that this type of divination is *שׂוֹחֵז* and is prohibited. As can be seen above, Rav's original omen does not involve a request for a particular sign; rather, he sees an omen and then he interprets it. Therefore this is not *שׂוֹחֵז* and so a different answer for his behavior is given, namely, that it was an optional meal (section D).¹⁹⁸

The next subdivision, consisting of sections E and F, contains examples of divination that were practiced by various rabbis including the example that Rav examines a ferry boat, which he did in section A, as well as that Samuel consulted a book. What the text is most likely alluding to in the case of Samuel is the practice of opening a Torah scroll or codex to a random page and choosing a random verse which is then interpreted in order to determine a particular course of action; however, this particular praxis is not spelled out in the text. The methods performed by Rav, Samuel and R. Yohanan provide counter-examples of types of divination which do not fall under the category of *שׂוֹחֵז* and are thus permitted. Like Rav's examination of a ferry boat, one can see a similar distinction between the divination of Eliezer and Jonathan and that of R. Yohanan. While the signs received by Eliezer and Jonathan were not subsequently interpreted, R. Yohanan asks for and receives a child's verse which he does subsequently interpret.

argues that the distinction is that divination "depends upon the happening of a certain event," but omens are not prohibited (Neusner, *History*, III.117). Unlike Harari, he acknowledges that the examples in this text are considered omens.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Swartz posits this to mean that "if an action is performed with the specific intention of generating an answer, then it counts as forbidden divination, but that if one is simply reading signs from one's environment, the practice is allowable" (Swartz, "Divination," 158-59). However, according to this interpretation there would be no difference between the divination performed by Eliezer and Jonathan and that performed by R. Yohanan as I outline below that there is.

In the story, once R. Yohanan was convinced that Samuel was more knowledgeable than he was about *terefah* meat, he wished to see him. Before he set out on his journey he asked a school-boy to recite for him the last verse that he had learned. The purpose of doing so would be in order to determine whether it was prudent to set out on such a dangerous excursion as long distance travel was quite dangerous in those days. The boy proceeded to recite 1 Sam 28:3, ‘Now Samuel had died.’ R. Yohanan interprets this in a straightforward fashion, namely, that Samuel indeed had died and therefore there was no reason for him to go to Babylonia. However, the anonymous editor proceeds to say that it was not true that Samuel had died; rather, the purpose of the omen was simply to ensure that R. Yohanan would not bother himself with the trip.¹⁹⁹

It is possible to understand this statement by the anonymous editor when taken into consideration with the *baraita* and R. Eleazar’s statements in G and H. According to the statement attributed to R. Shimon b. Eleazar, divination by means of a child does not fall under the category of *שנה*, but rather under the category of *סימן*.²⁰⁰ This is followed by an assertion by R. Eleazar that its efficacy is only proven if it was made known three times. A statement about various magical or divinatory elements needing to be proven three times or being related to the number three is not unique here.²⁰¹ For instance, *t. Shab.* 4:9 defines an amulet made by an expert as one that “served to bring healing and

¹⁹⁹ Swartz, based on the statement in *b. Ber.* 55-57 that omens are not always what they appear to be, views this as another example of an omen not being what it appears. R. Yohanan does not learn the truth about Samuel; rather, he is compelled to do what is in his best interests (Swartz, “Divination,” 159-60). However, this interpretation does not take into account the rest of the *sugya*.

²⁰⁰ Harari acknowledges that the category “sign” *סימן* differs from “divination,” but he does not connect this category with the practices mentioned in this text. Rather, he argues that the rabbis consider bibliomancy to be one of the “Ways of the Amorites” despite the fact that it is not explicitly referred to in this manner in the Bavli (Harari, “Sages,” 546-49).

²⁰¹ See Jacobs, “Numbered Sequence,” 138-43 on the use of the number three as a literary device.

did so a second and a third time.”²⁰² Additionally, in *b. Ber.* 55b, it is stated that one can “make good (i.e. remedy) a (bad) dream in the presence of three (people).” So, while this passage may be questioning the efficacy of unconfirmed bibliomancy/omens, the rabbis are not prohibiting the practice while at the same time they are clearly delineating between the categories of נחש and סימן. This appears to be an emic definition of divination which posits the distinction between biblically prohibited and biblically condoned methods of divination in so far as נחש is biblically prohibited while סימן is not.

Of the instances of bibliomancy which entail a request for a child’s verse, *b. Hul.* 95b is the only one which has a parallel of the act of bibliomancy in the Yerushalmi, namely *y. Shab.* 8c. The version in the Yerushalmi is quite different than the Bavli. It portrays the use of this form of bibliomancy in a positive light. As we will see, a comparison of the two versions highlights the polemic of the anonymous narrator in the Bavli who portrays unconfirmed bibliomancy in a negative light. This section of the Yerushalmi follows the commentary on *m. Shab.* 6:10. This Mishnah prohibits going out with a locust’s egg, a jackal’s tooth or a nail of someone who was crucified because this is following the “ways of the Amorites.” After the commentary directly related to this Mishnah is a teaching in the name of R. [E]liezer b. Jacob followed by another by R. Eleazar which are related as follows:

R. [E]liezer b. Jacob taught: “‘You shall not perform divination (תנחשו), you shall not practice soothsaying (תענונו)’ (Lev 19:26). Although there is not נחש there is סימן. And only after three סימני. For example, ‘When I was returning from Padan, Rachel died’ (Gen 48:7). ‘Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more and you [would take] Benjamin, etc.’ (Gen 42:36).” Said R. Eleazar, “They followed after the hearing of a *bat kol*.” What is the basis? ‘Your ears will hear a word from behind you saying, “This is the way, walk in it”’ (Isa 30:21).

²⁰² See also *y. Shab.* 6:2 (8b); Veltri, *Magie*, 169.

This passage appears to be equating סימן with the *bat kol* and saying that נחש is an example of the “ways of the Amorites.” The Tanna, R. [E]liezer b. Jacob, expounding upon Lev 19:26, teaches that even though one should not perform נחש, סימני are permissible.²⁰³ However, it is related that this is only after three סימני happen and two biblical examples are given. R. Eleazar, a 3rd century Palestinian Amora, however, argues that they, which presumably refers to those in the previous biblical examples, followed what they heard from a *bat kol*. So, this passage juxtaposes the Tannitic view that what occurred in these biblical texts was a סימן, with the Amoraic view that it was a *bat kol*. In Gen 48, Joseph makes the trip because he was told that his father was ill (Gen 48:1). Likewise, Jacob says that he heard that grain was in Egypt and that is why he travels there (Gen 42:2). In each case, it is unclear from whom they received their information. Thus, the identification with a *bat kol* makes sense. Following the statement that they followed what they heard from a *bat kol*, the same scriptural basis is cited for the *bat kol* as was given in *b. Meg.* 32a, which was discussed in the previous chapter.²⁰⁴ In both contexts, the verse Isa 30:21 defines the *bat kol* as a chance utterance which one would hear spoken behind him. The fact that it is a chance utterance necessitates that the utterance is not of the form of a predetermined sign which would require no action by the consultant in order to be understood.

Immediately following the above mentioned passage are a series of stories, most of which appear to deal with the following of a *bat kol*. The other parallel to the account in *b. Hul.* 95b occurs in this series.

²⁰³ Most other instances of the discussion of this biblical verse tend to be parallels of the discussion in *b. Sanh.* 68a.

²⁰⁴ In *b. Git.* 67b-68a, a similar verse, namely 2 Sam 2:21 ‘Turn yourself to your right or to your left,’ is the verse which Rav Sheshet receives when he inquires of a child’s verse.

R. Yohanan and R. Shimon b. Laqish desired to see the face of Samuel. They said, “We will follow the hearing of a *bat kol*.” They passed before a hall of studies. They heard the voice of children, “‘And Samuel died’ (1 Sam 25:1).” They took it as a סימן, and thus it was for him.

In this version of the story, both R. Yohanan and R. Shimon b. Laqish wished to see Samuel and the reasoning behind their trip is not stated. They state that they are going to “follow the hearing of a *bat kol*,” in determining whether or not to go on the trip. What they consider a *bat kol* here is an instance of bibliomancy in which they overhear children reciting a random verse and thus it is also a form of cledonomanancy. The text then describes that they took this utterance as a סימן and thus it was for him. Thus, this section of text effectively equates this form of bibliomancy/cledonomanancy with both the *bat kol* and the category סימן.

Several elements occur in both the Yerushalmi and Bavli versions of this narrative; however, there are significant differences in both their placement and their functions, which suggests that the narrative as it exists in the Bavli is either a reworking of the tradition preserved in the Yerushalmi or is based on a different version of the tradition. While both versions of the narrative involve bibliomancy via a child’s verse, the verse is overheard in the Yerushalmi, but deliberately requested in the Bavli. Requesting a child’s last verse for the purpose of bibliomancy does not occur in the Yerushalmi. This form of bibliomancy only occurs in the Bavli and in a single narrative in Esther Rabbah.²⁰⁵ As we will see, unlike the Bavli narrative where R. Yohanan’s bibliomancy is unconfirmed, other passages which involve the request for a child’s verse are confirmed in that they either are performed multiple times or are juxtaposed with other methods of divination, while other methods of bibliomancy are not. Likewise, in the

²⁰⁵ Esther R 7:13.

Yerushalmi, the verse uttered by the children is connected with the *bat kol*, as both can likewise be considered forms of cledonomanancy. While the Bavli does juxtapose the *bat kol* and bibliomanancy in other passages, the *bat kol* is not mentioned in this narrative. This makes sense. Since the method of bibliomanancy used involves the direct request for the child's verse, it is no longer a form of cledonomanancy and thus is not equivalent with the *bat kol*.

Furthermore, while the passages in both the Yerushalmi and the Bavli distinguish between נחש and סימן, state the necessity that the סימן be confirmed three times using Gen 42:36 as proof, and imply that this form of bibliomanancy is a form of סימן, these statements occur in different contexts in each of these narratives. In the Yerushalmi, the distinction between the categories נחש and סימן, the fact that it is only after three occurrences, and the use of Gen 42:36 are given as R. Eliezer b. Jacob's commentary on Lev 19:26. They serve to define what would be permissible forms of divination in contrast to the biblically prohibited category נחש. The narrative of R. Yohanan and R. Shimon b. Laqish is a separate, yet related, narrative in which these two rabbis take a verse they overheard children saying as a סימן that Samuel had died and that they should not bother to make the trip to visit him.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, in this version of the narrative, this sign is said to be true. Thus, in the version in the Yerushalmi, R. Yohanan's and R. Shimon b. Laqish's use of this form of bibliomanancy/cledonomanancy is portrayed in a positive light.

In the Bavli version, however, R. Yohanan, a Palestinian rabbi, is portrayed by the anonymous narrator as misinterpreting a verse which he specifically requested. This, along with the distinction between the categories נחש and סימן and the statement that a

²⁰⁶ While this סימן is not confirmed by three occurrences, the fact that the narrative mentions that they heard the voice of "children" could imply that it was confirmed in this manner due to the multiple voices reciting the verse.

סִימָן must be confirmed three times, is utilized in a different context in order to highlight his mistake. While it is possible that the statement by the anonymous author is given simply to clarify the meaning of the sign for the reader and to explain how R. Yohanan came to acknowledge Samuel as his Rav while explaining why he never called on him, it appears to contradict R. Yohanan's implied understanding of the omen. Furthermore, unlike the depictions of both Samuel in the Yerushalmi and Rav in the Bavli, Samuel in the Bavli narrative had to prove himself to R. Yohanan before he would consider him his master. Neusner takes this to indicate that Samuel was not well known or respected in Palestine.²⁰⁷ While that may be possible, R. Yohanan's questioning of Samuel's knowledge combined with his mistaken interpretation of the omen serves to portray R. Yohanan's use of unconfirmed bibliomancy in a negative light. The fact that R. Yohanan's misinterpretation of the omen is followed by statements about the necessity that a סִימָן be confirmed three times indicates that the author thinks that R. Yohanan was wrong in his interpretation of the omen because unlike the author of the narrative, R. Yohanan considered unconfirmed omens to be reliable. In fact, in the remainder of the passages in which this form of bibliomancy occurs, it either occurs several times or as a secondary confirmatory omen after another method of divination had been performed. However, given that the omen, despite R. Yohanan's incorrect interpretation of it, served to determine the correct manner of action for R. Yohanan, this form of bibliomancy in itself is both efficacious and depicted in a positive manner while R. Yohanan's mistaken interpretation of an unconfirmed instance of bibliomancy appears to be the primary target of negative depiction in this passage.

²⁰⁷ Neusner, *History*, II.137.

Another passage which involves bibliomancy via a child's verse occurs in *b. Hag.* 15a-b.²⁰⁸ In this narrative, the efficacy of this form of bibliomancy is proven through repeated occurrences with the same result; however, it has negative results for the recipient because he is not considered part of the category "rabbi." This section of the Bavli comments on *m. Hag.* 2:1, which limits the study of certain esoteric subjects, namely, the study and discussion of the laws on incest (Lev 18), the Story of Creation (Gen 1-2), Ezekiel's vision of the chariot (Ezek 1-3), and the four matters (the questions: What is above? What is beneath? What was beforetime? And what will be hereafter?). Preceding this story, these and other esoteric subjects are addressed. The immediate context of this story is in the course of expounding the Toseftan passage about the four who entered the *pardes*, *t. Hag.* 2:3. In this story, the four sages Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Abuya (Aher) and R. Akiba entered the *pardes*. The story seems to relate to some sort of esoteric activity.²⁰⁹ An unfortunate fate befell each of the first three sages, and only R. Akiba came out unscathed. The Bavli contains an elaboration and expansion of what happened to the last three sages. The story of what happened to Elisha ben Abuya reads as follows:

- A. Aher cut down the shoots. About him Scripture says, 'Do not give your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt' (Ecc 5:6). What does it mean? He saw Metatron, that authority was given to him to sit [and] to write the merits of Israel. He said, "It is taught that on high there is no sitting and no contention and no backs²¹⁰ and no weariness. Perhaps heaven forbid there are two powers." They took away Metatron and they struck him with sixty rings of fire. They said to him, "What is the reason when you saw him that you did not stand up before him?" Authority was given to him to rub out the merits of Aher. A *bat kol* came forth and said, "'Return you backsliding children' (Jer 3:22) except Aher."

²⁰⁸ Parallels to this passage occur in *y. Hag.* 77b-c and 3 Enoch 16; however, bibliomancy is not used in those versions of the narrative.

²⁰⁹ This study is not concerned with the exact nature of the esoteric activity within the פירדס; rather, it is concerned with the use of bibliomancy solely in the Aher portion.

²¹⁰ Rashi; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1059 states that "no backs" means that everything is in sight.

- B. He (Aher) said, “Since I have been banished from that world (the world to come), let me go out to enjoy this world.” Aher went out to evil ways [lit. evil growths]. He went out, he found a prostitute, he demanded her. She said to him, “Are you not Elisha b. Abuyah?” He tore loose a radish from the bed on the Sabbath and he gave it to her. She said, “It is another (אחר).”
- C. After he went out to evil ways, Aher asked R. Meir, “What is [the aggadic teaching that can be derived from] what is written, ‘Also God made this corresponding to this’ (Eccl 7:14)?” He said to him, “Everything that the Holy One Blessed Be He created, he created one corresponding to it. He created mountains, he created hills, he created seas, he created rivers.” He said to him, “R. Akiba, your master, did not say thus. Rather, he created righteous men, he created wicked men, he created the garden of Eden, he created Gehinom. Everyone has two parts, one in the Garden of Eden and one in Gehinom. The righteous man, having been declared innocent, takes his portion and the portion of his associate in the Garden of Eden. The wicked man, being guilty, takes his portion and the portion of his associate in Gehinom.” R. Mesharsheya said, “What is the scriptural proof? With regard to righteous men it is written, ‘therefore in their land they will possess double’ (Isa 61:7). With regard to wicked men it is written, ‘Break them with double breaking’ (Jer 17:18).”
- D. After he went out to evil ways, Aher asked R. Meir, “What is [the aggadic teaching that can be derived from] what is written, ‘Gold and glass cannot equal it nor can the exchange of it be vessels of fine gold’ (Job 28:17)?” And he said to him, “These are words of Torah which are hard to acquire like vessels of gold and vessels of fine gold, but easy to destroy like vessels of glass.” He said to him, “R. Akiba, your master, did not say thus. Rather, just as vessels of gold and vessels of glass, even though they are broken, have a remedy, so also a Torah scholar, even though he has sinned, he has a remedy.” He said to him, “[Then] you also repent [lit. return].” He said to him, “Already I heard from behind the curtain, “Return you backsliding children’ (Jer 3:22) except Aher.””
- E. Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that Aher was riding on a horse on the Sabbath and R. Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah from his mouth. He (Aher) said to him, “Meir, turn around, for already I measured with the hooves of my horse. Until here is the Sabbath limit.” He (Meir) said to him, “Also you turn around (i.e. repent).” He (Aher) said to him, “Did I not already say to you that I already heard from behind the curtain, “Return you backsliding children’ (Jer 3:22)—except Aher.””
- F. He (Meir) seized him and took him to a school-house. He (Aher) said to a school-boy, “Recite for me your verse.”²¹¹ He (the school-boy) said to him, “‘There is no peace, said God, for the wicked’ (Isa 48:22).” He (Meir) took him to another synagogue. He (Aher) said to a school-boy, “Recite for me your verse.” He (the school-boy) said to him, “‘Though you wash with natron and you use much lye, your sin is stained before me’ (Jer 2:22).” He (Meir) took him to another synagogue. He (Aher) said to a school-boy, “Recite for me your verse.” He (the school-boy) said to him, “‘And you, who are ruined, what are you doing that you

²¹¹ Munich 95, Vatican 134 and Cambridge TS F2(1), 204 read: שמעיה לההוא ינוקא דקרי “He heard a certain school boy read.”

wear scarlet, that you ornament yourself with ornaments of gold, that you make your eyes large with powder? You beautify yourself in vain, etc.’ (Jer 4:30).” He (Meir) took him to another synagogue until he took him to thirteen synagogues. All of them recited for him in this same manner. To the last one (school-boy), he (Aher) said to him, “Recite for me your verse.” He (the school-boy) said to him, “‘To the wicked (ולרשע) God said, what have you done to recount my statutes, etc.’ (Ps 50:16)?” That school-boy was stumbling over his tongue. It sounded like he said to him, ‘To Elisha (ולאלישע) God said.’ There are some who say that there was a knife with him (Aher) and he tore him (the school-boy) [into pieces] and sent him to thirteen synagogues. And there are some who say that he said, “If I had a knife in my hand I would have torn him [to pieces].”

- G. When the soul of Aher rested, they said, “Let him not be judged and let him not enter the World to Come. Let him not be judged because he was engaged in Torah and let him not enter the World to Come because he sinned.” R. Meir said, “It is better that he be judged and enter the World to Come. When I die I will raise smoke from his grave.” When the soul of R. Meir rested, smoke rose from Aher’s grave. R. Yohanan said, “Is it a mighty [deed] to burn one’s master? One was among us and we were not able to save him? If I were to hold his hand, who would tear him away from me?” He said, “When I die, I will extinguish the smoke from his grave.” When the soul of R. Yohanan rested, the smoke ceased from the grave of Aher. A certain hired mourner began about him, “Even the gatekeeper could not stand before you, our master.”
- H. The daughter of Aher came before Rabbi. She said to him, “My master, support me.” He said to her, “Whose daughter are you?” She said to him, “I am the daughter of Aher.” He said to her, “Are there still his descendants in the world? Behold it is written, ‘He has no offspring and no progeny among his people and there is no survivor in his dwelling-place’ (Job 18:19).” She said to him, “Remember his Torah and do not remember his deeds.” Immediately fire came down and singed the bench of Rabbi. Rabbi wept and said, “If it is so on account of those who disgrace her, how much the more so on account of those who praise her.”
- I. But how did R. Meir learn Torah from the mouth of Aher? Behold Rabbah b. Bar Hana said R. Yohanan said, “What is [the aggadic teaching that can be derived from] what is written, ‘For the lips of the priest should keep knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth. For he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts’ (Mal 2:7)? If the teacher is like the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, they should seek Torah from his mouth, but if not, they should not seek Torah from his mouth.” Resh Lakish said, “R. Meir found a verse and he expounded, ‘Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise and direct your heart to my knowledge’ (Prov 22:17). It does not say ‘to their knowledge’ but ‘to my knowledge.’” R. Hanina said, “[Deduce it] from here, ‘Listen, daughter, and consider and incline your ear and forget your people and the house of your father, etc.’ (Ps 45:11).” The verses contradict each other. There is no contradiction. This one is about an adult and this one about a child. When R. Dimi came, he said, “In the West, they say R. Meir ate the half-ripe date and threw the peel away.”

- J. Raba expounded, “What is [the aggadic teaching that can be derived from] what is written, ‘I went down to the garden of nuts to see the fresh greens of the torrent valley, etc.’ (Song 6:11)? Why are Torah scholars compared to nuts? To tell you that just as this nut, even though soiled with mud and filth, whatever is inside it is not repulsive, so also a Torah scholar, even though he sinned, his Torah is not repulsive.”
- K. Rabbah b. Shila found Elijah. He said to him, “What is the Holy One Blessed Be He doing?” He said to him, “He says traditions from the mouths of all the rabbis, but from the mouth of R. Meir he does not say [traditions].” He said to him, “Why? Because he learned traditions from the mouth of Aher?” He said to him, “Why? R. Meir found a pomegranate. He ate its inside and threw away its peel.” He said to him, “Now he says, ‘Meir my son says, “When a man suffers, what expression does the Shekhinah say? ‘My head is heavy, my arm is heavy.’”’” If the Holy One Blessed Be He suffers so on account of the blood of the wicked, how much the more so over the blood of the righteous that is shed.

This portion of the Bavli seeks to interpret the enigmatic statement from the Tosefta that upon entering the פֶּרֶדֶס (“garden” or “Paradise”) Aher cut down the shoots. The narrative in the Bavli begins to define what this means by associating the verse ‘Do not give your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt’ (Eccl 5:6) with Aher and then showing how he fulfilled that verse. Aher saw Metatron sitting and writing the merits of Israel and he erred in stating “Perhaps heaven forbid there are two powers,” a doctrine which is contrary to the concept of monotheism.²¹² Whether this statement was purposefully said or he unwittingly erred in saying it, the mere statement of this doctrine was what led him to go out to evil ways. In other words, his mouth led him to sin.²¹³ On account of his statement Metatron is punished and is subsequently permitted to erase the merits of Aher. In this narrative, the *bat kol* states that all can repent with the exception of Aher, thus confirming the punishment inflicted upon him by Metatron.²¹⁴ By disallowing him from

²¹² Allowing Metatron to remove the merits of Aher implies that Aher is excommunicated from the community because Metatron is the recorder of Israel’s merits (Murray-Jones, “Hekhalot Literature,” 21).

²¹³ Goshen-Gottstein, *Sinner*, 92; Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 70. Segal argues that not only did Aher unwittingly err in saying these words, but he was horrified by the possibility that there were two powers in heaven and that was the cause of his exclamation (Segal, *Two Powers*, 61).

²¹⁴ Murray-Jones, “Hekhalot Literature,” 21.

repentance, the *bat kol* leaves Aher thinking that he has been banished from the World to Come, so he might as well enjoy himself in this world by engaging in sinful acts. Thus, his actual sinful acts, by means of which he bounds himself off from the category “rabbi,” while partially the result of his stating the doctrine of two powers, ultimately result from his being disallowed repentance for his statement.²¹⁵

After Aher goes out to engage in sinful acts, he questions R. Meir about a certain aggadic teaching. Despite the fact that it is Aher asking R. Meir questions, it is R. Meir who learns the correct interpretation of Torah from the apostate Aher in the name of R. Akiba.²¹⁶ On account of his superiority in Torah, R. Meir tells Aher to repent; however, Aher thinks this is futile based on the *bat kol*. This is juxtaposed with another account in which Aher’s superior knowledge of Torah is displayed. In this narrative, R. Meir was following Aher riding on a horse on the Sabbath and learning Torah from him. When they reached the limits of the Sabbath, i.e. 200 cubits from one’s dwelling place,²¹⁷ Aher expressed concern that Meir not sin by following him and told him to turn around. In turn R. Meir told Aher that he too should return, i.e. repent.²¹⁸ Aher then says that that he cannot repent, having heard thus from “behind the curtain” – referring to the statement made by the *bat kol*. R. Meir, not believing this to be the case, proceeds to drag Aher to a school-house hoping to obtain an omen through bibliomancy which would contradict Aher’s belief that he cannot repent.

²¹⁵ Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 72.

²¹⁶ Rubenstein argues that despite the fact that Aher’s merits were erased by Metatron, he continues to earn indirect merit through teaching Torah to Meir (Rubenstein, *Rabbinic Stories*, 98).

²¹⁷ *m. Shab.* 24:5; *m. Erub.* 4:3, 5:7.

²¹⁸ Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 76.

In this narrative, bibliomancy does not counter Aher's belief as R. Meir desires; rather, it serves to confirm the statement of the *bat kol* thirteen times over.²¹⁹ In the first school-house, Aher asks a school-boy to recite the last verse that he learned, and the verse given equates Aher with the wicked. Meir, not being satisfied with this result, takes Aher to another school-house. In this case, the verse equates Aher with a sinner. Meir, still unsatisfied, proceeds to take Aher to a total of thirteen synagogues in order to obtain omens.²²⁰ When they reach the last synagogue, the child asked to recite a verse stutters and appears to pronounce ולרשע "to the wicked" as ולאלישע "to Elisha." Additionally, unlike the other verses, this verse 'To the wicked God said, what have you done to recount my statutes, etc.' (Ps 50:16) is the only one to insinuate that not only is Elisha unable to repent, but that one should not learn Torah from him either.²²¹

While Aher is ultimately redeemed after his death by R. Meir and his other disciples and thus brought back into the rabbinic fold, it is while Aher is not considered part of the category "rabbi" that bibliomancy is performed. In this passage, these multiple instances of bibliomancy are not depicted in a negative light; however, the fact that it was performed multiple times indicates that at least R. Meir, who brought Aher to each of the synagogues, thought that it needed to be performed multiple times in order to confirm the results. This is in accord with the statements of the anonymous editor in the previous passage. While bibliomancy itself is not depicted in a negative light in this passage, though it does require confirmation, it is used to reinforce the negative aspects of the

²¹⁹ Rubenstein, "Elisha ben Abuya," 189; *Talmudic Stories*, 76.

²²⁰ Multiple confirmatory omens, at least one of which involves the request for a child's verse, also occur in *b. Git.* 56a, 67b-68a and *Esther R* 7:13. While *Esther R* also involves the request for several children's verses, though in that case the children are all readily available in the same location, in *b. Git.* 56a and 67b-68a, the request for a child's verse serves as confirmation for a previous type of divination, belomancy and snorting as an omen respectively. See Jacobs, "Numbered Sequence," 146-48 for the use of the number thirteen as a literary device in the Bavli.

²²¹ Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 76.

depiction of Elisha b. Abuyah. Both the nickname given to him, Aher, as well as the use of bibliomancy in this narrative serve to distance him as אחר “other,” and bound him off from the rabbis in life. This is especially so since it is only in the bibliomancy verses that Aher’s knowledge of Torah is rejected, which has negative consequences for his disciple Meir until the end of the narrative when God begins to recite traditions in his name. In other words, the use of bibliomancy in this narrative questions whether one can learn from a sinning sage.²²²

In another narrative, *b. Git.* 56a, bibliomancy is neither used as a confirmatory omen nor is it confirmed through multiple uses; rather, it is combined with another form of divination in order to give a broader perspective of the future. This section of Talmud comments on part of *m. Git.* 5:6, which leads into a story about the destruction of Jerusalem. Contained in this story is an account of three actions which Caesar takes against the Jews.²²³ The first thing he did was to send a blemished calf to determine whether the Jews were in fact revolting. Since the rabbis do not sacrifice the blemished calf, he infers that they are in fact revolting and sends Nero against them. Nero uses various methods of divination in order to determine if he will be successful in his actions against Jerusalem; however, he determines not to take up action against Jerusalem, so Caesar sent Vespasian, who besieged Jerusalem for three years. The section of the narrative involving Nero and divination reads as follows:²²⁴

A. He (Caesar) sent against them Caesar Nero. As he was coming, he cast an arrow to the east—it arrived and fell in Jerusalem. [He cast an arrow] to the west—it

²²² Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 71.

²²³ It is unclear to whom the term Caesar refers in this context since the Emperor at the time depicted would be Nero himself; however, it would be odd for him to send himself and Nero would be unable to send Vespasian against Jerusalem if he ran off and became a proselyte.

²²⁴ While other sections of this narrative have parallels elsewhere in rabbinic literature, the Nero narrative is unique to the Bavli account of this story.

arrived and fell in Jerusalem. [He cast an arrow] to [each of] the four directions of the heavens—it (each) came and fell in Jerusalem.

- B. He (Nero) said to a school-boy, “Recite for me your verse.” He (the school-boy) said to him, “‘I will give my vengeance on Edom by the hand of my people Israel, etc.’ (Ezek 25:14).” He (Nero) said, “The Holy One Blessed Be He, desires to destroy his house, and he desires to wipe his hands on that man (me)!”
- C. He fled and went and he became a proselyte, and R. Meir came out from him.

In both the first and second scenes, Nero uses different divinatory methods to determine if his military venture will be successful. Using divination to determine success in battle was a fairly standard practice in the Mediterranean world. For example, Saul, in 1 Sam 28, consulted a necromancer in order to determine if his next venture against the Philistines would be successful. Additionally, in Rome, the method of extispicy was used to determine if the gods were pleased with a proposed military endeavor. If they were not, often the practice was repeated until a positive omen was received.²²⁵ In our story, Nero first used the method of belomancy. He shot an arrow towards the east to determine if in fact it was divinely decreed that Jerusalem should be destroyed. Then he shot an arrow to the west and then one in each of the four directions of the compass in order to confirm this.

In the second scene, Nero consulted a different divinatory method, bibliomancy, in order to determine if he himself would be successful in battle. He asked a child to recite the last verse he learned. The child replied with Ezek 25:14. When one equates the biblical nation of Edom with Rome²²⁶ the verse seems to imply that Rome (or its representative) will be destroyed by the Israelites. Nero then combines the two omens and interprets them as meaning that it is divine will that Jerusalem will be destroyed, but if he

²²⁵ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Divination: Greek and Roman Divination.”

²²⁶ Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 151; Bastomsky, “Emperor Nero,” 321.

himself were the one to lead the battle against Jerusalem, he would be destroyed.²²⁷ It is then related that on account of these omens, Nero fled, became a proselyte and that R. Meir was a descendant of him, indicating that his decision received divine approval.²²⁸

This passage appears to be a unique version of the myths circulating after Nero's death that he did not actually commit suicide but that he fled to the East and will come back again, the Nero *redivivus* legend.²²⁹ This version, unlike the others in circulation, connects Nero's flight with Jerusalem, a place which historically he did not visit, and his lineage with R. Meir, a prominent rabbi. The question is why the author of this narrative might have associated Nero with both of these things. There are a few instances in which Nero has been connected with Jerusalem in literature. *Sib.* IV.116-36 contains two accounts of the Nero *redivivus* legend in between which is sandwiched a reference in lines 122-24 to either Vespasian or Titus destroying the Temple. It is possible that the legend of Nero visiting Jerusalem came about as a misattribution of these lines to Nero.²³⁰ This, however, seems unlikely as a direct source for the tradition in the Bavli since the Talmudic narrative does not contain any of the other elements common to the Nero *redivivus* narratives that are found in *Sib.*, such as the murder of his mother Agrippina, his claim to be God, his favor of the East or his construction of the canal at the isthmus of Corinth.²³¹ Another connection occurs in Suetonius who relates that some

²²⁷ Rubenstein views the use of bibliomancy here as a way of confirming the ambiguity of belomancy (Rubenstein, "Bavli Gittin 55b-56b," 28-29; *Talmudic Stories*, 151); however, he fails to take into account the fact that Nero is depicted as combining the two omens which individually have different meanings.

²²⁸ Rubenstein, "Bavli Gittin 55b-56b," 29; *Talmudic Stories*, 152.

²²⁹ Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadot ha-ḥurban*, 25. On Nero's suicide see: Dio, *Histories*, 63.29.2; Josephus, *J.W.* 4.9.2 and 4.493. On the notion that Nero did not actually die, but hid see: Augustine, *City of God*, XX.19. On people falsely claiming to be Nero after his death see: Dio, *Histories*, 63.9.3 and 66.19.3.

²³⁰ Bastomsky, "Emperor Nero," 323-24.

²³¹ Kreitzer, "Hadrian," 98.

astrologers told Nero that he would rule the East and in particular Jerusalem.²³² A third connection occurs within rabbinic literature; however, it is outside the Bavli. In Midrash Tehillim 79, the belomancy mentioned in Ezek 21:26 is applied to Nebuchadnezzar. Like in the Nero account, Nebuchadnezzar is said to have shot an arrow in four directions, including Jerusalem and this is how he knew that he would be successful in destroying Jerusalem. The Bavli narrative is utilizing the same technique and applying it to Nero. However, since Midrash Tehillim post-dates the Bavli, either it is drawing on the Bavli or both texts are drawing on an earlier source. In either case, these texts are attributing the act to one of these two particular kings since each is responsible for the destruction of one of the Jewish Temples.²³³

Various opinions have been recounted as to why R. Meir is depicted as descended from Nero. One suggestion is that it is likely due to a pun on *ner* and *meir* along with the fact that Meir's patronymic is never given.²³⁴ However, the Bavli utilizes a motif in which an "evil gentile" is the ancestor of noteworthy Jews.²³⁵ The Bavli often describes the victory over Jewish enemies not as a physical victory, but rather as a spiritual one, with Judaism triumphing over them.²³⁶ For instance, *b. Git.* 57b relates a baraita in which the descendants of Haman, the enemy of Esther and Mordecai, learned Torah in Benai Berak and the descendants of Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army in Judg 4:2-3,

²³² Suet., *Nero* 40.

²³³ Bastomsky, "Emperor Nero," 321; Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadot ha-hurban*, 25.

²³⁴ Jacobs, "How Much," 59 n.45; Bacher, *Agada*, 2:5-6 esp. n.6; Cohen argues that the name Meir is of Phrygian, i.e. Anatolian, origin equivalent to Μείρος/Μίρος and that he, as opposed to another rabbi, is linked to Nero because Meir is linked to the area where Nero allegedly killed himself at the end of his life (Cohen, "Rabbi Meir," 55-56); however, there is no association of R. Meir with Anatolia elsewhere in rabbinic literature.

²³⁵ See Bastomsky, "Emperor Nero," 322-23; Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadot ha-hurban*, 25. Within rabbinic literature, this motif only occurs in the Bavli. A similar motif, however, occurs in Dan 2:46ff., another piece of Babylonian Jewish literature, where Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the Jewish God.

²³⁶ Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadot ha-hurban*, 25.

taught children in Jerusalem, and the descendants of Sennacherib, who destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, publically taught Torah. This story of Nero is based on a view that Israel's enemies convert and their descendants become part of Israel. An example is the narrative of Nevuzaradan, in *b. Sanh.* 96b=*b. Git.* 57b, who converted after killing hundreds of thousands of Jews.²³⁷

Thus, bibliomancy is depicted in a positive light in this narrative and is efficacious for Nero in that it prevents him from taking a course of action that would be detrimental to him and furthermore he becomes a proselyte from whom a well respected rabbi is descended. And not only is Nero depicted as the ancestor of a prominent rabbi, but he is also depicted as acting like a rabbi in his use of bibliomancy. By using bibliomancy he already recognizes the authority that the Hebrew Bible has as a means though which one can uncover hidden knowledge. Furthermore, Nero is the only non-rabbi in the Bavli who is depicted as using the Hebrew Bible for divinatory purposes. By depicting Nero as accepting the authority of the Hebrew Bible by means of bibliomancy, as well as depicting him as the ancestor of a prominent rabbi, the rabbis are utilizing bibliomancy in this narrative in the opposite manner as they did with Aher, i.e. the use of bibliomancy in this narrative is serving as a means by which to rabbinize Nero. As we will see in the following chapter on necromancy, there is another instance in which divination is used by a prominent proselyte.

Unlike the passages discussed above which involve figures from or in connection with Palestine, the other instance of bibliomancy by means of the request for a child's last verse in the Bavli, namely *b. Git.* 67b-68a, involves a Babylonian rabbi. This section of

²³⁷ Bacher, *Agada*, 2:5 n.6. See also Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories* 352 n.48; Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadot ha-hurban*, 25.

Talmud comments on *m. Git.* 7:1. The subject of the Mishnah is whether a *get* (bill of divorce) is valid if a *kordiakos* (a man whose mental or moral capacity has been afflicted by a pathogenic demon) pronounces it.²³⁸ This Talmud section begins by discussing what exactly is a *kordiakos*, followed by a discussion of remedies for it. This is then followed by two stories involving the household of the Exilarch (the head of the Jews in Babylonia). The first story relates what members of the household of the Exilarch would do when they wanted to annoy R. Amram the Pious. The second story relates a situation where the Exilarch asks Rav Sheshet to dine with him, but Rav Sheshet refuses because he believes the servants of the Exilarch to be unreliable because of their having been suspected of removing a limb from a live animal (i.e. not properly slaughtering an animal before using its meat). This story consists of three parts. The first part is a discussion of the unreliability of the Exilarch's servants. This is followed by the servants' two attempts on Rav Sheshet's life. The servants thought that they could kill him in the ways they attempt because Rav Sheshet was blind.²³⁹ In their first attempt they try to choke him with a piece of bone, but he felt it and thwarted their attempt. In their second attempt they tried to cause him to fall into a pit upon leaving the Exilarch's household, but their plans were thwarted through Rav Sheshet's recourse to bibliomancy. After the second attempt on Rav Sheshet's life, a discussion ensues between him and R. Hisda concerning how he knew about the second attempt. The text reads as follows:

- A. The Exilarch said to Rav Sheshet, "What is the reason the master does not dine with us?" He said to him, "Because the servants, who are suspected of [severing] a limb from a living animal, are not reliable." He said to him, "Who is to say [that this is true]?" He said to him, "Now I will show you." He said to his servant, "Go. Steal. Bring to me one leg from a living animal." He brought it to him. He said to them, "Arrange before me the limbs of the animal." They brought three legs. They

²³⁸ See Rainbow, "Derivation of *kordiakos*."

²³⁹ *b. Ber.* 58a.

placed them before him. He said to them, “Was this [animal] three legged?” Cutting off [a leg from an animal] they brought one from elsewhere. They placed [it] before him. He said to his servant, “Also place your [leg that you stole].” He brought it. He said to them, “Was this [animal] five legged?” He (the Exilarch) said to him (Rav Sheshet), “If so, let them make [food] in the presence of the master and let him eat.” He said to him, “Very well.”

- B. They brought a table before them and they brought before him (Rav Sheshet) meat and they placed before him a portion that can choke the unseeing [lit. that chokes the mother-in-law]. He felt it and took it. He wrapped it in his scarf. After eating they said to him, “A cup of silver was stolen from us.” While they were searching, they found that he wrapped it (the meat) in his scarf. They said to him (the Exilarch), “See, master, he did not want to eat; rather, [he wanted] to vex us.” He said to them, “I surely ate but I tasted in it the taste of a leperous [animal].” They said to him, “A leperous [animal] was not made for us today.” He said to them, “Examine in the place [from which this portion was taken], for R. Hisda said a black spot on white skin and a white spot on black skin is a disease.” Examining they found it.
- C. As he (Rav Sheshet) was going out, they (the servants) dug a pit for him and they threw a reed mat over it, and they said to him, “Come, master, and rest.” R. Hisda snorted to him from behind him. He (Rav Sheshet) said to a school-boy, “Recite for me your verse.” He (the school-boy) said to him, “‘Turn yourself to your right or to your left’ (2 Sam 2:21).” He (Rav Sheshet) said to his attendant, “What do you see?” He (his servant) said to him (Rav Sheshet), “A reed-mat which was thrown.” He (Rav Sheshet) said, “Turn away from it.”
- D. After he (Rav Sheshet) went out, R. Hisda said to him, “How did you know, master?” He (Rav Sheshet) said to him, “For one thing, because [my] master snorted to me. And also because a school-boy recited a verse to me. And also because servants are suspect because they are not reliable.”

The third part of the story, which is what we are concerned with, consists of two scenes, namely, the attempt on Rav Sheshet’s life inside the abode of the Exilarch and his conversation with R. Hisda after he has gone outside. Like in the story above in *b. Git.* 56a, the story at hand contains two different omens; however, here, the first omen is subsequently confirmed through bibliomancy as bibliomancy confirmed the *bat kol* in *b. Hag.* 15a-b. After the servants created the hidden pit and called to Rav Sheshet so that he would walk over it and fall into the pit, R. Hisda, who apparently was outside the Exilarch’s house, snorted to Rav Sheshet. Rav Sheshet took this as an omen that the servants were up to no good, so he confirmed his suspicion through bibliomancy. He

asked a school-boy, who also was apparently outside the Exilarch's house, to recite for him the last verse that he learned. He recited the verse from 2 Sam 2:21, 'Turn yourself to your right or to your left.' Rav Sheshet took this verse as a sign that he should examine what was to his right and left and so he asked his attendant what he saw, and he informed him of the pit.

After Rav Sheshet left the home of the Exilarch, R. Hisda asked him how he knew that the servants had devised a scheme to kill him. He answers that it was because of the two omens, along with his knowledge about the character of the servants. Thus, in this passage we see bibliomancy being used as a secondary confirmatory omen. Furthermore, we see that it is depicted in a positive light and that it is proved efficacious for Rav Sheshet, a Babylonian Amora.

As we have seen, all of the instances in which bibliomancy via the request for a verse is used in the Bavli, it is associated with confirmation. In *b. Hul.* 95b, the narrative portrays R. Yohanan's mistaken interpretation of unconfirmed bibliomancy in a negative light due to the fact that he is depicted as considering unconfirmed bibliomancy reliable, in contrast to the anonymous author who considers it unreliable. In *b. Hag.* 15a-b, bibliomancy serves to confirm the statement of the *bat kol* that Aher is unable to repent and is itself confirmed thirteen times over indicating that R. Meir thought that confirmation was necessary. In *b. Git.* 56b, Nero is depicted as combining the omens from belomancy and bibliomancy in order to fully explicate his circumstances. And in *b. Git.* 67b-68a, Rav Sheshet utilizes bibliomancy in order to confirm R. Hisda's snort.

In each of these passages, bibliomancy is efficacious; however, it does not always have a positive outcome. While it is both efficacious and has a positive outcome for Rav

Sheshet, a Babylonian rabbi, the other passages all involve Palestinian figures, two of which are depicted negatively and the other positively. In *b. Hul.* 95b, while R. Yohanan's interpretation does serve to keep him from bothering with a trip from the Land of Israel to Babylonia, he interprets it incorrectly and on account of this the anonymous author portrays his use of unconfirmed bibliomancy negatively. In *b. Hag.* 15a-b, the use of bibliomancy along with the nickname אחר, serves to distance Elisha ben Abuyah as an אחר "other," and to bound him off from the rabbis during his lifetime. However, the narrative in *b. Git.* 56b serves to rabbinize Nero, who accepts the authority of the Hebrew Bible by his very recourse to bibliomancy. It does so both through his use of this form of divination along with the fact that he is depicted as the ancestor of a prominent rabbi. Thus, when bibliomancy of this form is either not directly associated with confirmation or it is utilized by a figure whom the rabbis desire to depict as an "other," the person utilizing it is depicted negatively; however, bibliomancy itself is depicted positively and is always efficacious.

Overhearing a Child's Verse

While in the previous examples a rabbi specifically requested a verse from a child, in the following passage in *b. Yoma* 75b we will see an instance in which a rabbi simply overhears a child's verse which is then interpreted by the rabbi in terms of his own circumstances. Thus in the passage under discussion in this section, the child's recitation of a verse functions as a sort of cledonancy. There are also other passages in which a rabbi overhears a child's verse, but they are not a form of cledonancy; rather, the overhearing of the verse is simply the vehicle which permits the exegesis of the

verse.²⁴⁰ In this passage, a child's verse is cited as the reason why one day a particular action was not performed for Raba, the student of Rav Hisda. It reads as follows:

It is written שליו and we read סליו. R. Hanina said, "Righteous men eat it at ease, wicked men eat it and it is like thorns to them." R. Hanan b. Raba said, "There are four kinds of quail (סליו) and these are שיכלי and partridge and pheasant and שליו. The best of all of them is שיכלי. The worst of all of them is שליו and it is like a small bird. We place it in an oven and it swells and it fills the oven. And we place it upon 13 loaves of bread and the lowest [loaf] cannot be eaten except by means of combination [with some other food]. Rav Judah would find it among the jars. Rav Hisda would find it among the twigs. To Raba his laborer would bring [it] every day. One day he did not bring [it]. He (Raba) said, "What is [the reason for] this?" He went up to the roof. He heard a child that said, "'I heard and my body quivered' (Hab 3:16)." He said, "Deduce from it that the soul of Rav Hisda rested. And because of the master, the student eats."

In the course of a discussion of types of סליו ("quail"), it is mentioned how three different rabbis obtained it. While it is related that Rav Judah would find it among his jars and Rav Hisda would find it among the twigs, Raba would be brought it on a daily basis by his laborer. A narrative is then related about one day when Raba's laborer failed to bring it to him. When this happened, Raba, questioning the reason for it, went up to a roof and overheard a child say 'I heard and my body quivered' (Hab 3:16). Raba interpreted this verse as meaning that Rav Hisda had died and also deduced that it was on account of Rav Hisda, his master, that he had been receiving quail.²⁴¹ So, here we see Raba overhearing a chance instance of a child reciting a verse, which is therefore both a form of bibliomancy and cledonomancy, and interpreting it in terms of the current question preoccupying him, namely, why his servant did not bring him any quail that day. It appears as though Raba's laborer had been obtaining the quail that he brought to Raba on account of the merit of Rav Hisda and after he passed away, the laborer was no longer able to obtain any and thus he brought none. In this case, bibliomancy/cledonomancy is

²⁴⁰ *b. Hag.* 5a and *b. Sanh.* 111b.

²⁴¹ Rashi.

depicted in a positive manner and is efficacious in that it allows Raba to understand not only why he is no longer obtaining quail but also its source.

Random Verse Coming to Mind

While the abovementioned passages all involve obtaining a verse from another individual, another brief passage from the Bavli Dreambook allows for the possibility that a verse which arises internally could be used for bibliomancy. *b. Ber. 55b=b. Ber. 57b* relates in the name of R. Yohanan that “If one rises early and a verse falls into his mouth, behold this is a minor prophecy.” While no particular praxis is related in this text, it appears that if a verse randomly comes to mind upon waking, it may be used for bibliomancy by the person who thinks of it. Also, due to the fact that it is a chance utterance which comes to mind, this method may also be considered a form of cledonomancy. We do not see any praxis of this method either here or elsewhere in the Bavli; however, this statement portrays this method positively and indicates that it would be efficacious for one who utilizes it.

This method of bibliomancy, as well as that in which a child’s verse happens to be overheard, can be considered a form of cledonomancy since both involve chance utterances. Both of these methods of bibliomancy are depicted positively, efficaciously, and those who utilize them are likewise depicted positively. This is in contrast to the method of bibliomancy which involves the direct request for a verse from a child. Since the verse is solicited, it is not a chance utterance, and cannot be considered a form of cledonomancy. As we saw above, that method of bibliomancy, while always depicted positively and efficaciously, when the figure using it does not confirm it or when it is utilized by a figure who the rabbis desire to depict as an “other,” the person utilizing it is

depicted negatively. Those forms of bibliomancy which are also methods of cledonomancy are not associated with confirmation in the Bavli and are always received by rabbis. We will see in the following section a discussion of other methods of cledonomancy which do not overlap with bibliomancy.

Cledonomancy

There are two different methods of cledonomancy present in the Bavli which do not overlap with bibliomancy. These methods of cledonomancy consist of interpreting the meaning of the last words of a dying man²⁴² or the speech of a bird.²⁴³ It will be argued that the rabbis always depict these methods positively and efficaciously. Furthermore, these methods of cledonomancy are only received by rabbis who are likewise depicted in a positive manner in the narratives in which they occur; however, when mediated by a diviner who does not employ rabbinic knowledge, it has unfortunate consequences for the mediator.

Last Words of a Dying Man

The last words of a dying man are utilized as a form of cledonomancy in two narratives in the Bavli. In *b. BB* 58a-b, there are a series of five aggadic narratives which form a distinct unit coherently linked by two themes: stories about R. Bena'ah's wisdom, showing the superiority of the wisdom of the Jewish sages, and the boundaries between

²⁴² *b. BB* 58a.

²⁴³ *b. Git.* 45a.

the world of the living and the world of the dead.²⁴⁴ The fourth story contains divination based on the last words of a dying man.²⁴⁵ It reads as follows:

A certain man [when on his deathbed] said to them (his sons): “A vessel of dust to one of my sons, a vessel of bones to one of my sons, a vessel of stuffings to one of my sons.” They did not understand what he said to them, so they came before R. Bena’ah. He said to them, “Do you have land?” They said to him, “Yes.” [R. Bena’ah said,] “Do you have beasts?” [They said to him,] “Yes.” [R. Bena’ah said,] “Do you have cushions?” [They said to him,] “Yes.” [R. Bena’ah said,] “If this be so, then this is what he meant.”

This story exemplifies R. Bena’ah’s great wisdom. A certain man on his deathbed divides his property by type among his sons, speaking in riddles so that people would think he only has a few vessels full of goods.²⁴⁶ His sons do not understand what he means, so they come before R. Bena’ah, so that he may interpret what their father said. He asks them if they have land, beasts and cushions. To each they answer yes. He in turn replies that this is what their father meant: land to one son, beasts to another, and cushions to the third. Thus we see R. Bena’ah functioning here as a diviner who is correctly able to ascertain the meaning of the last words of a dying man to his sons. In this passage cledonomanancy is depicted positively, especially in that it takes place in the context of R. Bena’ah functioning as a rabbinic judge, and efficaciously and it has a positive outcome for those whom it affects.

In another narrative, namely *b. BM 86a*, an instance of cledonomanancy based on the last words of a dying man which is explicated by a *bat kol* is juxtaposed with an instance of ornithomanancy (divination by means of birds). The passage reads as follows:

R. Kahana said, “R. Hama the son of the daughter of Hassa related to me [that] Rabbah b. Nahmani’s soul rested on the basis of persecution, [since] they had

²⁴⁴ R. Bena’ah was a Palestinian Tanna from the 3rd cent. CE, and head of the academy at Tiberias (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 83).

²⁴⁵ The story which follows it contains a reference to necromancy and will be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁴⁶ Jacobs, *Structure and Form*, 130.

informed against him to the house of the king.” They said, “There is one man among the Jews that sets aside 12,000 Israelites during a month in the summer and a month in the winter from the poll-tax. They sent a soldier of the king after him, but he did not find him. He ran and went from Pumbeditha to Akra, from Akra to Agama and from Agama to Sahin and from Sahin to Zarifa and from Zarifa to ‘Ena Damim and from ‘Ena Damim to Pumbeditha. In Pumbeditha he found him. The soldier of the king happened to come to that inn of Rabbah. They brought a tray before him (the soldier of the king) and they gave him 2 glasses to drink and they removed the tray from before him. His face turned behind him. They said to him (Rabbah), “What will we do with him? He is a man of the king.” He (Rabbah) said to them, “Bring a tray before him and give him 1 glass to drink and remove the tray from before him and he will be cured.” They did to him thus and he was cured. He (the soldier of the king) said, “I know that the man that I want is here.” He searched after him and he found him. He said, “I am going from here. If I am killed I will not reveal that man (Rabbah) but if I am lashed I will reveal him.” They brought him (Rabbah) before him (the soldier of the king) and he brought him to a chamber and he bolted the door before him. He (Rabbah) prayed for mercy. The framewall fell apart. He fled and went to Agama. He was sitting upon the stump of a palm and was memorizing. He heard that²⁴⁷ they were disputing in the heavenly academy: If the white spot preceded the white hair, he is unclean but if the white hair preceded the white spot, he is clean. If there is doubt the Holy One Blessed Be He said he is clean and all the heavenly academy says he is unclean. And they said, “Who decides? Rabbah b. Nahmani decides. Rabbah b. Nahmani who said, ‘I am select in leprosy. I am select in tents.’” They sent an agent after him. The angel of death was not able to approach him since his mouth did not cease from his memorization. Meanwhile the wind blew and made noise between the reeds. He imagined it was a troop of horsemen. He said, “Let the soul of that man [myself] rest and not be delivered into the hand of the kingdom.” When his soul was resting he said, “Clean, clean (טהור, טהור).” A *bat kol* came forth and said, “Happy are you Rabbah b. Nahmani that your body is clean (טהור) and your soul went forth with ‘clean’ (טהור).” A tablet fell from heaven in Pumbeditha [saying] Rabbah b. Nahmani was summoned by the heavenly academy. Abaye and Raba and all the rabbis went out to attend to him [but] they did not know his location. They went to the marsh. They saw birds that were providing shade and standing [there]. They said, “Deduce from it [that] he is there.” They mourned him 3 days and 3 nights. A tablet fell [saying], “Anyone who keeps away, he shall be under a ban.” They mourned him 7 days. A tablet fell [saying], “Go to your house in peace.”

This narrative purports to be a story related by R. Kahana that was related to him by R. Hama about how Rabbah b. Nahmani died on account of persecution which had resulted from his having been informed against to the house of the king. He flees the

²⁴⁷ According to Escorial G-I-3; Hamburg 165; Munich 95; Vatican 115; Vatican 117. Only Florence II-I-8 does not read thus.

soldiers who were sent against him and miraculously escapes the first time he is captured; however, it is related that the heavenly academy also want him dead so that he can settle a dispute for them about leprosy. Concerning leprosy, both sides agree that if the white spot preceded the white hair, he is unclean, and if the white hair preceded the white spot, he is clean. The dispute, however, is over the case in which one is unsure which came first. God argues that in the case of uncertainty he is clean, while the rest of the heavenly academy declares him unclean. The heavenly academy, however, was unable to obtain Rabbah b. Nahmani to settle this dispute since the angel of death could not approach him as long as he did not cease from studying. Upon hearing the wind blow and mistakenly thinking that it is the king's horsemen, Rabbah b. Nahmani states that he would rather die than be delivered up to the kingdom. Thus, while his death is not ultimately caused directly by the kingdom on account of his being persecuted, it is indirectly the cause for his death since he would rather die than be captured.

Upon his death, Rabbah b. Nahmani utters the words "clean, clean" which are then interpreted by a *bat kol*. The last words of a dying man are often considered a form of divination and the *bat kol's* statement interprets them in a manner which explicates his circumstances upon death, namely, that Rabbah b. Nahmani died in purity. However, the reader should also understand his words as applying a resolution to the dispute in the heavenly academy. One should understand that Rabbah b. Nahmani at his death is siding with God in declaring that in a case in which there is doubt as to whether the white spot or the white hair came first, the person is declared clean.

After his death, those on earth are informed by a heavenly tablet as to the reason behind Rabbah b. Nahmani's death, namely, that he was needed by the heavenly

academy.²⁴⁸ Upon receipt of this message all the rabbis go out to mourn him; however, they do not know where he is. In order to determine his whereabouts, the rabbis went out to the meadow and observed birds that were standing and providing shade. They take this as a sign that Rabbah b. Nahmani was there. Thus, they make use of ornithomancy in order to determine his whereabouts in order to mourn him. Having determined where to mourn him, they proceed to do so. After three days another heavenly tablet appears which tells them that whomever leaves then will be under a ban, so they continue to mourn him. After seven days they are informed by means of a third heavenly tablet that they may leave. As we saw in this narrative, divination is depicted in a positive manner and both cledonancy by means of the last words of a dying man and ornithomancy are efficacious for those who employ them. Furthermore, the rabbis involved in these narratives are depicted in a positive manner.

Speech of a Bird

While in the previous passage, rabbis interpreted the particular sighting of some birds as indicating hidden knowledge, in *b. Git.* 45a we see an instance in which the speech of a bird is interpreted, thus making it an instance of both ornithomancy and cledonancy. While it is clear that the intended recipient of the speech is Rav Ilish, an unidentified man is the one who understands what the bird means. Scholars who address this passage tend to focus on the magical act of the daughters of Rav Nahman and ignore the function of ornithomancy/cledonancy in this passage.²⁴⁹ However, as we will see, it is this method of divination which is the crux upon which various figures are defined as

²⁴⁸ Heavenly tablets appear both here and in *b. Yoma* 69b. In both narratives, they function in a manner similar to the *bat kol's* function as a divine revelatory utterance.

²⁴⁹ See for example Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 166-68; Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic," 187-88; Janowitz, *Magic*, 91-92; Ilan, "You Shall Not Suffer a Witch to Live," 229.

the “other” vis-à-vis the rabbis. This passage follows a questioning of why two different reasons are given in *m. Git.* 4:6 that one must not help a captive to escape, whether to prevent abuses or the mistreatment of fellow captives. This story addresses the situation in which Rav Ilish disregards this statement and endangers his fellow captives.²⁵⁰ The passage reads as follows:

The daughters of Rav Nahman were stirring a pot with their hands. Rav Ilish was perplexed by it [saying,] “It is written, ‘I found one man from a thousand, but a woman among all these I have not found’ (Eccl 7:28) [and] behold here are the daughters of Rav Nahman.” The turn of events caused them to be captured and he also was captured with them. One day a certain man was sitting next to him who knew the language of birds. A raven came and called to him. He said to him, “What did it say?” He said to him, “Ilish, flee! Ilish, flee!” He (Ilish) said, “The raven is a liar and I do not rely upon it.” Meanwhile a dove came and called out. He said to him, “What did it say?” He said to him, “Ilish, flee! Ilish, flee!” He (Ilish) said, “The community of Israel is like a dove; Derive from the matter that a miracle will happen for me.” He said, “I will go. I will see the daughters of Rav Nahman. If they preserved their virtue, I will bring them back.” He said, “Women, all the words that they have they relate to each other in the privy.” He heard them saying, “Here [our husbands] are men and the Nehardeans are men. Let us say to our captors to remove us from here so that none of our husbands hear and redeem us.” He stood. He fled. He and that man went. A miracle happened for him. He crossed on a ferry, but that man was found and killed. When they returned, they would stir the pot by witchcraft (כשפים).²⁵¹

In this narrative, upon seeing the daughters of Rav Nahman stirring a cauldron with their bare hands, Rav Ilish was perplexed, doubting that women could have such merit as would allow them to perform the acts they do.²⁵² It so happened that both the daughters of Rav Nahman and Rav Ilish were taken captive. One day while in captivity, Rav Ilish happened upon a certain man who knew the language of birds and when a raven

²⁵⁰ See Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 167.

²⁵¹ According to all the manuscript evidence and contrary to the Vilna edition which puts the statement “they would stir the pot by witchcraft” in the mouth of Ilish. Vatican 130 כי הדרן אתיין הוה בחשן קידר' בכשפים; Vatican 140 כי הדרן ואתיין הוה קא בחשן קדרא בכשפים; Arras 889 כי הדר' אתאן הוה כחשן קידרא בידייהו בכשפים; Munich 95 כי הדרן הוה בחשן קידרא בכשפים; Oxford Opp. 38 (368) כי הדרן אתאן הוה קא בחשן קידר' בכשפים.

²⁵² See Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 167. Ilan conflates the beginning and the end of the narrative inferring that Rav Ilish realizes that the women are engaging in כשפים when he first sees the women stir the pot (Ilan, “You shall not Suffer a Witch to Live,” 229); however, that is not clear from the narrative.

cawed at him he asked him what it said and he told him that it said “Ilish, flee! Ilish, flee!” Rav Ilish, however, does not believe the raven, characterizing it as a liar,²⁵³ and does not consider heeding this warning until after he hears the same message from a dove. Rav Ilish did not consider the message of the raven to be truthful and thus did not interpret it in terms of his circumstances, so in essence he did not perform divination in this context. While not associated with such in this passage, the call of a raven is considered *נחש* “divination” elsewhere in the Bavli;²⁵⁴ however, similar references with respect to a dove do not exist. Furthermore, elsewhere in rabbinic literature, there are similar negative statements about the call of a raven. For instance, in *t. Shab. 6:6*, it is considered one of the “ways of the Amorites.” Levinson argues that both the birds and the nature of the actions of Rav Nahman’s daughters in this passage present a problem of interpretation for Rav Ilish in that “his lack of ability to distinguish between the raven and the dove parallels his inability to differentiate between the righteousness or the sorcery of the daughters.”²⁵⁵ The manuscript tradition, in contrast to the printed edition, does not place the statement that the daughters’ actions are *כשפים* in the mouth of Rav Ilish, thus increasing the idea that Rav Ilish is unable to distinguish the nature of their actions. However, there are negative portrayals of ravens elsewhere in rabbinic literature and that could be the unstated reason why Rav Ilish does not trust what it says without confirmation. So, the narrative may be depicting Rav Ilish as able to properly

²⁵³ Swartz views this as indicating that birds in general do not always tell the truth and are therefore unreliable (Swartz, “Divination,” 161). Given that the language of birds would require specialized knowledge, it is likely, but by no means certain, that the man was a professional diviner, since this passage does not refer to the man as such or to him receiving any sort of payment for his services.

²⁵⁴ *b. Sanh. 65b*.

²⁵⁵ Levinson, “Enchanting Rabbis,” 78. Furthermore, Levinson argues that the issue is “not which bird to listen to but rather how to use rabbinic knowledge to penetrate the veil of ephemeral appearances” and that Ilish should have trusted the original verse he cited at the beginning of the narrative (Levinson, “Enchanting Rabbis,” 79).

differentiate between the birds based on rabbinic knowledge and thus Levinson's parallel would not hold.

After Rav Ilish heard the dove, he both heeds its apparent warning and proceeds to interpret its message in terms of his current circumstances. He interprets that it means that a miracle will happen for him, which does in fact occur in the remainder of the narrative. While he does heed the apparent warning of the dove and does set out to flee from his captors, Rav Ilish decides first that he should see if he should help the daughters of Rav Nahman to escape with him and judges that they would be worthy of his help if they had kept their virtue in their captivity. This intended action would have been in violation of the above mentioned ruling in the Mishnah. However, when he overhears the women stating that they are just as happy having their captors as husbands as they had been previously, he realizes they have not kept their virtue and he flees along with the man who knew the language of birds. Fleeing along with that man also is in violation of the ruling in the Mishnah. In his flight, a miracle does happen for Rav Ilish in that he is able to escape on a ferry while the man who knew the language of birds was found and killed. While Rav Ilish did not help them, the ending of the narrative intimates that the daughters of Rav Nahman did eventually return; however, their actions in stirring the pot are now categorized as כשפים.²⁵⁶

Many scholars have discussed how the stereotyping of the women was a means by which the rabbis excluded women from normal means of power by defining them as the "other."²⁵⁷ They do not, however, discuss how the use of cledonancy/ornithomancy is likewise used in this passage as a way to define the

²⁵⁶ Janowitz connects this classification of their actions as כשפים with their moral failure as wives (Janowitz, *Magic*, 91-92).

²⁵⁷ Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 364-69; Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 166-68.

“other.” Not only is cledonomanancy/ornithomanancy the reason why Rav Ilish visits the daughters of Rav Nahman, and thus the means through which they are defined as sorceresses and thus bounded off as an “other” vis-à-vis the rabbis, but it also juxtaposes Rav Ilish’s proper use of cledonomanancy/ornithomanancy with that of the man who understands the language of birds. The man who interprets the language of birds is here pictured as a diviner who is able to comprehend their message, but who does not have rabbinic knowledge. Unlike Rav Ilish, he is unable to distinguish legitimate forms of ornithomanancy from illegitimate ones, the dove and the raven respectively. Thus, while a miracle occurs for Rav Ilish who properly makes use of cledonomanancy/ornithomanancy, a negative outcome – death – results for the diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge. Thus, we also see cledonomanancy/ornithomanancy as a way to bound off this man who has knowledge of birds as an “other” vis-à-vis the rabbis. So, while we see that this method of divination is depicted positively and is efficacious, it only has a positive outcome when one has rabbinic knowledge about which birds are reliable and which are not.

As we saw, in each instance of cledonomanancy that is not juxtaposed with bibliomanancy, cledonomanancy was depicted positively and efficaciously. Furthermore, it had a positive outcome for every person who adhered to rabbinic methods of interpretation; however, it had a negative outcome for the professional diviner who knew the language of birds because he did not adhere to these methods.

Conclusion

Bibliomanancy and cledonomanancy are forms of divination which, like the *bat kol*, do not have a biblical precedent, and thus no legal precedent. They are always depicted positively and as being efficacious. Furthermore, they tend to have a positive outcome for

those who employ them except when they are performed by someone who is not considered part of the category “rabbi.” The depiction of bibliomancy which involves the direct request for a verse is problematized when it involves a Palestinian figure, rather than a Babylonian rabbi, and it is associated with the need for confirmation, either directly or through its use in conjunction with other methods of divination.

Cledonomancy is likewise problematized when it is performed by a diviner who lacks rabbinic knowledge.

Bibliomancy via the request for a child’s verse is always associated with confirmation in the Bavli; however, it does not always have a positive result. While it is both efficacious and has a positive result for Rav Sheshet, a Babylonian rabbi, in *b. Git.* 67b-68a, the other passages all involve Palestinian figures, two of which are depicted negatively and the other positively. In *b. Hul.* 95b, R. Yohanan, a Palestinian rabbi, is portrayed as misinterpreting a verse which he specifically requested. The fact that R. Yohanan’s misinterpretation of the omen is followed by statements about the necessity that a סימן be confirmed three times indicates that the author thinks that R. Yohanan was wrong in his interpretation of the omen because, unlike the author of the narrative, R. Yohanan considered unconfirmed omens to be reliable. However, given that the omen, despite R. Yohanan’s incorrect interpretation of it, served to determine the correct manner of action for R. Yohanan, this form of bibliomancy in itself is efficacious, is depicted in a positive manner, and serves to have a positive outcome for R. Yohanan. Rather, R. Yohanan’s use of unconfirmed bibliomancy appears to be the primary target of negative depiction in this passage.

In *b. Hag.* 15a-b, while Aher is ultimately redeemed after his death by R. Meir and his other disciples and thus brought back into the rabbinic fold, it is while Aher is not considered part of the category “rabbi” that bibliomancy is performed. While bibliomancy itself is not depicted in a negative light in this passage, though it does require confirmation, it along with the nickname אחר, serves to distance Elisha ben Abuyah as an אחר “other,” and to bound him off from the rabbis during his lifetime. This is especially so since it is only in the bibliomancy verses that Aher’s knowledge of Torah is rejected, which has negative consequences for his disciple Meir until the end of the narrative when God begins to recite traditions in his name.

In contrast to the abovementioned passages which negatively portray Palestinian rabbis and serve to distance them from the “rabbis,” the use of bibliomancy in *b. Git.* 56b serves to include a non-rabbinic figure within the category “rabbi.” In this narrative, Nero is depicted as combining the omens from belomancy and bibliomancy in a manner which allows him to avoid taking a course of action that would be detrimental to him. Furthermore, this narrative relates that on account of what he learns, Nero flees, becomes a proselyte, and a well respected rabbi, R. Meir, is descended from him. Not only is Nero depicted as the ancestor of a prominent rabbi, but he is also depicted as acting like a rabbi in his use of bibliomancy. By using bibliomancy he already recognizes the authority that the Hebrew Bible has as a means through which one can uncover hidden knowledge. By depicting Nero in both of these manners the rabbis are doing the exact opposite of what they did with Aher with this narrative, i.e. this narrative is serving as a means by which to include Nero within the category of “rabbi.” Thus, when bibliomancy of this form is either not directly associated with confirmation or utilized by a figure whom the rabbis

desire to depict as an “other,” the person utilizing it is depicted negatively; however, bibliomancy itself is depicted positively and is efficacious.

In contrast to the abovementioned method of bibliomancy, cledonomancy, whether associated with bibliomancy or not, is depicted as having a positive result for those involved except in the case where it is associated with a diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge. The sole example of this was *b. Git.* 45a. In this passage, not only was cledonomancy the reason why Rav Ilish visits the daughters of Rav Nahman, and thus the means through which they are defined as sorceresses and thus bounded off as an “other” vis-à-vis the rabbis, but it also juxtaposed Rav Ilish’s proper use of cledonomancy with that of the man who understands the language of birds. Unlike Rav Ilish, he is unable to distinguish legitimate forms of ornithomancy from illegitimate ones, the dove and the raven respectively. Thus, while a miracle occurs for Rav Ilish who properly makes use of cledonomancy, a miracle does not occur for the diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge and he is killed.

Furthermore, of particular interest is the fact that one of the passages which portrays the use of bibliomancy by means of a child’s verse is also the most explicit passage on the distinction between the categories נחש and סימן, namely *b. Hul.* 95b. In *b. Hul.* 95b, Rav defines נחש as methods which are akin to the acts of Eliezer the servant of Abraham or Jonathan the son of Saul in Gen 24:14 and 1 Sam 14:9-10 respectively. In each of those accounts, the character asks God for a specific sign, which subsequently is given to them and which requires no further interpretation in order to be understood. These methods are contrasted with both the methods of divination which are said to be performed by various rabbis, namely, Rav examining a ferry-boat, Samuel a book and R.

Yohanan a school boy, as well as with the statements of the anonymous editor. Thus, the rabbis are delineating between the categories of נחש and סימן and would consider bibliomancy of various sorts to be part of the category סימן and thus not biblically prohibited.

Additionally, it is possible that the sole passage which depicts someone associated with cledomancy in a negative light, namely *b. Git.* 45a, may also contain an allusion to the distinction between נחש and סימן. In *b. Git.* 45a, we see a man who knew the language of birds explicate the message of both a raven and a dove to Rav Ilish; however, Rav Ilish only believed the message of the dove. While not explicitly stated in this passage, one possibility as to why Rav Ilish did not believe the raven and characterized it as a liar may be due to the fact that the call of a raven is considered נחש according to *b. Sanh.* 65b. If this is the case, one could consider Rav Ilish to be acting upon rabbinic knowledge about the nature of birds in his choice to interpret the statement of the dove, but not the raven. The man who knows the language of birds, however, is not likewise depicted as distinguishing between these birds and thus is not depicted as having rabbinic knowledge. Furthermore, it is this distinction between having and not having rabbinic knowledge which results in Rav Ilish's miraculous survival while the other man perishes. Thus, in this narrative, a diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge is negatively depicted and is designated as an "other" by means of cledomancy. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, in Sasanian Persia, the rabbis, as well as the Christians and Zoroastrian Persians venerated knowledge as a source of religious power. As I argued there with respect to dream interpretation, the rabbis here are also depicting their particular esoteric knowledge as fruitful while depicting that of others in a negative light.

Furthermore, we had previously seen in Chapter 2 that the Babylonian rabbis negatively portrayed Palestinian rabbis who were functioning as professional diviners. It is possible that R. Yohanan and Aher are likewise functioning as professional diviners in these passages or that these passages are likewise polemicizing against the divinatory practices of Palestinian rabbis. However, it is also possible that the issue may be with the method of divination itself. In these passages, the rabbis are not interpreting a verbal or visual utterance which they have just happened upon as is the case with other methods of bibliomancy, cledonancy and oneiromancy. Rather, they are deliberately requesting an omen which they then interpret according to their own circumstances. This method of obtaining an omen is closer to the method attributed to Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, and Jonathan, the son of Saul, namely the request for a particular sign which was considered *שָׂחָה*. It is also similar to the direct requests for information that are associated with necromancy which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter V

Necromancy

Introduction

This chapter will argue that while the rabbis generally accept the efficacy of necromancy and incubation, these practices are legislated based on biblical precedent in a manner similar to magic. This is due to the similarities the rabbis perceive between these practices; however, the rabbis legislate against these biblically prohibited practices based upon whether or not an action occurs, meaning that the practice involves an act, deed, practice or event taking place as opposed to mere words or an illusion,²⁵⁸ a criterion which does not appear in the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, the depiction of necromancy and incubation in the Bavli does not follow biblical precedent. While necromancy is uniformly depicted negatively in the Hebrew Bible, the rabbis tend to negatively depict necromancy and incubation when they are performed by non-rabbis but positively or neutrally when they are performed by rabbis. Furthermore, with the exception of one non-rabbi with close connections to the rabbis, the Bavli does not depict non-rabbis as actually performing necromancy. That is, no conversation with a ghost occurs nor is there any insight into how knowledge was gained from such a consultation.²⁵⁹ Rather, non-

²⁵⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 819.

²⁵⁹ Additionally, the one exception to this, *b. Git.* 56b-57a, is likely reflecting a Palestinian rather than a Babylonian attitude towards and depiction of necromancy.

rabbis who engage in necromancy are negatively depicted and in the passages in which this occurs, the rabbis are depicted as showing the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over them.²⁶⁰ Rabbis, however, are depicted as performing necromancy and information about what knowledge was obtained by the consultation is related, often through direct discourse with the dead, though the praxis is not related in any detail.

The term necromancy comes from the Greek term νεκρομαντεῖον “oracle of the dead,” which is a compound word consisting of νεκρός “dead” and μαντεῖον “oracle.” Necromancy is the “the art or practice of magically conjuring up the souls of the dead . . . to obtain information from them, generally regarding the revelation of unknown causes or the future course of events.”²⁶¹ Generally, necromancy involves direct contact between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The dead either bodily invade the world of the living or the consultation takes place at some location between these two worlds. It also involves the participants in the ritual, the necromancer and the ghost of the dead, coming into the same state of existence in order to communicate. For this reason, it was considered a dangerous act in the Greco-Roman world.²⁶²

Both necromancy and incubation, a ritual which is performed in order to coerce the dead to appear in a dream and provide hidden knowledge, will be dealt with in this chapter. With the exception of the definitions and descriptions in *b. Sanh.* 65a-b, no texts actually depict the praxis of necromancy or incubation in any detail. For instance, they mention spending the night in a cemetery, knocking on a grave, asking for a dream, that a rabbi “did what he did,” and raising the dead (בנגידא); however, what is implied by these actions is never fully explained. This does not mean that these should not be taken as

²⁶⁰ *b. BB* 58b and *b. Ber.* 59a.

²⁶¹ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Necromancy.”

²⁶² Ogden, *Necromancy*, xvii-xviii.

instances of necromancy/incubation since they have parallels in the ancient world; rather, it shows that the Bavli is very reticent to depict praxis in this case.²⁶³ One reason for this may be the fact that necromancy is both biblically and rabbinically prohibited in legislation, hence they do not want to depict it in detail lest it encourage other rabbis to practice it.

One complication this lack of depiction of praxis causes is that it is often unclear from a passage whether a rabbi is performing necromancy or incubation when the consultation occurs in a cemetery. Cemeteries were common locations in which incubation was practiced; however, when it is not explicitly mentioned that the dead appeared in a dream, one cannot determine for certain that it was incubation, rather than a different necromantic technique, that was utilized. A similar lack of information about the exact nature of necromantic consultations at tombs occurs in Greek and Roman sources. There, while we have evidence of praxis, we do not know the exact method by which the consulter experienced the ghost, though in many cases there is indirect evidence that the ghost was experienced through a dream, and thus incubation took place.²⁶⁴ Due to the fact that incubation was often considered to be a particular necromantic technique, for the sake of convenience, when a dream is not explicitly mentioned in connection with the consultation, the practice will be referred to as necromancy.

²⁶³ Harari, "Opening the Heart," 315.

²⁶⁴ Ogden, *Necromancy*, 11 and 75-92. In fact, incubation likely also took place at many *nekuomanteia* "places of necromancy" or "oracles of the dead." Given this association, the dream experienced through incubation was considered a form of necromancy, rather than considered one which would be interpreted by means of oneiromancy.

History of Research

A few works have addressed the topic of either necromancy or incubation in rabbinic literature. They have, however, tended to focus on either *b. Sanh.* 65a-b or on the rabbinic understanding of the Witch of Endor narrative (1 Sam 28).²⁶⁵ Some attention has been paid to the topic of incubation as well.²⁶⁶ In addition, some of the other passages which mention necromancy have been discussed, but generally it has not been with an eye to understanding how necromancy is legislated or depicted in rabbinic literature.²⁶⁷ To date there is no study which addresses the difference between the legislation and depiction of necromancy in the Bavli nor the differing treatment of its performance by rabbis vs. non-rabbis.

Biblical Precedents

Aside from dreams, necromancy is the only type of divination currently under consideration which is explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike dream interpretation, which is permitted and tends to be depicted positively, necromancy is explicitly forbidden and the performance of necromancy is negatively depicted in the Hebrew Bible. The explicit prohibition can be seen in four passages, namely, Deut 18:10-11; Lev 19:31; 20:6 and 27. The sole instance of the occurrence of the performance of

²⁶⁵ For a discussion of *b. Sanh.* 65a-b see Levinas, "Desacrilization and Disenchantment"; Veltri, *Magie*, 77-79; Malul, "Jewish Necromancy," 55-59 and 68-69; LaVallée, "Targum," 193-96; Harari, "Opening the Heart," 333-35; Finkel, "Necromancy," 14-15 and Faraone, "Necromancy," who unfortunately follows Finkel's discussion which conflates the Mishnah with the Bavli. For a discussion of the Witch of Endor narrative in Midrash see Seidel "Necromantic Praxis in the Midrash."

²⁶⁶ See Hasan-Rokem, "Communication with the Dead."

²⁶⁷ For a general discussion of necromancy see Harari, "Sages and the Occult," 547. For a discussion of *b. Shab.* 152b-153a see Lachs, "Rabbi Abbahu," 203-4; Smelik, "Witch of Endor," 162-63; LaVallée, "Targum," 195. For a discussion of *b. BB* 58a-b see Jacobs, *Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud*, 91-94. For a discussion of *b. Ber.* 59a see Harari, "Opening the Heart," 334; Liebes, *Studies*, 38-39; Fishbane, "Exegetical Theology," 164; Malul, "Jewish Necromancy," 67. For a discussion of *b. Git.* 56b-57a see Schäfer, *Jesus*, 82-94. For a discussion of *b. Ber.* 18b see Cohen, "Representation of Death." For a discussion of *b. MQ* 28a see Elman, "Acculturation," 47-48.

necromancy is the account of Saul and the Witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28:3-25.²⁶⁸ This Biblical legislation forms the basis of the legislation against necromancy in the Bavli. The depiction of necromancy, however, differs. As we will see, while necromancy is negatively depicted in the Hebrew Bible, in the Bavli it is only depicted negatively when it is performed by a non-rabbi, while it is depicted either positively or neutrally when performed by a rabbi.

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 contains the most comprehensive list of prohibitions against magicians and diviners.²⁶⁹ While only these verses explicitly mention the necromancer, it is necessary to look at them in terms of their immediate context in order to understand their significance. Deut 18:9-14 reads as follows:

When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to do the like of the abominations of those nations. Let no one be found among you who causes his son or daughter to pass through fire, or who is an augur (קסם), a soothsayer (מעוונן), a diviner (מנחש), a sorcerer (מכשף), one who casts spells (חבר חבר), or one who consults ghosts (בעל אוב) or familiar spirits (ידעני), or one who inquires of the dead (דרש אל-המתים). For anyone who does these things is an abomination to the Lord, and on account of these abominations, the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you. You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God. For these nations, that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers (מעווננים) and augurs (קסמים); but to you, however, the Lord your God has not assigned the like.²⁷⁰

Within these verses, three different practitioners associated with the dead are mentioned, namely, the בעל אוב,²⁷¹ ידעני,²⁷² and the דרש אל-המתים. As we will see later on, the rabbis

²⁶⁸ There are, however, other references to necromancy in the Hebrew Bible that lack a depiction of praxis. See 2 Kgs 21:6; 23:24; Isa 8:19; 19:3; 29:4; 2 Chr 33:6.

²⁶⁹ Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 221; Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 138 and 182; Cryer, *Divination*, 231; Schäfer, "Magic," 27-28. Despite these promulgations against magicians and diviners, there are also several instances in the Bible which show similar practices being used legitimately, though not necromancy.

²⁷⁰ JPS translation edited to include Hebrew terms.

²⁷¹ The term אוב appears in: Lev 19:31, 20:6, 27; Deut 18:11; 2 Kgs 21:6, 23:24; 2 Chr 33:6; Isa 8:19, 19:3, 29:4; 1 Sam 28:3, 7, 8, 9. It is usually translated in the following ways: ghost, necromancer, medium or spirit; however, it is used in three main ways. Sometimes, the term refers to an instrument used to consult the dead (Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 172; Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic," 36; 2 Kgs 21:6, 23:24). It also can refer to the spirit of the dead (Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 172; Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic,"

interpret the first two of these terms as referring to necromancers and the third term as referring to one who performs incubation.²⁷³ This distinction, however, does not seem to appear in the Hebrew Bible itself. Jonathan Seidel argues that Deut 18:10-11 is associated with Josiah's political agenda.²⁷⁴ He argues that the "Canaanizing" of these practices is a "mechanism for politicizing oracular and ritual praxis."²⁷⁵ Brian Schmidt hypothesizes that these verses are an expansion of the list found in 2 Kgs 21:6 and in 2 Chr 33:6.²⁷⁶ He

36; Isa 8:19, 19:3, 29:4; Lev 19:31, 20:6, 27; 1 Sam 28:3, 7, 8, 9; Deut 18:11). It also may be used in a phrase to refer to the person who raised the spirit of the dead (Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic," 42). The etymology of the term אֹבִי is problematic. In the singular this noun is written in the plene form as אֹבִי; however, in the plural it is of the same consonantal form as the word "fathers" and thus it is possible to confuse the two (Hoffner, "'ōbh," 130). Several different theories have been given for the etymology of this term. One possibility is that it is the same word that occurs in Job 32:19 meaning "skin-bottle" (Hoffner, "'ōbh," 131; Brown et al., *Brown Driver Briggs*, 15). A second possibility is that it is derived from the same root as the Arabic verb 'āba, "to return" (Hoffner, "'ōbh," 131). A third possibility is that it is not a Semitic word at all, rather it is a loan word related to Sumerian *ab*, Akkadian *aptu*, Hurrian and Hittite *a-a-bi* (normalized *ayabi*) and Ugaritic 'ēb which mean "sacrificial pit" (Hoffner, "Hebrew 'ōb," 385; Hoffner, "'ōbh," 131). We have texts from these non-Semitic languages using these terms in contexts with the meaning "sacrificial pit," where, by various means, one may consult the dead (Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh = Akkadian version, Tabl. XII, 83-84; Hittite, KUB VII, 41; X 63 obv I 17-28; XXIV, 49, III, 31; XV 31 obv ii 6-26; XXIX 4 rev iv 31-36; 4 ii 3-8, 19-21; XXXIV, 96,6; KBo II 9 iv 9-16; II, 19; III, 22; XI 14 iii 28-31; Bo 2072, III, 13, 16, 19; C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook 2 Aqht I:26-29* (=Corpus 19 I:26-29)). Hoffner believes that, of these three possibilities, אֹבִי refers to the pit. Seidel understands אֹבִי as a metonym which refers both to the pit and the spirit from the pit (Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic," 42). Schmidt disagrees with the definition of "pit" because of "the problematic phonemic relation of the *p* and *b* in Sumerian *ab*, Akkadian *apu*, Hittite *api*, all supposedly signifying 'pit,' and Hebrew 'ōb" and the fact that no pit is mentioned in our only extant Biblical necromantic rite, 1 Sam 28:3-25 (Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 151). He prefers the connection with Arabic 'āba, 'to return,' translating אֹבִי as 'the One-who-returns' (Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 151). A further possibility is that it is in fact connected with the term of the same root meaning "father, ancestor" and would then in this context refer to a dead ancestor (Nihan, "1 Samuel 28," 31; Malul, "Jewish Necromancy," 75).

²⁷² ידעוני comes from the root י-ד-ע, "to know, be familiar with." According to *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 240 (f) the term is a noun which has a double termination that expresses an adjectival idea. The referent of this term, however, is problematic. It has been suggested that this term refers to "knowers," i.e. the dead with special knowledge about the world of the living or to "familiar ghosts," i.e. ancestral spirits (Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 150-151; Driver and White, *Leviticus*, 90; Levine, *Leviticus*, 134). Whereas the term אֹבִי sometimes occurs alone, ידעוני is always found in conjunction with אֹבִי (Driver and White, *Leviticus*, 90; Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 172). Thus, these terms together possibly could be seen as a hendiadys where the second term explains the first, i.e. "the dead, who know" (Malul, "Jewish Necromancy," 76).

²⁷³ Scholars have suggested that this last term is intended to include any forms of necromancy which are not included in the terms אֹבִי or ידעוני, such as incubation or oracles of the dead (Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 226; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 281).

²⁷⁴ Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic," 18.

²⁷⁵ Seidel, "Ancient Jewish Magic," 15-16.

²⁷⁶ Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 182.

argues that the Israelites adopted Assyrian necromancy during Manasseh's reign.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, the "Canaanizing" of the practices was a means by which dtr-Yahwism marginalized competing cults and ideologies and thus magic, including necromancy, was a category of cultural control.²⁷⁸

In contrast to Deut 18:10-11, which legislates against practitioners, Lev 19:31 could be understood either as a command against consulting a necromancer or as a command against acting as a necromancer, depending on whether one understands אבת and ידענים as referring to the person who raises the spirit or to the spirit itself.²⁷⁹ It states, 'Do not turn to אבת and do not inquire of ידענים, to be defiled by them: I the Lord am your God.'²⁸⁰ The phrase אל תפנו "do not turn to," is a prohibition consisting of the negative particle *al* plus the 3rd masculine plural form of the jussive. The negative particule אל + a prefixed verb is used to indicate a specific, immediate prohibition. This is in contrast to לא + prefixed verb which is used with legislation.²⁸¹

While the previous verses are prohibitions or commands against necromancers which do not stipulate punishment, the verses in Leviticus 20 each legislate different punishments for those who engage in necromancy. As we will see, both of these punishments are mentioned in connection with necromancy in the Bavli. Lev 20:6 is phrased similarly to Lev 19:31 stating, 'And the person that turns to אבת and ידענים to go astray after them, I will set my face against that person, and I will cut him off (כרת) from

²⁷⁷ Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 241.

²⁷⁸ Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 189 and 259.

²⁷⁹ While the distinction between legislation against practitioners vs. acting as a necromancer is not clearly defined in the Hebrew Bible, it is possible that the former term should be taken as referring to professional necromancers while the latter does not necessarily refer to a professional acting as such.

²⁸⁰ אל-תפנו אל-האבת ואל-הידענים אל-תבקשו לטמאה בהם אני יבוב אלהיכם.

²⁸¹ Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 567 and 571.

among his people.²⁸² This passage states that one who turns to the אבת or ידענים will be punished with כרת. According to Seidel, actions which are punished by כרת are those which cause a rupture between the sacred and the profane. This particular form of illicit divination “‘pollutes’ the realm of the sacred because it is a threat to what is now considered legitimate priestly divination.”²⁸³ כרת applies to intentional transgressions that are not punishable by a court, i.e. when the act is not observed by two witnesses. In the case of a transgressor willingly committing one of these types of acts without being observed by two witnesses, the transgressor is liable for a sin offering. If there are two witnesses, the transgressor is stoned.²⁸⁴ Lev 20:27 legislates punishment by stoning for one who acts as a necromancer. It states, ‘A man or a woman who has in them an אוב or ידעני shall be put to death; they shall be pelted with stones—their bloodguilt shall be upon them.’²⁸⁵ The phrase כִּי-יְהִיָּה בָהֶם literally means “who has in them.” Some scholars see this as a parallel to the LXX *engastrimuthos*, literally “one who speaks from his stomach.”²⁸⁶ Since both the terms אוב and ידעני are mentioned in this verse, it seems to indicate two different types of actions that are punishable by death.²⁸⁷ This is one of the issues taken up in *b. Sanh.* 65a-b.

Additionally, there is one extended narration of a necromantic ritual in the Hebrew Bible in 1 Sam 28:3-25, in which Saul consults the Witch of Endor. Due to the length of this passage, only a brief sketch of this account will be given. The explicit circumstances which drive the actions of Saul are located outside of the immediate

²⁸² והנפש אשר תפמה אל-האבת ואל-הידענים לזנות אחריהם ונתתי את-כני בנפש ההוא והכרתי אתו מקרב עמך.

²⁸³ Seidel, “Ancient Jewish Magic,” 60-64, quote on 63-64.

²⁸⁴ Porusch, *Kerithoth*, 1.

²⁸⁵ ואיש או-אשה כִּי-יְהִיָּה בָהֶם אוב או ידעני מות יומתו באבן ירגמו אתם דמיהם הם

²⁸⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1765; Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 152.

²⁸⁷ Budd, *Leviticus*, 292.

narrative. From 1 Samuel 15 we know that Saul rejected God's command and on account of this he is rejected as king. As recounted in 1 Sam 28, Saul was at war with the Philistines. He first attempted to enquire of the Lord by every legitimate means at his disposal, including by means of dreams and the *urim* and *thumim*, but God would not respond. So, Saul arranged to consult with a necromancer, whose practices he had recently outlawed. He disguised himself and came to the Witch of Endor at night and asked her to divine a ghost for him. She was wary of being entrapped, but Saul assured her that no harm would come to her. He asked her to bring up Samuel. When she brought him up she shrieked and realized the man consulting her was Saul. Saul asked her what she saw. She replied that she saw אלהים coming up from the earth. He asked what the man looked like and she described him as an old man in a robe. Then the conversation between Samuel and Saul commenced.

While Saul's recourse to necromancy did provide him with answers, they were not the answers he wanted. Ultimately, he is told the reasons for his downfall. Samuel reveals not only the unfavorable outcome of the battle between Saul and the Philistines (v.19), but also informs Saul that he will no longer be king (v.17). He tells Saul that God took the kingship from him and gave it to David because he did not obey God. Saul was not concerned with royal legitimacy when he had Samuel raised up; however, it is a major theme in this part of 1 Samuel.²⁸⁸ Issues of royal legitimacy and necromancy were often associated in the ancient world. For instance, in a letter to king Esarhaddon in 672 BCE it was questioned whether Ashurbanipal should have been appointed crown prince, the answer being given by the ghost of Esharrahmat, Esarhaddon's wife.²⁸⁹ Necromancy

²⁸⁸ Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 206-7.

²⁸⁹ Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 206-7.

was similarly used in the context of political instability with regard to the king's tenure in "The Teaching of King Amenemhat" and Papyrus Harris which related the use of necromancy in the context of political instabilities in the reigns of Amenemhat I and Ramses III respectively.²⁹⁰ Thus we see necromancy being used in a similar fashion with respect to Saul; however, necromancy is not fruitful for him. Rather, in this narrative, necromancy, while efficacious in allowing Saul to know the future, is depicted as an illegitimate means by which to do so and thus in a negative light.

Knowledge of the Dead According to the Bavli

There are a couple of passages in the Bavli which explicitly discuss what knowledge the dead have and for how long after death they continue to have knowledge about the realm of the living.²⁹¹ Two of these passages juxtapose accounts of incubation with a discussion of what knowledge the dead have and the third involves a theological debate between a rabbi and a *min*. The first passage juxtaposed with incubation is *b. Ber.* 18a-b which consists of a debate over whether or not the dead have knowledge of the living. In this passage, the locus for questioning whether or not the dead have knowledge of the living is Eccl 9:5 'But the dead do not know anything' which implies that the dead do not have knowledge of what is going on in the realm of the living. The 'dead' in this verse, however, is interpreted as referring to those who are wicked during their lifetime and those who are righteous are interpreted as 'living' even in death. Thus, this verse is ultimately discounted as evidence that the dead do not have knowledge of the living. That

²⁹⁰ Ritner, "Necromancy," 95.

²⁹¹ For the view of the dead as mediators of knowledge in Jewish magic and the ancient world see Harari, "Opening the Heart," 335-36.

this is the case is both exemplified and questioned by the narratives involving incubation which follow it.²⁹²

The other juxtaposition of incubation with a discussion of the extent of the knowledge of the dead occurs in *b. Shab.* 152a-b. There, incubation takes place in the house of the deceased and it is followed by a statement concerning the period of time after death during which the dead have knowledge of the realm of the living. This statement reads as follows:

R. Abbahu said, “All that is said in front of the dead he knows until the top-stone [for a grave] closes.” R. Hiyya and R. Shimon b. Rabbi differ about this. One says until the top-stone closes and the other says until the flesh is consumed. [The one] who says until the flesh is consumed, as it is written, ‘Surely his flesh upon him is in pain and his soul within him mourns’ (Job 14:22). [The one] who says until the top-stone closes, as it is written, ‘And the dust returns to the earth as it was, etc.’ (Eccl 12:7).

R. Abbahu states that the dead know all that is said in front of them until the top-stone closes. Afterwards, presumably the dead would not be able to gain further knowledge about the living. A debate between R. Hiyya and R. Shimon b. Rabbi, who both predate R. Abbahu, is then juxtaposed with his statement; however, it is not indicated who holds which opinion. One holds the same opinion as R. Abbahu; however, the other claims that the dead know what is said in front of them as long as flesh remains on the body.

Scriptural citations are given for both views, but the difficulty remains unresolved.

Burial would have taken place during the same day, except on the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement.²⁹³ In certain places and during certain time periods, secondary burial

²⁹² These narratives will be discussed below in the section on the performance of Necromancy/Incubation by Rabbis.

²⁹³ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 480.

whereby the bones would be re-interred occurred.²⁹⁴ It is unclear exactly how long the time frame was for reinterment; however, it has been suggested that the dead would be placed in the family tomb and after a year the relatives would gather the bones.²⁹⁵ We can presume that the second opinion claims that the dead can know what is said in front of them for a period of time after death, which may be approximately a year. This gives us insight into what type of information one may possibly be able to extract from the dead through necromancy, namely, what is said in front of their remains within a specified timeframe. These specified timeframes, however, do not necessarily cohere with other information concerning the knowledge of the dead in the Bavli.

In *b. Shab.* 152b-153a, R. Abbahu argues that Samuel was able to be brought up because it occurred within twelve months of death. This narrative involves a stereotyped conversation between a rabbi and a *min* in which a *min* asks R. Abbahu a thorny theological question dealing with the interpretation of a scriptural passage from the Witch of Endor narrative.²⁹⁶ The topic of the previous portion of *gemara* deals with a *baraita* which states that the souls of the righteous are hidden beneath the heavenly throne. The dialogue between a *min* and R. Abbahu juxtaposes this rabbinic teaching with the fact that Samuel was brought up by necromancy in 1 Sam 28. It reads as follows:

²⁹⁴ Secondary burial was practiced in Israel from at least the Neolithic period throughout the Roman period; however, ossuaries have also been found in other locations such as Alexandria and Carthage (Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries*, 26-30). A similar practice to ossuaries, that of using bone containers after the flesh had been removed from the corpse, was prevalent in Persia during the Sasanian period (Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 114).

²⁹⁵ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 483-84. Meyers takes 2 Sam 22:10ff., where the period of decomposition is noted, to indicate that it took approximately eight months (Meyers, "Secondary Burial," 11).

²⁹⁶ For a discussion of the implication of stereotyped narratives between a rabbi and a *min* see Chapter 2. Other passages which involve the discussion of Scriptural references to necromancy include *b. Sof.* 12b and *b. Hag.* 4b; however, they do not likewise inform us about the extent to which the rabbis considered the dead to have knowledge.

A certain *min*²⁹⁷ said to R. Abbahu, “You say that the souls of the righteous are hidden under the throne of glory. How did the necromancer (אורבא טמיא) bring up Samuel by pulling out of the grave by necromancy (בנגידא) (1 Sam 28:7)?”²⁹⁸ He said to him, “There it was within twelve months [of death]. For it was taught: For a full twelve months the body exists and its soul ascends and descends; after twelve months the body ceases to exist and its soul ascends but it does not descend again.”

In this narrative, the question being asked is if the righteous are hidden under the throne of glory, among whom Samuel would reside, and thus reside with God, how could Samuel be dragged out of his grave by a necromancer. The answer that R. Abbahu gives to the *min* is that it was possible to raise him from the grave by necromancy since it was within twelve months of his death and during that time, while the flesh still exists, the soul continues to have a connection with the body. After the flesh ceases to exist, the souls of the righteous then reside solely under the throne of glory. The timeframe given in this passage appears to cohere with one of the opinions in *b. Ber.* 18b; however, it is not the opinion attributed to R. Abbahu in that passage and also in this case it has nothing explicitly to do with how long the dead have knowledge of the living after death. One could possibly infer, though, that in *b. Ber.* 18b, the reason why the dead are considered to have knowledge of the realm of the living is on account of the fact that the soul continues to have a connection with the body while the flesh still exists. Once that connection is severed, this knowledge ceases to exist. Despite these statements in *b.*

²⁹⁷ While the Vilna edition reads צדוקי, it is clear from the manuscript tradition that a *min* is meant here.

²⁹⁸ The particular terminology used here to refer to the necromancer and how the necromancer performs his/her actions is only used in the Bavli here, in the story of Onkelos in *b. Git.* 56b-57a, and in the story of the necromancer interpreting the meaning of an earthquake in *b. Ber.* 59a, both of which will be discussed below. The necromancer is referred to as an אורבא טמיא. According to Sokoloff, the phrase as a whole refers to a necromancer. Individually the term אורבא means “underworld spirit” and טמיא means “unclean.” Thus, the necromancer could be seen as one who brings up an unclean spirit (Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 84). We will see unclean spirits referred to in association with incubation in the discussion of *b. Sanh.* 65a-b below. It appears here that the necromancer performs her action בנגידא, “by pulling” (Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 729). This is a different method than those which we will see are associated with the necromancer in *b. Sanh.* 65a-b, namely, בגולגולת “by means of a skull” or בזכורו “by naming.” Unlike those methods which will be discussed below, I do not know of any parallels to the method of “pulling” in the ancient world.

Shab. 152a-b, 152b-153a and *b. Ber.* 18b, in the incubation narrative in *b. Ber.* 18a-b which will be discussed below, the dead are depicted as having knowledge of the realm of the living for several years. Given this information, I do not believe that any sort of conclusions can be drawn about how long the rabbis considered the dead to have knowledge about the living. We can, however, definitively state that the rabbis considered the dead to have knowledge about the living for at least some span of time after their deaths.

Legislation on Necromancy in the Bavli

The biblical legislation against necromancy which occurs in Deut 18:10-11; Lev 19:31; 20:6 and 27 forms the basis of the legislation against necromancy and incubation in the Bavli. As we had seen above, this legislation occurs at times in conjunction with legislation against other types of magical practitioners. The legislation against necromancy and incubation in the Bavli perpetuates this connection with magic by associating the necromancer with various types of magical practitioners as well as by legislating both magic and divination in a similar fashion. However, unlike in the Hebrew Bible, the basis of the legislation against magic and necromancy is whether or not an action takes place. Despite legislating against magic, at no time do the rabbis discount the efficacy of necromancy in their legislation and additionally, they display knowledge of necromantic techniques which are familiar from both the Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian world. In particular the list of the prohibited practitioners in Deut 18:10-11 are addressed in the two most prominent discussions of the legislation of necromancy in the Bavli, namely the discussion of the Noahide laws in *b. Sanh.* 56a-b and the extended discussion of necromancy in *b. Sanh.* 65a-b.

Noahide Laws

The discussion of the Noahide laws is the sole instance in the Bavli where the entire list of items prohibited in Deut 18:10-11 is addressed. The Noahide laws are laws said to have been commanded to the sons of Noah and are meant to be followed by all of mankind. In the portion of text in *b. Sanh.* 56a-b, the seven commandments generally regarded to comprise the Noahide laws are listed, namely, adjudication, blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, bloodshed, robbery and tearing a limb from a living animal. Then, the passage shows certain rabbis adding to these laws. R. Simeon adds the sorcerer (כישוף). R. Jose, on the other hand, says that gentiles are prohibited not only from acting as a sorcerer, but they are also not to engage in any of the activities listed in Deut 18:10-11.²⁹⁹

b. Sanh. 65a-b

A discussion of many of the items prohibited in Deut 18:10-11 can also be found in *b. Sanh.* 65a-b.³⁰⁰ This passage contains four *sugyot* which deal with necromancy. These *sugyot* are part of the longest discussion of magic in the Bavli, namely *b. Sanh.* 65a-67b, where the rabbis are interested in defining themselves vis-à-vis the “other.”³⁰¹ As we will see in this passage, the rabbis legislate against necromancy based on whether or not an action occurs, which is the same manner according to which biblically prohibited magic is legislated in the Bavli. Furthermore, the rabbis connect necromancy in certain ways with various magical practices. As we will see, while laws on magic have three legal categories, namely, guilty, guilty but not punished, and innocent, laws pertaining to necromancy only have the first but the third is evident in *aggadah*. The first

²⁹⁹ Deut 18:10-12 is quoted in the text of the Bavli.

³⁰⁰ Definitions of the diviner (מנחש) and the soothsayer (מעיין) can also be found in *t. Shab.* 7:13 and 14 respectively.

³⁰¹ Seidel, “Charming Criminals,” 148-49.

sugya discusses the incongruity of expressions in *m. Sanh. 7:7* and *m. Ker. 1:1*, the list of 36 transgressions which are punishable by כרת, “cutting-off.” This *sugya* attempts to define the action performed by the necromancer and directly associates necromancy and magic. The second and third *sugyot* give definitions for the terms ידעני and בעל אוב. And the fourth *sugya* discusses the differences between one who consults an אוב and the דרש אל המתים “one who consults the dead,” and ends with an act of creation which the rabbis elsewhere in *b. Sanh.* distinguish from magic. The relevant portions of the text read as follows:

- I. What is the difference between the Mishnah here stating בעל אוב and ידעני, and with respect to *Keritot* the Mishnah (*m. Ker. 1:1*) is stating בעל אוב, but ידעני is omitted?
 - a. R. Yohanan said, “Because both are stated in one negative precept (Lev 19:31).” Resh Lakish said, “ידעני, because there is no action in it.” And as to R. Yohanan, why is a בעל אוב mentioned [rather than a ידעני]? Because the verse opens with it.
 - b. But what is the reason that Resh Lakish does not agree with R. Yohanan? Said R. Papa, “They are stated separately in the decree of death (Lev 20:27).” But R. Yohanan maintains, “Offences for which there are separate prohibitions are regarded as separate; but in the decree of death, they are not regarded as separate.”
 - c. But what is the reason that R. Yohanan does not agree with Resh Lakish? He (R. Yohanan) might say to you, “The Mishnah of *Keritot* is taught in accordance with R. Aqiba who says, ‘An action is not discernible.’” But Resh Lakish [maintains], “Granted that R. Aqiba does not require a great action, but he requires a small action.” What action is there in blasphemy? The movement of the lips is an action. What action is done by a בעל אוב? The knocking of his arms is an action.
 - d. But even according to the Rabbis? But are we not taught: [The idolater] is not guilty except over a thing which entails an action, e.g., slaughtering a sacrifice, burning incense, making libations and prostration. But said Resh Lakish, “Who teaches prostration [entails an action]?” R. Aqiba, who said, “An action is not discernible.” But R. Yohanan said, “You may say even the Rabbis agree, bending his body [in prostration], is an action according to the Rabbis.”
 - e. Now, according to Resh Lakish if bending his body is not an action according to the Rabbis, then is the knocking of the arms of a בעל אוב an action? Then Resh Lakish’s statement [that the בעל אוב performs an action] is likewise made according to R. Aqiba, but not according to the Rabbis. If this be so that the

blasphemer is excluded, should the בעל אוב require it (a sin offering)? But said ‘Ulla, “[It refers to a בעל אוב] who offers incense to a demon.” Said Raba to him: “But is not offering incense to a demon idolatry?” But said Raba, “[It refers to a בעל אוב] who offers incense as a charm.” Said Abaye to him, “Is not offering incense as a charm to act as a charmer (חובר הבר)?” Indeed, and the Torah says: This charmer is stoned...

- III. Our Rabbis taught: בעל אוב denotes both one who raises by naming and one who consults a skull.
- a. What is the difference between them?³⁰² For one who raises by naming, it does not ascend in its usual manner, and it does not ascend on the Sabbath; For one who consults a skull, it ascends in its usual manner and it ascends on the Sabbath. It ascends? To where does it go up? Lo, [the skull] lies before him. Rather say: It answers from its place, and it answers on the Sabbath.
 - b. And the wicked Tinneius Rufus asked this question of R. Aqiba. He said to him, “How does this day (the Sabbath) differ from any other?” He (R. Aqiba) said to him, “And how does one man differ from another?” He (Tinneius Rufus) said to him, “Because my Lord (the Emperor) desires.” “The Sabbath likewise,” [R. Aqiba said], “because my Lord desires.” He (Tinneius Rufus) said to him, “Thus I would say to you, who can be certain that today is the Sabbath?” He (R. Aqiba) said to him, “Let the river Sabbath prove it; let the בעל אוב prove it; let his (your) father’s grave prove it, that smoke does not ascend on the Sabbath.” He (Tinneius Rufus) said to him, “You have despised him (Tinneius Rufus’ father), shamed him, and cursed him [by this proof].”
- IV. He who consults an אוב, is that not the same as “ודרש אל-המתים”? (Deut 18:11)³⁰³
- a. דרש אל-המתים³⁰⁴--As has been taught: “ודרש אל-המתים”: this means one who starves himself and goes and spends the night in a cemetery, so that an unclean spirit [of a demon] may rest upon him [to enable him to foretell the future].
 - b. And when R. Aqiba reached this verse, he wept. If when one starves himself so that an unclean spirit may rest upon him—an unclean spirit rests upon him, one who starves himself so that a clean spirit (the Divine Presence) may rest upon him—how much the more [that a clean spirit rests upon him].³⁰⁵ But our sins have exiled it from us, as it is written, ‘But your iniquities have been a barrier between you and your God’ (Isa 59:2).
 - c. Said Raba, “If the righteous desired they could create the world,” as it is written, ‘But your iniquities have distinguished between [you and your God]’ (Isa 59:2).³⁰⁶ Raba created a man, and sent him to R. Zera. R. Zera spoke to him, but received no answer. He (R. Zera) said to him: “You are

³⁰² Yad Harav Herzog and Munich 95 read “What is the difference between one who raises by naming and one who consults a skull?” Firenze II.1.9 omits.

³⁰³ “He who consults an *ob*” Firenze II.1.9 and Yad Harav Herzog omit.

³⁰⁴ Munich 95 omits.

³⁰⁵ Firenze II.1.9 adds.

³⁰⁶ Yad Harav Herzog reads “But your iniquities have distinguished between you and your God.”

from charmers, return to your dust.” R. Hanina and R. Oshaia spent every Sabbath eve engaged in the Laws of Creation,³⁰⁷ by means of which they created a third-grown calf and ate it.³⁰⁸

The *sugya* in *b. Sanh.* 65a begins by questioning the incongruity of expressions found in *m. Sanh.* 7:7 and *m. Ker.* 1:1. *m. Sanh.* 7:7 states that the בעל אוב and the ידעני are stoned, but only the בעל אוב is mentioned in *m. Ker.* 1:1 as being subject to כרת. A debate ensues between R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish, both second generation Palestinian Amoraim, over this incongruity of expression.³⁰⁹ However, this discussion moves onto a disagreement over whether or not an action is performed by the necromancer and then to define what is the minimum action required for a sin offering to be incurred by one who acts as a בעל אוב according to R. Aqiba.

Several different answers are given regarding what type of action is performed by the בעל אוב. The first answer is that the knocking of his arms is an action. This response is then refuted. Interestingly, the subsequent answers seek to define the action performed by the בעל אוב as various sorts of magical practices. ‘Ulla says the בעל אוב is the same as one who offers incense to a demon. However, Raba objects since burning incense to a demon is idolatry, which is another category entirely. Raba then gives the alternative that the בעל אוב is one who offers incense as a charm.³¹⁰ Abaye notes that offering incense as a charm is to act as a charmer (חובר חבר), which is another category prohibited in Deut 18:10-11. We then have an argument from the authority of the Torah. Yes, offering incense as a charm is to act as a charmer, and that charmer is stoned; however, for an unintentional

³⁰⁷ Following Firenze II.1.9 and the parallel in *b. Sanh.* 67b.

³⁰⁸ Firenze II.1.9, Yad Harav Herzog and Munich 95 read “R. Hanina and R. Oshaia when they were sitting, they were engaged in the Laws of creation, by means of which they created a third-grown calf and ate it.”

³⁰⁹ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 86. Debates between this pairing are some of the most noted in the Talmud (Mielziner, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 261).

³¹⁰ Rashi interprets this as meaning that the בעל אוב offers incense as a charm to demons so that they will assist him in sorcery. According to Veltri, this category may be referring to a practice similar to Greek and Roman binding spells (Veltri, *Magie*, 78).

transgression a sin offering would be due. This discussion of what constitutes the action of the *בעל אוב* and *ידעוני* is also connected with the sorcerer later on in the tractate in *b. Sanh. 67b* which reads: “But: The *אוב* and *ידעוני* are included among the sorcerers (*מכשפים*). And why were they found to be singled out? So that it says to you just as the *אוב* and *ידעוני* are stoned, also the sorcerer is stoned.” Thus, we see that at least some rabbis considered the *בעל אוב* and the *ידעוני* to be sorcerers.

Legislation on necromancy resumes in the fourth *sugya* which distinguishes between incubation and necromancy and between magic and God’s creative power. It begins by questioning what appears to be a redundancy in Deut 18:11; are not consulting an *אוב* and *דורש אל המתים* the same thing? *דורש אל המתים* is then defined by means of a *baraita* as: one who starves himself and sleeps in a cemetery in order that an unclean spirit, a demon, will rest upon him and enable him to tell the future.³¹¹ Thus it is defined as incubation. Incubation in the ancient world generally consisted of purificatory rituals followed by sleeping in a sacred space or cemetery so that a divinity or the dead would appear to the person in a dream in order to provide hidden information.³¹² In this text, incubation occurs in a cemetery. By the mention that this rite will cause an unclean spirit to rest upon the person, fasting is negatively depicted in this context as the purificatory ritual undergone by the dreamer. It is then stated that when R. Aqiba reached this verse, Deut 18:11, he wept,³¹³ because a *qal va-homer*, an argument from the lesser to the greater, could be made that if it is possible to get an unclean spirit to rest upon a person

³¹¹ Other instances of incubation and spending the night in cemeteries will be discussed in the next section. Cf. Ogden, *Necromancy*, 251-62 for harm that may befall a necromancer in Greek and Roman sources. Cf. Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 260-61; Hasan-Rokem, “Communication with the Dead” for information on incubation in the Near East.

³¹² See Johnston, “Incubation-Oracles”; Patton, “Great and Strange Correlation” for information on incubation in the ancient world.

³¹³ Cf. *b. Hag. 4a*; *b. Kid. 81b*; *b. Naz. 23a*; *b. Yoma 9b*; *b. Sanh. 81a, 103b*. Veltri argues that this motif is probably a later editorial addition (Veltri, *Magie*, 79).

then surely it would be possible to get a clean spirit (the Divine presence) to rest upon a person. However, man's sins have exiled him from God according to Isa 59:2, 'But your iniquities have been a barrier between you and your God.' Raba understands this verse as "But your iniquities have distinguished between you and your God." In other words, man's sins are not keeping him from God's presence; rather, they are what is keeping man's power to create from equaling that of God. This is then followed by two brief examples of righteous men creating by means of magic; however, their creations do not equal those of God. Rabbah created a man and sent it to R. Zera; however, R. Zera knew it was created by magic for it could not speak. R. Hanina and R. Oshaia created a third-grown calf by means of the 'Laws of Creation' and ate it.

This last statement should be viewed in connection with its parallel passage in *b.*

Sanh. 67b. There it states:

Abaye said: The laws of sorcerers are like the laws of the Sabbath: there are from them those punished by stoning, there are from them those free from punishment but forbidden, and there are from them those which are permitted. Thus: he that performs an action (העושה מעשה) is punished by stoning, he that deceives the eyes (האוזן את העינים) is free from punishment but forbidden. And permitted? Such as was done by R. Hanina and R. Oshaia. Every Sabbath evening they were engaged in the Laws of Creation and they produced for themselves a third-grown calf and they ate it.

Three types of explanations are present in this passage: guilty, innocent, and guilty but not held liable. Two of these three types, guilty and guilty but not held liable are accounted for by a sorcerer who performs an action and a sorcerer who deceives the eyes respectively. What is interesting is the third type which is permitted. What R. Hanina and R. Oshaia do is not a deception of the eyes – that is, they actually do effect a change in the material realm as evidenced by the fact that they eat the calf. Apparently, what they do is somehow different than performing an action (העושה מעשה) since what they do is

permitted, but that is prohibited. What this implies is that what R. Hanina and R. Oshaia do is different from a sorcerer who performs an action because, though both make a change in the material realm, R. Hanina and R. Oshaia make a change in the material realm in the same manner as God did when he created the universe, though to a much lesser degree. The sorcerer, while he makes a change in the material realm, he does not do so in the same manner as God did when he created the universe. Thus, the rabbis make a distinction between a magical action and an act of creation, though both may appear to us as “magic.”

Thus, we see here a similar discourse with respect to legislation on magic as was used with respect to necromancy above. In both cases, the fact that they perform an action is what is associated with the fact that these practices are both prohibited and punished. As we saw, the exact nature of the action of the necromancer was discussed in detail in the Bavli and some rabbis interpret the action of the necromancer to be the equivalent of various types of magical practitioners. Thus, we see two connections between the legislation on magic and necromancy in the Bavli, the direct comparison of these practices and the role of “action” in the legislation. As we will see later in our discussion of actual instances of the performance of necromancy, the rabbis also consider there to be a category of “innocent” performance of necromancy, when it is performed by a rabbi; however, this category is only apparent through aggadic narratives, not halakhic discourse.

Despite legislating against necromancy, the rabbis do not discount the efficacy of necromancy and in fact, it is utilized in *sugya* 3 in a story in which R. Aqiba and Tinneus Rufus, the Roman governor of Judea during the reign of Hadrian, dispute over the

difference between the Sabbath and all other days.³¹⁴ In the course of this discussion, R. Aqiba gives three proofs which will indicate that it is the Sabbath, one of which is the בעל אוב. Previously in the *sugya*, two methods by which the בעל אוב functions are distinguished and one of the criteria is that they behave differently on the Sabbath. It is stated that the בעל אוב denotes both one who raises by naming³¹⁵ and one who consults a skull.³¹⁶ The ghost does not ascend on the Sabbath for the first method, but it does for the second. Presumably the type of בעל אוב referred to here is one who raises by naming, because as stated above he is not able to do so on the Sabbath. The fact that R. Aqiba uses the בעל אוב as proof for the Sabbath indicates that at least some rabbis acknowledge the effectiveness of necromancy despite its legal prohibition.

³¹⁴ There are parallel passages in Gen. R. 21 (5) and *Pesiq. Rab.* 23.

³¹⁵ The text reads המעלה בזכרו. Rashi connects this with the word זכר, “male,” and interprets the phrase to mean that the necromancer raises the spirit and it rests on his penis and speaks from there. His rendering becomes problematic when one takes into account the fact that the witch of Endor, who is female, is considered this type of בעל אוב in *y. Sanh.* 7:10 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Gen 31:19. This may, however, be evidence of a different notion of these terms in Palestinian vs. Babylonian sources. In both this definition and the other, הנשאל בגולגולת, the *bet* of agency is used indicating “by means of” or “with the assistance of.” Seidel argues that this does not indicate the use of different parts of the corpse for necromancy, but rather different methods. He renders the phrase as “raises by means of naming” based on contemporaneous Aramaic, Syriac and Mandaic texts (Seidel, “Necromantic Praxis in the Midrash,” 103-5). This concept is quite familiar from magical texts in antiquity, where in the course of most magic spells, the entity at whom the spell is directed is either directly named or referred to by indirect means if its exact name is unknown. Alternatively, it could also refer to the invocation of various supernatural beings (gods, angels, daimons, etc.) who assist in assuring that the act is effective. For the role of utterances in Greek and Roman necromancy see Ogden, *Necromancy*, 175-78.

³¹⁶ The method הנשאל בגולגולת “one who enquires by means of a skull” has precedents both in Mesopotamian and in Greco-Roman practice. In Mesopotamian sources, consulting a skull consisted of preparing a salve or ointment and anointing the skull with it. This would be followed by an incantation for the purpose of making the ghost appear inside the skull and speak. The incantations would call upon various deities to help ensure that the ghost would come up. See Cryer and Thomsen, *Biblical and Pagan Societies*, 86-87; Scurlock, “Magical Uses,” 106; Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 216-17; LaVallée, “Targum,” 14-40. Thus, these rites would involve the dissolving of barriers between three worlds: the world of the living, the world of the dead, and the heavenly realm. While Mesopotamian practices predated the rabbis, a millennium, skull divination in Greco-Roman practice is contemporaneous with the rabbis. Necromancy first appears in Mesopotamian texts ca. 900 BCE. However, it was not popular until the reign of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681-669 BCE) (Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 88). There are a series of three texts in the *PGM* which reference skull divination. See LaVallée, “Targum,” 40-112 for a discussion of these texts. For further information on skull divination in Greek and Roman sources see Apuleius *Apology* 34; Hippolytus *Refutations* 4.41; *PGM* IV.2125-39; Ogden, *Necromancy*, 202-16. For further information on skull divination in Mesopotamian sources see Cryer and Thomsen, *Biblical and Pagan Societies*, 86-87.

So, as we have seen, legislation on necromancy in the Bavli perpetuates the connection between these practitioners and the magical practitioners present in the Hebrew Bible and it continues to prohibit these practices. Unlike in the Hebrew Bible, however, in the Bavli the legislation against both magic and necromancy is based on whether or not an action takes place. While laws on magic have three legal categories, namely guilty, guilty but not punished, and innocent, laws pertaining to necromancy only have the first, though the third may be evident in *aggadah*. Despite this legislation prohibiting necromancy, the rabbis do not discount the efficacy of necromancy in their halakhic discourse. Rather, the fact that it is efficacious is indeed shown through a brief narrative in which R. Aqiba uses the בעל אוב as proof that it is the Sabbath. As we will see, other aggadic narratives likewise do not tend to question the efficacy of necromancy. However, they only depict the use of necromancy in a positive way when it is performed by a rabbi. Thus only in this case is it equivalent to the magic category of “innocent.” When necromancy occurs in conjunction with a non-rabbi, however, it is depicted negatively as a means by which to designate those who adhere to competing ideologies as the “other,” a use of necromancy similar to that in the Hebrew Bible.

Necromancy /Incubation Performed by a non-Rabbi

Accounts of both necromancy and incubation involving non-rabbis are attested in *aggadah* in the Bavli. While the final form of these narratives never questions the efficacy of necromancy or incubation in conjunction with a non-rabbi, in one text we see a distinction between the attitude presented in the earlier attributed material and that of the anonymous author.³¹⁷ It is possible that the earlier attributed material is discounting

³¹⁷ *b. Ber. 59a.*

the efficacy of necromancy. Additionally, while the performance of incubation by a non-rabbi is depicted, though in an unusual manner, the Bavli only depicts a non-rabbi with close associations with the rabbis as actually performing necromancy. Other non-rabbis are neither depicted as having a conversation with a ghost by means of necromancy nor do we know for certain that they specifically obtained their knowledge from necromancy. Whether or not the practice is depicted, non-rabbis who engage in incubation or necromancy are negatively depicted and in those passages in which non-rabbis are not depicted as performing necromancy, the rabbis show the superiority of their rabbinic knowledge over that of the “other.”

Incubation

There is a single instance in the Bavli, namely *b. AZ 55a*, which refers to a pagan incubation shrine. This passage occurs at the end of the discussion of *m. AZ 4:7* in which the Romans question the rabbis as to why their God does not abolish idolatry. The answer given is that he would, except that people worship things that are necessary for the world such as the sun and the moon. The text reads as follows:

Said Raba b. R. Isaac to Rab Judah, “There is an idolatrous shrine in our place that whenever the world is in need of rain, [the idol] appears to [its priests] in a dream and says to them, ‘Slaughter a man to me and I will send rain.’³¹⁸ They slaughtered a man to it and rain came.”

This narrative appears to be an inversion of standard accounts of incubation shrines. We know that this reference is not to just any pagan shrine due to the fact that the idol appears in dreams, a practice which is usually associated with incubation shrines.

³¹⁸ Munich 95; Pesaro Print (1515); Bazzan-Archivio Storico Communale Fr. Ebr. 11 have this phrase. New York JTS Rab. 15 and Paris 1337 omit the statement that the idol appears in a dream and tells them to slaughter a man and it will bring rain. Following Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 228-29 n. 52, I accept that this was an original part of the tradition.

However, usually one would go to an incubation shrine in order to obtain knowledge about a certain circumstance through a dream encounter with either a divinity or the dead. Additionally, while there are accounts from as early as the late Republic of the role of human sacrifice in conjunction with necromancy, human sacrifice was not generally a component of these practices. When it is associated with it, however, it was boys who were said to be sacrificed and at least in the case of Nero, this boy-sacrifice was explicitly connected with incubation.³¹⁹ In these instances, the sacrifice of the boy helped to instigate the necromantic consultation.

The situation presented in the Bavli is a bit different in that at this particular shrine the idol appears to act of its own accord in appearing to the priest in a dream whenever the world needs rain. In other words, no rites are performed to elicit the consultation; rather, the idol is depicted as acting of its own accord, and thus the passage does not depict true incubation taking place. Furthermore, the sacrifice of the man comes after the necromantic consultation rather than before it. According to Daniel Ogden, we should not take accounts of human sacrifice in Roman necromancy as attesting to its use; rather, human sacrifice was associated with necromancy in some literary accounts in order to heighten its deviancy.³²⁰ The mention of human sacrifice in conjunction with incubation at a pagan shrine probably serves the same purpose in the Bavli. The efficacy of incubation, however, is not questioned since the narrative does relate information being delivered which is effective in bringing about rain. Given that this is our only instance of a reference to a pagan incubation shrine in the Bavli, the fact that the idol appears in a dream is absent from some of the manuscripts, and the fact that it occurs

³¹⁹ Ogden, *Necromancy*, 197-201.

³²⁰ Ogden, *Necromancy*, 267.

within a longer narrative consisting of five stories about idolatry, we should consider that it is not the act of incubation in and of itself on account of which the shrine and its practice is negatively depicted. Rather, it is possible that it could be on account of the designation of the shrine as a house of idolatry and that this narrative, like the others preceeding it, serves to relieve rabbinic anxiety over the existence and attractiveness of idol worship.³²¹

Necromancy

Unlike the sole case of incubation by a non-rabbi, there are three passages in which necromancy is associated with a non-rabbi. While the efficacy of necromancy and/or the necromancer is not entirely discounted, and in fact it is explicitly acknowledged by the anonymous author of one of the passages, necromancy and/or the necromancer is depicted negatively. In two of the accounts, the performance of necromancy is neither depicted nor is the knowledge presented in the account specifically linked to necromancy. However, in both accounts the rabbis show the superiority of their knowledge over those who engage in necromancy. In the other account, necromancy is depicted; however, unlike the other two non-rabbis, the protagonist of this narrative has close connections with the rabbis.

In *b. BB* 58a-b, there are a series of five aggadic narratives which form a distinct unit coherently linked by two themes: stories about R. Bena'ah's wisdom and the boundaries between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The last of these stories contains a reference to necromancy. It reads as follows:

³²¹ Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 110-16.

- A. A certain man heard his wife say to her daughter, “Why do you not hide the forbidden act (her love affairs)? This woman has (I have) ten children, and only one is from your father.”
- B. When [the husband] died, he said to them, “All of my property goes to one son.” They did not know which of them he meant. They came before R. Bena’ah. He said to them, “Go and knock at the grave of your father, until he stands and reveals to you to which of you he bequeathed.” All of them went, but the one that was his son did not go. He (R. Bena’ah) said to them, “All of the property belongs to this one.”
- C. They then went and informed against him before the king, saying, “There is one man among the Jews, who takes money from people without witnesses or anything else.”³²² They (the king’s men) took him and imprisoned him.
- D. His (R. Bena’ah’s) wife came and said to them (the king’s men), “I had one slave, and they severed his head, and they stripped his skin, and they ate his flesh, and they filled him (his skin) with water and they would give [their] companions to drink from it, but they did not give me either the price or his rent.” They did not know what she had said to them, so they said, “Bring the wise man of the Jews and he will tell [us].” They called R. Bena’ah, and he said to them, “She means a water bucket.”³²³ They said, “Since he is so wise, let him sit in the gate and act as a judge.”

This story exemplifies R. Bena’ah’s great wisdom and his ability to judge. In this story, a certain man hears his wife say to her daughter that she needs to hide her love affairs better and that she herself has ten children, but only one from her husband and he is not the wiser. Because of this, the man decides that when he dies all of his property will go to his true son. He is not aware which is his real son, so he merely states “All of my property goes to one son.” His sons also do not know which of them he means so they come before R. Bena’ah to find out.

What follows is a test that is reminiscent of Solomon’s test to determine which of two women is the mother of a baby in 1 Kgs 3:16-28. In both cases, the judge proposes a situation that should be considered reprehensible to the party with the legitimate claim. While Solomon suggests splitting the baby, which would result in the baby’s death and

³²² Firenze II.1.8-9 reads ““who takes money from people without witnesses and without documents.”” Vatican 115 reads ““who takes money without witnesses.””

³²³ Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 421.

neither woman getting what she wants, R. Bena'ah tells the sons to perform necromancy by knocking at their father's grave. While necromancy would not necessarily result in physical harm to anyone involved in the dispute, it was considered a dangerous act in the ancient world because by its very nature it involved the world of the living and the world of the dead coming into contact. The method which R. Bena'ah suggests, however, that of banging on the ground in order to get the attention of and raise a ghost for questioning, was a common form of necromancy practiced throughout the ancient world.³²⁴ He does this test in order to determine which of the ten sons is the legitimate heir. All of the sons went but one. By not going, the true son chooses the path which may not get him what he wants, but does not cause him to engage in a reprehensible act. As in the Solomon narrative, where Solomon gives the baby to the woman who gives up her claim to the baby so that he will not be killed, R. Bena'ah decreed that all the property belongs to the son who chose not to go to his father's grave and perform a reprehensible act in order to determine that the inheritance was his. Thus, we see that necromancy in this narrative is depicted as a social perversion, the use of which is not condoned by the Rabbis.

Since R. Bena'ah is able to use a test that contains a necromantic ritual, it can be assumed that this particular rite would have been widely known and perhaps widely used as well. While the nature of this narrative does not let us know whether or not the sons who did go to their father's grave were successful since their actions are not depicted, we cannot determine from this text whether the rabbis would have considered it to have

³²⁴ Instances in Greco-Roman sources: In Euripides's *Trojan Women* 1302-6, Hecabe raises the dead by banging on the ground with both of her hands. Also Philostratus states that Herodes Atticus beat the ground and called to his daughter in order to discover where to bury her. In the *Iliad* 9.568-72, Althaea beats on the ground and Erinys responds to her call. In Aeschylus' *Persians* 683 the *ghorus* drums on the ground in order to raise the spirit of Darius. Cf. Ritner, "Necromancy," 90-94 and Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 90-94 for the Egyptian practice of asking similar questions of the dead through inscriptions known as "Letter to the Dead;" Ogden, *Necromancy*, 178 for information on this technique in Greek and Roman sources.

worked. However, none of the passages in the Bavli involving necromancy actually depict its praxis in any detail. Given that many of these instances have parallels in the ancient world, we should take the lack of praxis as an indication that the Bavli is very reticent to depict necromantic praxis. It is possible that this is due to the fact that it is prohibited both biblically and rabbinically and the rabbis do not want to depict it in detail lest it encourage others to practice it. And in fact, in the next passage we will see that the anonymous narrator does acknowledge the efficacy of necromancy, but denounces it lest it encourage others to practice it.

Furthermore, in this narrative, ultimately we see the superiority of R. Bena'ah's knowledge over that of the sons who go to perform necromancy at his instigation. The sons who go are unhappy with R. Bena'ah's ruling because he does not have witnesses or anything else to support his determination, for there is no evidence other than this test for the ruling that the son who did not go is the true heir. So, the other sons inform against him to the king and he is imprisoned. However, R. Bena'ah's knowledge is again proven to be superior, this time over the Romans. His wife aids him in his release by going to the king's judges and telling them a story which they do not understand and which necessitates a judgment. Since they are unable to determine the meaning of her riddle, they go and fetch the wise man of the Jews, R. Bena'ah, who is able to answer her riddle. On account of his wisdom, they decide to make him a judge. From this latter exchange, not only do we see that he has bested both the Romans and the sons by his superior knowledge, but the acceptance of his answer in the second case also lends authority to his determination in the first. As we will see in the next narrative, rabbinic knowledge is also shown to be superior to a pagan necromancer.

In *b. Ber.* 59a, we see a narrative in which R. Kattina encounters a necromancer. This passage begins by defining what the term זועות in *m. Ber.* 9:2 refers to. That term is included in this Mishnah in a list of natural phenomena at the appearance of which one should say a blessing. R. Kattina defines this term as a “rumbling”; however, his answer does not inform us as to the cause of the rumbling. The narrative involving the encounter between R. Kattina and a necromancer serves to define its source. The text reads as follows:

And over earthquakes (זועות). What are זועות? R. Kattina said:³²⁵ A rumbling. R. Kattina was once going on the road. When he arrived at the door of the house of a necromancer (אורבא טימא), there was a rumbling. He said, “Does the necromancer know what this rumbling is?” He called after him, “Kattina, Kattina, why would I not know? When the Holy One, blessed be He, remembers his children, who dwell in suffering among the nations of the world, He lets down two tears into the great sea, and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other, and that is the rumbling.” Said R. Kattina,³²⁶ “The necromancer is a liar and his words are lies. If so, there should be one rumbling after another!” But it is not [so] (ולא יהיא)!³²⁷ One rumbling after another was made, and the reason why he did not admit it to him was so that the whole world should not go astray after him. R. Kattina states his own opinion, “[God] clasps his hands, as it is said, ‘I will also smite hand against hand, and I will cause my fury to rest’ (Ezek 21:22).” R. Nathan says, “[God] emits a sigh, as it is said, ‘I will satisfy my fury upon them and I will be comforted’ (Ezek 5:13).” And the Rabbis said, “He tramples on the firmament, as it is said, ‘Shouting as they that tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth’ (Jer 25:30).” R. Aha b. Jacob said, “He presses his feet under the throne of glory, as it is said, ‘Thus said the Lord, the heaven is my throne and the earth is my foot-stool’ (Jer 66:1).”

In this narrative, R. Kattina, arriving at the house of a necromancer (אורבא טימא) and experiencing a rumbling, inquires as to whether the necromancer knew the cause. The necromancer exhibits surprise at R. Kattina’s insinuation that he would not know the source of the rumbling and he proceeds to explain it as two of God’s tears hitting the ocean. In the course of this narrative, however, there is no necromantic praxis nor is

³²⁵ Oxford Opp. Add. Fol. 23 and Paris 671 read “Rav Nahman.”

³²⁶ Munich 95 adds “his own opinion.”

³²⁷ Munich 95; Oxford Opp. Add. Fol. 23 and Paris 671 read “Yes (אין).”

necromancy explicitly stated as the source of the necromancer's answer to R. Kattina's question. R. Kattina publicly denounces the necromancer as a liar arguing that if there are two tears then there should be two rumblings, one after another. So we see R. Kattina denouncing the knowledge of the necromancer. Despite the fact that necromancy is not necessarily stated to be the source of the necromancer's knowledge, the narrative portion ending with R. Kattina's statement may be questioning the efficacy of necromancy.

We see, however, an interesting distinction in attitudes towards necromancy when we compare the view as presented in this earlier narrative with the views of the anonymous narrator.³²⁸ The anonymous narrator points out an alternative reason for R. Kattina's statement, namely, that two rumblings did occur, but that R. Kattina denounced him so that he would not lead people astray. In contrast to R. Kattina, who may be questioning the efficacy of necromancy, the alternative proposed by the anonymous narrator does not question the efficacy of necromancy, but it does betray anxiety over the fact that since the necromancer's knowledge is correct, he may lead people astray.

This anxiety is also apparent from the final formation of the narrative as a whole as it juxtaposes rabbinic opinions of the origin of the rumbling with that of the necromancer in order to depict the superiority of rabbinic knowledge. Causes the rabbis give for the rumbling include God clapping his hands, sighing, trampling on the firmament and pressing his feet under the throne of glory. In each case, the opinion of the rabbi is couched in terms of scripture. This is in contrast to the necromancer, whose

³²⁸ This is an example in which we can see that the attitudes of earlier rabbis differ from those of later generations and provides an argument against those scholars who claim that earlier traditions cannot be uncovered and that the Talmud is a product of Stammaitic redactors. See Kalmin, "Formation and Character," 844-46.

opinion of the cause of the rumbling is not couched in terms of a scriptural proof text.³²⁹ Thus, this text shows us the struggle over authority and social control of knowledge, in particular over professional divination because of its effectiveness.³³⁰ As we also saw with respect to dream interpretation in Chapter 2, the rabbis are positing their knowledge of scripture against the knowledge of professional diviners. While the final form of this narrative does not discount the efficacy of necromancy, it depicts the superiority of the rabbis' knowledge over that of a professional diviner and hence the superiority of knowledge derived from scripture. While the necromancer's opinion is not invalidated, he is publicly denounced and then trumped by the rabbis' opinions which are couched in scripture. While the necromancer is able to give one possible cause for the source, the rabbis are able to provide several, all of which are based in scripture. Thus, we see in this narrative that while the earlier material may be questioning the efficacy of necromancy, the alternative proposed by the later anonymous narrator does not. Despite this distinction, as with the previous narrative, we see that necromancy is not depicted as performed by a non-rabbi and those who are said to engage in these practices are negatively depicted.

The sole passage in which it is clear that necromancy is being performed by a non-rabbi who is associated with them in other texts is *b. Git. 56b-57a*. In this case, the efficacy of necromancy is not questioned, but it is depicted as being performed for a negative reason, in order to determine whether or not it would be advantageous for Onkelos to convert to Judaism. As we will see, this likely reflects a Palestinian attitude towards and depiction of necromancy that is utilized within the extended narrative in

³²⁹ See Liebes, *Studies*, 39; Fishbane, "Exegetical Theology," 164.

³³⁰ Harari, "Opening the Heart," 333; "Sages," 547.

which it is contained in order to contrast both Titus, who defiled the Temple, and Onkelos with Nero.³³¹ The text reads as follows:³³²

- A. Onkelos son of Kolonikos was the son of Titus's sister. He wanted to become a proselyte.
- B. He went. He raised Titus from the dead by pulling [out of the grave by necromancy] (בגדיגא). He said to him, "Who is the most important in that world (the world of the dead)?" He said to him, "Israel." [He said to him,] "What then about joining them?" He said to him, "Their commands are extensive and you will not be able to observe them. Go. Incite them in that world and you will be on top [lit. the head], as it is written, 'Her adversaries become the head, etc.' (Lam 1:5), [meaning] anyone who harasses Israel becomes head." He said to him, "What is your punishment?" He said to him, "What I decreed for myself. Every day my ashes are collected and sentence is passed on me and they burn me and they scatter my ashes over the seven seas."
- C. He then went. He raised Balaam by pulling [out of the grave by necromancy]. He said to him, "Who is the most important in that world?" He said to him, "Israel." [He said to him,] "What then about joining them?" He said to him, "'You shall not seek their peace and their prosperity all [your] days' (Deut 23:7)." He said to him, "What is your punishment?" He said to him, "With boiling hot semen."
- D. He went. He raised by pulling [out of the grave by necromancy] Jesus/the sinners of Israel.³³³ He said to them, "Who is the most important in that world?" They said to him, "Israel." [He said to them,] "What then about joining them?" They said to him, "Seek their prosperity. Do not seek their harm. Anyone who touches them it is as if he touches the pupil of his eye." He said to them, "What is your punishment?" They said to him, "With boiling hot excrement, since a Master has said, 'Anyone who mocks at the words of the Sages is punished with boiling hot excrement. Come and observe the difference between the sinners of Israel and the prophets of the nations of the world who worship idols.'"

In this passage, Onkelos, upon wanting to become a proselyte, performed necromancy in order to determine whether or not it would be advantageous for him to do so. In the course of his performance, he raises up the "three arch villains of Jewish history

³³¹ Kalmin argues in many of his works that despite traditions involving Palestinian figures being recorded in the Bavli, they may in fact reflect Palestinian attitudes, rather than being Babylonian creations or reflective of Babylonian attitudes. These traditions may have originated in Palestine and been subject to tampering by later Babylonian authors. He argues that it is necessary to determine whether a text reflects Palestinian or Babylonian attitudes (or both) on a case-by-case basis. See for example, *Sage*, 22; *Jewish Babylonia*, 10-17; "Formation and Character," 849-52; "Problems in the Use of the Babylonian Talmud".

³³² Schäfer's translation from *Jesus*, 84-85 was consulted for this passage.

³³³ Munich 95 and Vatican 140 ישו; Vatican 130 ישו הגוצרי.

out of their graves to get their informed advice: Titus, the destroyer of the second Temple; Balaam, the prophet of the nations; and Jesus, the Nazarene.”³³⁴ Schäfer argues that an earlier editorial layer stated that Jesus was the third person who was brought up and it was changed by the anonymous author to “sinners of Israel.” This was done in order to conform to the anonymous Master’s saying which both matches the punishment of Jesus and distinguishes between the nations who worship idols and the sinners of Israel.³³⁵ In each of the three consultations, the person raised acknowledges that Israel is held in the highest regard in Gehinnom. However, Titus and Balaam attempt to dissuade Onkelos from becoming a proselyte, while Jesus acknowledges that he should join them. Titus not only tries to dissuade Onkelos by stating that their commands are hard to follow, but he advises Onkelos to persecute them. Similarly, Balaam advises Onkelos not to join them. Schäfer notes that this is done by putting the verse which states that the Ammonites and Moabites must be excluded from Israel into the mouth of Balaam thus turning it into a curse against Israel, which is what he always wanted to do but failed to do in the Hebrew Bible account.³³⁶ So not only is Onkelos depicted as performing necromancy by the technique *בגגידא*, but we see what information he is able to obtain from doing so. Thus, necromancy is depicted as working though the reason for doing so is not a positive one. If the earlier layer does in fact refer to Jesus, the advice he gives may differentiate him from Titus and Balaam in that he is a sinner of Israel.³³⁷

³³⁴ Schäfer, *Jesus*, 85.

³³⁵ Schäfer, *Jesus*, 90.

³³⁶ Schäfer, *Jesus*, 86-87.

³³⁷ Schäfer, *Jesus*, 94.

This passage is part of the same extended narrative as the one which juxtaposes Nero's decision to become a proselyte with bibliomancy and belomancy in *b. Git.* 56a.³³⁸ These two passages should be viewed in juxtaposition with one another.³³⁹ More specifically, the Onkelos narrative is an inversion of the Nero narrative intended to contrast both Onkelos and Titus with Nero. As was argued in the previous chapter, Nero is an "evil gentile" who is depicted as acting like a rabbi in his use of bibliomancy in which he elicits verses from children. By doing so, he acknowledges the authority of Scripture. Furthermore, on account of his use of divination, he is described as becoming a proselyte from whom a well respected rabbi is descended.

This passage serves to contrast the decisions of the emperors Nero and Titus on the one hand, and Nero and Onkelos on the other hand. While Nero is depicted as utilizing a particularly rabbinic method of divination and on account of it decides to become a proselyte instead of attacking Jerusalem, Titus attacked Jerusalem and desecrated the Holy of Holies. While Nero is depicted as having this change of heart during his lifetime, we see that in death, Titus' opinion of Judaism has not changed. While he recognizes that Israel is the most notable among the world of the dead, he counsels Onkelos not to join them and in fact to persecute them as he did. The answers given by Titus and Balaam are contrasted with Jesus/the sinners of Israel who changed their mind post-mortem and encourage Onkelos to convert; however, ironically, despite this post-mortem change of heart, their punishment remains the same.³⁴⁰ Perhaps one reason why the narrative depicts Onkelos questioning these characters is in order to make it clear that it is the decision he makes in life as to whether or not to convert that

³³⁸ See Chapter 4.

³³⁹ Schäfer argues that Onkelos follows the example of Nero in becoming a proselyte (Schäfer, *Jesus*, 84).

³⁴⁰ Schäfer, *Jesus*, 89.

determines what will happen to him after death. Unlike Nero, Onkelos is not an “evil gentile” who is rabbinized; rather, he consults “evil gentiles” in necromancy. Also, in contrast to Nero who is depicted positively and has a famous rabbi as his ancestor, Onkelos, who is associated with the rabbis in many other texts, is said to be related to Titus and is not rehabilitated in the narrative as Nero was. Furthermore, unlike Nero, who is rabbinized in his recourse to bibliomancy and his decision on the basis of it to become a proselyte, Onkelos is not rabbinized in this narrative and his motive in using necromancy, namely to determine whether becoming a proselyte is advantageous, is not depicted positively. As we will see, however, this portrayal of Onkelos differs from other depictions of him in the Bavli; however, one reason why he may have been depicted in this manner was in order to facilitate a conversation with the dead in which the dead realize the preeminence of Judaism after death, a theme which is present elsewhere in Palestinian sources.

A person named Onkelos is mentioned in a number of passages in the Bavli, but only in this text and *b. AZ* 11a with the patronymic Kolonikos.³⁴¹ All of the passages except *b. Git.* 56b-57a closely associate this figure with the rabbis. In *b. AZ* 11a, unlike the passage at hand, Onkelos, already having become a proselyte, is clearly rabbinized as he causes a number of others to convert through his knowledge of scripture. That Onkelos is rabbinized is also shown by the fact that a statement of his is referred to as a *baraita*.³⁴² Additionally, there are statements referring to his having translated the Pentateuch under the guidance of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua.³⁴³ While it is impossible to be

³⁴¹ *b. AZ* 11a; *b. BB* 99a; *b. Meg.* 3a (the parallel in *y. Meg.* 1:11, 71c, however, mentions that Aquila translated it into Greek); *t. Shab.* 7(8):18; *t. Hag.* 3:2, 3; *t. Mik.* 6:3.

³⁴² *b. BB* 99a.

³⁴³ *b. Meg.* 3a

certain that the Onkelos mentioned in many of these passages is the same one as in the passage at hand, we can be certain that the same Onkelos is mentioned in *b. AZ 11a*, a passage in which he is clearly rabbinized. The similarity between the depiction of Onkelos son of Kolonikos in *b. AZ 11a* with the depictions of Onkelos without a patronymic elsewhere in the Bavli suggests that we should understand all these passages as referring to the same person.³⁴⁴ So, the question is why he is depicted in a negative light in this one passage.

I suggest that the reason Onkelos is depicted as performing necromancy is in order to facilitate a conversation with the dead in which the dead realize the preeminence of Judaism after death, a motif which is present in Palestinian sources. There are two Palestinian parallels to the narrative in *b. Sanh. 65b* discussed above in which R. Aqiba uses the *בעל אוב* as proof that the Sabbath is different from other days. These parallels occur in *Gen. R. 2:5* and *Pesiq. Rab. 23*. In each of these narratives, Tinneus Rufus brings his father up in order to prove R. Aqiba's assertion that the *בעל אוב* proves that the Sabbath is different than other days. Once he is successful in bringing up his father on the Sabbath, in each instance he questions his father about why this happens, asking him if he has become a Jew after death. His father relates that after death, those who did not willingly keep the Sabbath during life are forced to after death. While the details are not the same as in the Onkelos passage, both of these passages utilize necromancy performed by a non-rabbi in order to show Judaism's superiority and that this is only apparent after death to those who do not adhere to it during life.

³⁴⁴ Schäfer, *Jesus*, 85 acknowledges that the Onkelos in the narrative at hand is the same one who translated the Torah into Aramaic.

Necromancy is not the only form of divination which has been utilized in Palestinian sources in order to show Judaism's superiority. Richard Kalmin has shown that Palestinian sources polemicize against astrology and stigmatize it as a non-Jewish practice. In particular, he discusses a couple passages from the Yerushalmi which show that when Jews do engage in astrology they are marginal figures such as converts and that their recourse to astrology has negative consequences.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, he argues that Babylonian sources depict astrology differently than do Palestinian sources. Unlike Palestinian sources, the Babylonian rabbis do not polemicize against astrology; rather, they depict astrology as unproblematically efficacious and show that it has an important impact on the lives of important rabbis.³⁴⁶ Likewise, with necromancy there appears to be a difference between Palestinian and Babylonian depictions. While Babylonian sources only depict rabbis actually performing necromancy and only polemicize against non-rabbis who purport to engage in necromancy, but they do not depict them as doing such, Palestinian sources depict non-rabbis as engaging in necromancy and they do so in order to depict Judaism's supremacy over other religious beliefs.

Necromancy/Incubation Performed by a Rabbi

Accounts of the practice of both necromancy and incubation by rabbis are attested in *aggadah* in the Bavli. In contrast to the negative portrayal of necromancy and incubation in association with a non-rabbi in the Bavli and the uniformly negative depiction of necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, the performance of necromancy or incubation by a rabbi is depicted neutrally in the Bavli. While the Bavli does portray rabbis as performing both necromancy and incubation, the praxis is generally not

³⁴⁵ Kalmin, "Problems in the Use of the Bavli," 173-74.

³⁴⁶ Kalmin, "Problems in the Use of the Bavli," 175-78.

described in any detail. Rather, we get a brief insight into method and learn what information was obtained by the consultation. Furthermore, on account of the lack of description of praxis, it is often difficult to determine whether incubation or another necromantic technique was utilized when the account is said to occur in a cemetery. This is due to the association of cemeteries with incubation, but a lack of references to the knowledge being obtained in a dream.

In two passages, namely *b. BM 107b* and *b. Ber. 18b*, it is unclear from the passage whether the rabbi is performing necromancy or incubation since the consultations take place in cemeteries, but there is no explicit mention of what type of necromantic technique was utilized. In *b. BM 107b*, Rab, a prominent 3rd century Babylonian Amora, is depicted as using necromancy and it is likewise proven to be efficacious for him as well as depicted positively.³⁴⁷ This *sugya* consists of varying interpretations of Deut 7:15. In this passage, five different opinions on what the “sickness” in Deut 7:15 refers to are given. In each case, the rabbi gives his opinion, which is followed by a proof that either he or someone else had said elsewhere. The first opinion, however, is the only one that involves necromancy. The relevant portion of the text reads as follows:

‘The Lord will ward off from you all sickness (חלי)’ (Deut 7:15). Said Rab, “This is the [evil] eye.”³⁴⁸ Rab is in accordance with his opinion [expressed elsewhere].³⁴⁹ For Rab went up to a cemetery, he did what he did (עבד מאי דעבד). He said, “Ninety-nine [have died] of the evil eye, and one of natural causes.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ A parallel to this passage occurs in *y. Shab. 14:3*; however, the account there does not mention necromancy.

³⁴⁸ Firenze II.1.8-9 and Vatican 115 read “This is the evil eye.”

³⁴⁹ Munich 95 omits.

³⁵⁰ “Ninety-nine [have died] of the evil eye” Munich 95 omits. Firenze II.1.8-9 reads “Ninety-nine have died of the evil eye, and one of natural causes.”

Rab states that the term “sickness” in Deut 7:15 refers to the evil eye. The proof states that Rab went up to a cemetery and he did what he did which allows him to determine that ninety-nine of those in the cemetery have died of the evil eye and one has died of natural causes.³⁵¹ This is an example of Rab performing a necromantic ritual in order to obtain hidden knowledge, namely the cause of death of the occupants of the cemetery. The text literally states that Rab עבד מאי דעבד “did what he did.” This phrase generally refers to the performance of a magical practice.³⁵² As we saw above in the discussion of legislation on necromancy, it is often treated as a form of magic. Given that the performance of this rite occurs in a cemetery and that Rab acquires some sort of hidden knowledge on account of his actions, despite the fact that it is not explicitly spelled out in the text, we can assume that he performed some sort of necromantic praxis. As we have seen, while the Bavli depicts rabbis as performing necromancy, it is very reticent to do so in any detail. Despite the lack of insight into praxis, Rab does obtain information by this method and thus necromancy is both depicted as efficacious and in a positive manner.

Likewise, in *b. Ber.* 18b there is a series of three narratives in which a rabbi consults the dead in a cemetery and it is unclear what necromantic technique(s) are utilized. In these narratives, the consultation of the dead is given as evidence that the dead have knowledge of the living; however, in each case, the narrative is followed by a difficulty which refutes this possibility in a manner which allows the introduction of

³⁵¹ For various incantations against the evil eye in Mesopotamia in Sumerian, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Syriac and Hebrew/Aramaic see Ford, “Ninety-Nine.” For the particular view that the evil eye can cause illness see particularly pp. 233-36.

³⁵² Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 837.

another proof-text.³⁵³ The first story consists of a series of indirect chance overhearings on the part of both the living and the dead while the subsequent stories involve direct conversation between the living and the dead. These stories read as follows:

- A. Has it not been taught: It once happened that a certain pious man (חסיד) gave a denar to a poor man on the eve of Rosh ha-Shanah in a year of dearth, and his wife vexed him, and he went and spent the night in the cemetery, and he heard two spirits conversing with one another. One said to her companion, "My dear, come and let us roam about the world and let us hear from behind the curtain what retribution is coming to the world." Said her companion to her, "I am not able, because I am buried in a matting of reeds. But you go, and whatever you hear tell me." She went and roamed about and returned. And her companion said to her, "My dear, what have you heard from behind the curtain?" She said to her, "I heard that anyone who sows after the first rainfall, hail will strike [his crop]." He went and sowed after the second rainfall. [The crops] of the whole world were struck. His [crop] was not struck. The next year he went and spent the night in the cemetery, and heard the two spirits conversing with one another. One said to her companion, "Come and let us roam about the world and hear from behind the curtain what retribution is coming to the world." She said to her, "My dear, did I not say thus to you? I am not able because I am buried in a matting of reeds. But you go, and whatever you hear, come and tell me." She went and roamed about and returned. And her companion said to her, "My dear, what have you heard from behind the curtain?" She said to her, "I heard that whoever sows after the second rain, blast will strike his [crop]." He went and sowed after the first rain. [The crop] of the whole world was blasted but his [crop] was not blasted. His wife said to him, "On account of what was the [crop] of the whole world struck last year and your [crop] was not struck and now the [crop] of the whole world was blasted and your [crop] was not blasted? He told her all those things. They say there were not many days until a quarrel occurred between the wife of that pious man and the mother of the young woman. She said to her, "Come and I will show you your daughter buried in a matting of reeds." The next year he went and spent the night in the cemetery and heard those conversing together. She said to her, "My dear, come and let us roam about the world and hear from behind the curtain what retribution is coming upon the world." She said to her, "My dear, leave me alone. The words between you and I already have been heard among the living." From here may we derive that they know? Perhaps another man died and went and told them.
- B. Come and hear: For Ze'iri deposited some money with his landlady. While he went and left to the study house, she died. He went after her to the courtyard of death (הצר מות). He said to her, "Where is my money?" She said to him, "Go. Take it from under me, in the pivot of the door, in such and such a place, and tell my mother to send me my comb and my tube of kohl by the hand of so-and-so

³⁵³ Cohen, "Representation of Death," 63.

who is coming tomorrow.” From here may we derive that they know? Perhaps Dumah³⁵⁴ announced to them beforehand.

- C. Come and hear: The father of Samuel had some money belonging to orphans deposited with him. When his soul rested, Samuel was not with him. They called him, “The son who consumes the money of orphans.” He went after [his father] to the courtyard of death (הצר מות). He said to them (the dead), “I am searching for Abba.” They said to him, “There are many Abbas here.” He said to them, “I want Abba b. Abba.” They said to him, “There are also many Abba b. Abbases here.” He then said to them, “I want Abba b. Abba the father of Samuel. Where [is he]?” They said to him, “He went up to the Academy of the Sky.” Meanwhile he saw Levi sitting outside. He said to him, “Why are you sitting outside? What is the reason you have not gone up?” He said to him, “Because they said to me: For all those years that you did not go up to the academy of R. Efes and made him upset, we will not bring you up to the Academy of the Sky.” Meanwhile his father came. [Samuel] saw that he was weeping and laughing. He said to him, “What is the reason you are weeping?” He said to him, “Because you are coming here soon.” [He said to him,] “And why are you laughing?” [He said to him,] “Because you are respected in this world.” He said to him, “If I am respected, let them take up Levi.” And they took up Levi. He said to him, “Where is the money of the orphans?” He said to him, “Go. You will find it in the enclosure of the millstones. The [money at the] top and the bottom is mine and the middle is the orphans.” He said to him, “What is the reason you did this?” He said to him, “So that if thieves steal, they should steal mine. If the earth consumes, it should consume mine.” From here may we derive that they know? Samuel is different. Since he was respected beforehand, they announced “Make room!”

Section A begins with a *baraita* that is introduced in order to contradict the halakhic opinion that the dead know their own pain, but they do not know that of the living. In this story, a *הסיד* who was upset with his wife for giving away money in a particularly hard year goes to spend the night at a cemetery and overhears two spirits conversing with one another. Rabbinic sources refer to *הסידים* who at most may have been on the margins of rabbinic society, but who had real social power. The rabbis depicted these *הסידים* as conforming to rabbinic values in order to make them seem unthreatening.³⁵⁵ This passage consists of a tripartite structure in which three different stories are brought forward as

³⁵⁴ “Silence.” The guardian angel over the dead (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 286).

³⁵⁵ See Kalmin, “Holy Men.” For the identification of the Jewish holy man as a rabbi see Kirschner, “Vocations of Holiness,” 116-20; Lapin, “Rabbis and Public Prayers for Rain,” 117-19; Bokser, “Wonder-working and the Rabbinic Tradition”; Green, “Palestinian Holy Men.”

evidence that the dead have knowledge of the living.³⁵⁶ While the *חסיד* in the first story may not have originally referred to a rabbi, given that the protagonists of the other two stories are rabbis, the anonymous narrator likely intends for us to understand the *חסיד* as a rabbi.

The content of this narrative gives no indication as to whether or not the *חסיד* sought out this initial consultation with the dead when he went to spend the night in a cemetery. It also does not tell us whether or not he was awake when he heard the spirits or whether it was in a dream. What is clear, however, is that the *חסיד* receives financial help from the spirits, which is his concern in going to the cemetery. Furthermore, while it is unclear whether he sought out his initial consultation with the dead, it is apparent that his intention in going to the cemetery in subsequent years was in order to obtain hidden knowledge from the dead. In other words, we went in order to perform necromancy. This particular narrative is likewise unique because there is no direct discussion between the living and the dead; rather, the *חסיד* overhears the conversation of two spirits.

In this narrative, one of the two spirits gains knowledge about what will happen to the crops of the living while roaming about the world and then conveys this knowledge to her companion who is buried in a matting of reeds. The man overhears this conversation and then acts accordingly. This happens two years in a row until his wife questions how he came into this knowledge. After this conversation, his wife got in a fight with the mother of the girl buried in a matting of reeds and says to her that she will show her where she is buried. The text does not clarify whether or not she did in fact show her; however, it is clear that this girl has knowledge of the fact that someone overheard their

³⁵⁶ For the significance of threefold repetition and the tripartite structure of many *sugyot* see Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 17 and 252-53.

conversation and learned where she is buried as she effectively conveyed this to her companion when the man went to the cemetery a third time. That this is how she learned about matters in the realm of the living is then questioned and an alternative explanation, that she was told by someone who had died recently, is given, thus allowing the introduction of another proof.

In Sections B and C, stories are brought forth which likewise serve to contradict the opinion that the dead do not know what is going on in the realm of the living. In each of these narratives, like the previous one, it is unclear how the consultation with the dead occurred, whether through an incubated dream or some other sort of necromantic ritual.³⁵⁷ Unlike the previous narrative, however, each of these involve a direct conversation between the living and the dead. In the story in section B, Ze‘iri, a 3rd century Babylonian Amora, questions his deceased landlady, with whom he had deposited some money, about where it is. She directly answers his question. Like in the previous narrative, it is shown that she has ongoing knowledge about the realm of the living when she tells him to give her comb and tube of kohl to a person who will be coming to the cemetery on the following day. That she just happens to have this knowledge about the living is then questioned and an alternative is brought forth which states that perhaps Dumah announces what they know to them in advance. Hence, the reason she would know that someone would be visiting her on the following day is because Dumah told her.

In the story in section C, Samuel desires to question his deceased father about the location of some orphans’ money which had been deposited with him. In this story,

³⁵⁷ While it is possible that no particular necromantic techniques were utilized in order to converse with the dead in these accounts, given that a conversation occurs between the living and the dead in which the living obtain hidden knowledge from the dead, these should be considered accounts of necromancy.

Samuel is depicted as asking the dead in more and more specific ways for his father and he is told that he was taken up to the Academy of the Sky. After learning this information, he sees Levi among the dead and asks him why he was not taken up to the Academy of the Sky to which he responds that it was on account of his neglecting to go to the academy of R. Efes. When Samuel does finally see his father, he is both weeping and crying. When he asks him why, his father responds that he is weeping because Samuel will soon join him among the dead. This is the example of his ongoing knowledge of what is occurring among the living. He responds that he is laughing since Samuel is respected in the world of the dead, on account of which Samuel's request for Levi to be taken up to the Academy of the Sky is granted. Thereafter, Samuel learns the location of the orphan's money. Like in the previous narratives, the evidence from this narrative that the dead have knowledge of the world of the living is discounted by stating that Samuel is different from other men and that on account of the fact that he was respected among the world of the dead, knowledge concerning him was granted to the dead. As was the case with the R. Kattina narrative above, this passage is another instance in which there is a distinction between the view presented in the earlier narratives and the alternative presented by the anonymous narrator. While the individual stories here have no issue with depicting the dead as continuing to know what is going on in the world of the living, the anonymous narrator, while not denying that the dead have useful knowledge, suggests that they may have acquired it by other means such as someone who recently died. Furthermore, we see that rabbis are positively depicted as being able to access the knowledge of the dead through necromancy.

Unlike the first story in this passage, there are parallels to the second and third accounts in several Greco-Roman and Christian texts, the earliest of which is Herodotus.³⁵⁸ Herodotus 5.92 relates the account of Periander's evocation of his deceased wife Melissa in order to determine the location of the deposit of a guest-friend. Both the second and third narratives in the Bavli account likewise involve the use of necromancy in order to determine the location of hidden money; however, the second account is closest to Herodotus. Unlike the landlady in the Bavli account who gives Ze'iri his information right away and then asks a favor of him in return, Melissa in Herodotus' account is unwilling to answer Periander's question about the money until after he has appeased her. However, while we have no reason to suppose that the relationship between Ze'iri and his landlady was anything but congenial, Periander was responsible for Melissa's death and thus she had reason to be angry with him. As in Chapter 3, I am not arguing here that the rabbis borrowed this motif directly from Herodotus; rather, there was a process of cultural influence in which a larger pattern of Greco-Roman tales and motifs circulated in the ancient world and that they were adopted and modified by the rabbis for their own narrative purposes. This appears to be another instance of their utilization for the purpose of depicting and questioning the ongoing knowledge of the dead.³⁵⁹ As with the text discussed in Chapter 3, we see these Greco-Roman motifs occurring in conjunction with rabbis dating to the 3rd century CE.³⁶⁰

In the other two accounts of conversations between the living and the dead, it is clear that incubation takes place since the consultation is explicitly said to have occurred

³⁵⁸ Augustine, *On the Love for the Dead*, 13; Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.353-59; *Apothegmata Sancti Macarii* at PG 34.244-45.

³⁵⁹ See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the significance of parallels between material in rabbinic and Greco-Roman literature where this passage is also briefly discussed in conjunction with *b. BB* 3b.

³⁶⁰ Ze'iri and Samuel are both 3rd century Babylonian Amoraim.

in a dream. In *b. Shab.* 152a-b, incubation takes place in the house of the deceased. This passage consists of a statement in the name of Rab Judah which tells what happens if the dead has no relatives or others to mourn them followed by a story which exemplifies this statement. It reads as follows:

Said Rab Judah, "A dead person who has no comforters, 10 people go and sit in his place." A certain man who died in the neighborhood of R. Judah had no comforters. Every day Rab Judah would assemble 10 men and they sat in his place. After 7 days he appeared to Rab Judah in a dream and said to him, "Let your mind be at rest for you have set my mind at rest."

In this story Rab Judah assembled ten men who would go and sit in mourning at the house of the man who died. After seven days the spirit of the dead man appeared to him in a dream and informed him that he had been comforted by his actions. This passage seems to imply that while Rab Judah and the 10 men spent the day at the man's house mourning him, they would go home to sleep in the evening. In incubation, while the dream often does occur in the same location as the rites, this does not necessarily have to be the case. For instance in PGM IV.2006-15, the rites occur where the corpse is located; however, the dream occurs when the officiant is at home. Incubation, however, is generally something which one intends to happen. This narrative, however, does not explicitly state that the intention of Rab Judah is to procure a dream, though it is possible that it was his intention and was simply unstated as is in line with the tendency not to depict the details of necromantic praxis in the Bavli. Alternatively, this could be an instance in which the dead acts of its own accord as was the case with the idol in *b. AZ* 55a. What we can determine, however, is that Rab Judah's actions are depicted positively and that he obtained information from the dead indicating that the rite was efficacious.

Furthermore, if we understand this to be an instance of deliberate incubation, the possible method of procurement had something to do with staying at the man's house.

Additionally, there is a brief narrative in *b. MQ* 28a in which rabbis explicitly solicit dream visitations after death from one who is on their deathbed.

- A. Rav Seorim, Raba's brother, while sitting before Raba, saw that [Raba] was going to sleep (dying). He said to him, "Let the Master tell him not to afflict me." He said to him, "Master, are you not his friend?" He said to him, "Since [my] *mazzal* has been lowered³⁶¹[to him], he does not care for me." He said to him, "Master, show yourself to me [in a dream]." He showed himself to him. He said to him, "Master, were you afflicted?" He said to him, "As from the puncture of the lancet."
- B. Raba, while sitting before R. Nahman, saw that he was going to sleep (dying). Said he to him, "Let the Master tell him not to afflict me." He said to him, "Master, are you not an esteemed man?" He said to him, "Who is esteemed, who is regarded, who is firm [before the Angel of Death]?" He said to him, "Master, show yourself to me [in a dream]." He did show himself to him. He said to him, "Master, were you afflicted?" He said to him, "As sliding a hair from milk. But if the Holy One, blessed be He, said to me, 'Go to that world as you were.' I wish it not, for their fear [of death] is great."

This passage consists of two sections in which a rabbi on his deathbed asks another rabbi who is accompanying him to ask that he not be afflicted with pain when he dies. The rabbi who is comforting him asks his dying companion if there is reason for him to be concerned in this way, to which the dying rabbi responds that there is. In each case, the companion asks to be visited in a dream after death. Thus, in each case, the rabbi makes a deliberate request for incubation so that he can question his companion about what it is like to die. The rabbi does in fact come to him in a dream and a consultation takes place in which the other rabbi asks his companion whether or not he was afflicted with pain when he dies, to which each makes a comparison showing how slight the pain actually was.

³⁶¹ Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 693.

We have seen in the abovementioned passages that necromancy and incubation are efficacious for rabbis as these practices were for non-rabbis. Furthermore, when a rabbi is involved in necromancy or incubation, the praxis necessary for the consultation is described albeit in a limited capacity. Additionally, when rabbis are depicted as engaging in necromancy or incubation, the information they obtain as a result of this practice is related and at times the conversation which occurs with the dead is described. Finally, in contrast to the negative depiction of the involvement of non-rabbis in necromancy or incubation, the involvement of rabbis is depicted positively or at least neutrally.

Conclusion

Necromancy, like dream interpretation, is a method of divination which has a biblical precedent and thus a legal precedent. In both the Hebrew Bible and the Bavli, the concept of necromancy is based upon the notion that people continue to have knowledge about the world of the living even after death; however, based on the passages in the Bavli, we cannot draw any conclusions about how long they considered this to be possible after death. While the efficacy of necromancy is generally not questioned in the Hebrew Bible nor in the Bavli, the treatment of it in these two corpora differs. It is clear from both the legislation on necromancy and the literary accounts of it that the authors of the Hebrew Bible and the Bavli were familiar with practices which were prevalent in their surrounding cultures. Only one narrative account of a necromantic rite occurs in the Hebrew Bible, namely 1 Sam 28:3-25. While the exact means by which the ghost of Samuel is consulted is unclear, the reasons for doing so, namely the context of political instability, parallels one use of necromancy in Mesopotamia and Egypt. While the Bavli is reticent to depict praxis in any detail, multiple accounts do exist and they refer briefly

to practices which have precedents in the Greco-Roman world. These practices include incubation, knocking on a grave, raising a ghost by naming, and raising a ghost by means of a skull.

Related to this is the manner in which necromancy is legislated in these corpora. The Hebrew Bible prohibits necromancy along with other forms of magic while depicting these practices as those of the surrounding Canaanite culture, thus using it as a category of cultural control over competing religious ideologies and cults. In the Bavli, necromancy is likewise prohibited in a manner similar to magic; however, its practice is not attributed to the surrounding culture. In the Bavli, the necromancer is directly associated with various types of magical practitioners such as the charmer (חֹבֵר חֶבֶר), sorcerers (מְכַשְׁפִּים), and one who offers incense to a demon. Furthermore, the rabbis legislate against the biblically prohibited practices of necromancy and magic based upon whether or not an action occurs, a criterion that does not appear in the Hebrew Bible. The fact that an action takes place is what causes the performer to be considered guilty and the practice to be both prohibited and punished. However, while laws on magic have three legal categories, namely guilty, innocent, and guilty but not punished, laws pertaining to necromancy only appear to have the first two. While only the category “guilty” occurs in the Bavli’s legislation of necromancy, we can consider the positive depiction of the performance of necromancy by rabbis in the aggadic narratives as akin to the “innocent” category.

While necromancy is prohibited in both the Hebrew Bible and in the Bavli, the depiction of necromancy and incubation in the Bavli does not follow biblical precedent. While necromancy is uniformly depicted negatively in the Hebrew Bible, the rabbis tend

to negatively depict necromancy and incubation when it occurs in association with non-rabbis but positively or neutrally when they are associated with rabbis. Only rabbis and those closely associated with them are depicted as performing necromancy and the information which results from the consultation is related, often through the depiction of direct discourse with the dead. While the praxis necessary for the consultation is mentioned, it is only described in a limited capacity. In the sole instance of the association of incubation with a non-rabbi, the Bavli does depict its performance, albeit in an unusual fashion; however, the Bavli does not depict non-rabbis who are not associated with the rabbis as actually performing necromancy. The reason why incubation is depicted as taking place may be on account of the fact that the pagan incubation shrine is referred to as a house of idolatry (בית עבודה כוכבים). This may account for the unusual features of the narrative such as the fact that the idol is depicted as coming of its own accord to the priest in a dream as opposed to through an elicited encounter as would normally happen during an incubation rite. With respect to necromancy in conjunction with a non-rabbi, however, no conversation with a ghost occurs nor is there any insight into how knowledge was gained from such a consultation except in the case where the non-rabbi has close ties with the rabbis. Furthermore, when a non-rabbi is associated with the performance of necromancy, not only is it negatively depicted, but the passages in which this occurs highlight the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over that of the “other.”

The sole passage in which necromancy is performed by a non-rabbi who is associated with them in other texts is *b. Git. 56b-57a*. Unlike other texts involving non-rabbis, Onkelos is depicted here as actually performing necromancy; however, this text,

unlike the others, is preserving a Palestinian motif which accounts for the differing depiction. This narrative is an example of necromancy being utilized in order for the dead to reveal to the living the preeminence of Judaism, a fact which they only realized after death. This motif is present in other Palestinian sources, but not in Babylonian ones, and only features Palestinian figures. While Babylonian sources depict rabbis performing necromancy, they do not depict non-rabbis, against whom they polemicize, as actually performing necromancy. Palestinian sources, however, depict non-rabbis as engaging in necromancy in order to polemicize against them by depicting Judaism's superiority over other religious beliefs.

In contrast, the other two passages in which necromancy is associated with non-rabbis each depict the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over the knowledge of the non-rabbis in the narrative, but in doing so they do not actually depict the non-rabbis as engaging in necromancy. In *b. BB 58b*, we saw the superiority of R. Bena'ah's judicial knowledge over the sons who come to him with an inheritance question and later over the Romans who detain him. In the case of the inheritance dispute, R. Bena'ah's superior judicial knowledge is shown through his use of a test reminiscent of Solomon's test from 1 Kgs 3:16-28. And, in each case, the judge proposed a situation that should be considered reprehensible to the party with the legitimate claim. In each case, the legitimate party did in fact refuse to participate in the proposal and was thus awarded their claim. In the Bavli account, it was necromancy that R. Bena'ah proposed as the test. However, the sons who do go out to perform necromancy, being unhappy with the ruling, inform against him to the king, thus setting up another instance in which R. Bena'ah's knowledge can be proved superior. This time, his knowledge is depicted as superior to

that of the Roman judges for he is the only one able to correctly interpret his wife's riddle.

In *b. Git.* 56b-57a, rabbinic knowledge of the meaning of a particular term is pitted against that of a pagan necromancer and proved superior. In this narrative, R. Kattina encountered a necromancer and asked him the meaning of the term זרעות. While the necromancer is able to give R. Kattina a correct interpretation of the term, R. Kattina did not admit that he did so and publicly ridiculed the necromancer as a liar. This statement could possibly be seen as questioning the efficacy of necromancy. The anonymous narrator, however, does not have any issue with the fact that the necromancer is correct, but he does display anxiety over the possibility that on account of his knowledge, the necromancer may lead people astray. Therefore, he states that this is the reason why R. Kattina denounced the necromancer and juxtaposes the differing opinions of several rabbis about the meaning of the term, each couched in terms of a different scriptural proof text. This is in contrast to the necromancer's answer which was not given in such terms. Thus, we can see this narrative as an instance of the rabbis showing that their knowledge, which is based in scripture, is superior to other forms of knowledge, such as that of a professional diviner.

While the Bavli depicts the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over that of non-rabbis and professional diviners through the use of rabbinic knowledge and interpretive techniques, they do not do so by rabbinizing necromancy. As we saw with other divinatory techniques, interpretation was necessary for them to be properly understood and utilized. Often the rabbis imposed their own particularly rabbinic interpretive techniques onto these practices in order to rabbinize what was in their view the proper

method of interpretation. Necromancy, however, does not necessitate interpretation in order for the information obtained from the consultation with the dead to be understood since it generally involves direct questions and answers. So, the rabbis cannot rabbinize necromancy in the way that they do these other methods of divination. This may be one reason that they do not depict non-rabbis as actually performing necromancy but they either depict rabbis as showing the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over knowledge obtained by non-rabbis who utilize necromancy or depict rabbis as utilizing necromancy.

The fact that the Bavli depicts rabbis as performing necromancy leaves us with a disjunction between the legislation and depiction of necromancy. Rabbis are depicted as performing necromancy despite the fact that necromancy is prohibited not only in the Bavli, but also in the Hebrew Bible. And not only do they depict rabbis as performing necromancy, but they are aware of necromantic methods which would utilize body parts from corpses, such as human skulls, and would therefore not only violate the prohibitions against the performance of necromancy, but also purity laws which legislate against corpse pollution. While the small number of passages depicting rabbis as performing necromancy does not allow us to offer a definitive reason as to why they might do so, there are a few things we can say for certain regarding the types of necromantic techniques they depict rabbis as utilizing and a few possible reasons why the rabbis might depict themselves as engaging in necromancy. One thing we should keep in mind, however, is that we cannot determine whether or not the rabbis' depictions of themselves actually reflect historical reality. That is, while we know that the rabbis depict themselves as performing necromancy despite its prohibition, we cannot determine whether or not they actually utilized it historically.

While the rabbis depict themselves as performing necromancy, both the techniques they are depicted as utilizing and the extent to which the praxis is related is limited despite the fact that they appear to have a much greater knowledge of necromantic techniques. The rabbis were aware of a wide range of necromantic techniques, including incubation, knocking on a grave, raising a ghost by naming, raising a ghost by means of a skull, and pulling out of the grave by necromancy. As we have seen, there are only four passages in the Bavli in which a rabbi is depicted as utilizing necromancy. In *b. BM* 107b, Rab עבד מאי דעבד “did what he did,” i.e. he utilized a magical technique, in order to determine how many of those who were buried in the cemetery. In *b. Ber.* 18b, it is unclear what necromantic technique was utilized by the rabbi since it is not stated; however, the consultation is likewise said to have taken place in a cemetery or the courtyard of death. And in *b. Shab.* 152a-b and *b. MQ* 28a, the rabbis utilize incubation and unlike the other two passages, it does not take place in a cemetery.

So, the rabbis only depict themselves as utilizing a small fraction of the methods of necromantic praxis with which they were familiar, and they only vaguely relate the particular praxis which they use or do not relate it at all. This could possibly be seen as evidence that they realize that this depiction is in violation of their own legal prohibitions and that on account of this when rabbis are depicted as utilizing necromancy they only vaguely refer to the necromantic technique or do not do so at all. Whether or not they relate the necromantic technique in any detail, one who was familiar with the practices would realize that the rabbis are utilizing necromancy in these cases. Another possibility, however, is that on account of the prohibition against necromancy, they do not relate the

practice in any detail lest it tempt others, most notably other rabbis, to violate the prohibition and perform it.

Half of the passages in which rabbis are depicted as utilizing necromantic techniques are depicted as taking place in a cemetery; however, despite their knowledge of at least one necromantic technique which utilizes a human body part, namely the skull, the rabbis do not depict either rabbis or non-rabbis as utilizing human body parts for necromancy. As was previously stated, rabbis are depicted as utilizing the methods of *עבד מאי דעבד* and incubation. In addition to incubation, other necromantic techniques such as knocking on a grave, pulling and raising by naming are associated with non-rabbis. Thus, we do not see either the depiction of rabbis or non-rabbis utilizing practices which would render one ritually impure through contact with a corpse. Given that the rabbis certainly polemicize in the Bavli against non-rabbis who are associated with necromancy, it is significant that they do not depict non-rabbis as utilizing corpses since the violation of purity laws could be a method by which to polemicize against them. However, it is possible that they do not do so since the Bavli is very reticent to depict praxis and mentioning the method of the utilization of a skull might betray more praxis than they appear to be comfortable with. The rabbis likely depict themselves as performing necromancy in a cemetery since utilizing various necromantic techniques in a cemetery was common throughout the Mediterranean world. This was due to the fact that if you want to communicate with the dead you ought to go to where they are.

The best analogy, however, for why the rabbis might depict themselves as performing necromancy while at the same time legislating against it comes from how the rabbis treat magic in the Bavli. As we have already seen, the rabbis legislate against both

magic and necromancy in a similar manner and thus there is a basis for thinking that they might conceive of them in the same manner more generally. Like with necromancy, the rabbis only give a very brief account of the actual praxis of magic; however, they do actually depict non-rabbis as performing magic, though these accounts often show their magic to be inferior to that of the rabbis. As was stated above with respect to necromancy, it is also possible that the rabbis are reticent to depict magical praxis on account of the legislation against it and the understanding that there is something not entirely right about the fact that rabbis are depicted as performing it.

As we saw, with the exception of *b. Git.* 56b-57a, the passages involving necromancy appear to depict a Babylonian attitude. We saw that the Babylonian rabbis tend not to depict non-rabbis as actually performing necromancy and instead in passages which involve non-rabbis they depict the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over those who are said to utilize these techniques. In contrast, the Babylonian rabbis depict themselves, though without an explicit description of the praxis, as actually performing necromancy. This is similar to the Babylonian attitude towards magic in the Bavli which Kimberly Stratton has identified. Through a text-critical approach to the Bavli, she has argued that magic has two different functions in the Bavli, namely to demonstrate the superiority of rabbinic power and authority and to marginalize a social danger, and that the former is characteristic of Babylonian sages while the latter is characteristic of Palestinian sages.³⁶² She argues that Palestinian rabbis attribute power to piety or asceticism and that their views on magic have been heavily influenced by Hellenistic discourse which perceives magic as dangerous and subversive.³⁶³ On the other hand, in

³⁶² Stratton, *Naming*, 37; “Imaging Power.”

³⁶³ Stratton, *Naming*, 160.

Babylonia, the types of practices which had come to be labeled as magic which were viewed negatively in Greece and Rome were not considered problematic there and knowledge of them could be seen as a means of demonstrating superior power. Many of the examples she uses involve magical contests between rabbis and non-rabbis. While necromantic contests were not a possibility, perhaps the depiction of the superiority of rabbinic knowledge over that of non-rabbis who engage in necromancy could be viewed as a similar concept.

As we saw with respect to dream interpretation in Chapter 2, necromancy appears to be another instance in which the Bavli depicts rabbis as positing their scriptural knowledge against the knowledge of professional diviners. Unlike dream interpretation, however, where the rabbinic methods of dream interpretation are detailed, necromantic praxis is not described in any significant detail. The Jews were a religious minority in Babylonia, who, like those in their surrounding culture venerated knowledge. By showing themselves superior to non-rabbis who engage in necromancy while at the same time only depicting rabbis as actually performing necromancy, these narratives depict the superiority of rabbinic knowledge, especially that of esoteric knowledge, while at the same time limiting the dissemination of competing forms of knowledge. Thus, the depiction of necromancy in the Bavli gives us insight into the struggle over the authority and control of knowledge, in particular that of esoteric knowledge. The rabbis do not depict necromantic praxis in any detail, they only depicted themselves as performing it, and they disavow the accurate knowledge of the professional diviner. This, combined with the fact that they tend to consider it efficacious, is likely due to anxiety the rabbis had over its effectiveness. Since necromancy is a prohibited practice in the Hebrew Bible,

it is possible that the rabbis were anxious that others would perceive the effectiveness of necromancy and not adhere to the biblical injunctions, as was specifically stated to be the case by the anonymous author of *b. Ber. 59a*.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

As we have seen, two of the methods of divination discussed in this work, namely oneiromancy and necromancy have biblical precedents, while bibliomancy and cledonancy do not. Oneiromancy is an accepted method of divination in the Hebrew Bible and it tends to be depicted positively in conjunction with the Israelite prophets and patriarchs, but negatively when performed by false prophets. Necromancy, on the other hand, is explicitly prohibited as a practice of non-Israelites and is always depicted negatively.

In the Bavli, the rabbis continue to explicitly prohibit necromancy which is prohibited in the Hebrew Bible and permit oneiromancy which is permitted in the Hebrew Bible. They also permit bibliomancy and cledonancy which have no biblical precedent. We saw in Chapter 4 that the rabbis distinguish between the categories נחש “divination,” which is biblically prohibited, and סימן “sign,” which is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The rabbis consider bibliomancy and cledonancy to be within the category סימן and thus not part of the category נחש. So, while there is no biblical precedent for the legislation of these practices, we do see that they are legislated according to biblical categories.

We see, however, that in the Bavli, the depiction of these practices does not necessarily correlate with how they are legislated. While in many of the chapters, there was only one instance in which divination was depicted as being performed by a non-rabbi, and thus we could not discuss trends with regard to individual divinatory techniques, when viewing these forms of divination together we can see certain trends in the depiction of rabbis versus non-rabbis performing divination in the Bavli. These trends show that overall, whether or not the practice is permitted or prohibited in the Bavli, the rabbis tend to positively (or at least neutrally) depict these forms of divination when they are performed by a rabbi who is not functioning as a professional diviner. The rabbis, however, tend to negatively depict these forms of divination when they are either performed by a professional diviner or by a non-rabbi. Thus, the way that these various forms of divination are depicted, regardless of whether or not they are permitted or prohibited, serves to define one as an insider or an outsider vis-à-vis the rabbis.

In addition to simply portraying non-rabbis who perform necromancy negatively, the rabbis employed various additional “othering” techniques. For instance, we saw that the discourse on dreams in the Bavli incorporates, modifies and parodies Palestinian materials in order to warn both against acting as a professional dream interpreter and against consulting them. We saw this in the Bar Hedyā narrative, which was a warning about the dangers of dream interpretation by unscrupulous interpreters on account of the doctrine that “all dreams follow the mouth.” The dialogue of R. Ishmael and the *min*, on the other hand, warned that to consult a dream interpreter was to act as a *min*, someone who would have been considered a “heretic” vis-à-vis the Babylonian rabbis.

We also see the rabbis negatively depict a professional necromancer in *b. Ber.* 59a. There, the anonymous narrator of the text, while not questioning the efficacy of necromancy, displays concern that since the necromancer's knowledge is correct about the origin of the rumbling, he might lead people astray. Therefore the anonymous author of the text juxtaposes rabbinic opinions of the origin of the rumbling based on scripture with that of the necromancer, whose opinion is not couched in terms of a scriptural proof text, in order to depict the superiority of rabbinic knowledge. While the necromancer is able to give one possible cause for the source of the rumbling, the rabbis are able to provide several, thus showing the superiority of rabbinic knowledge.

Additionally, we saw the use of cledonancy/ornithomancy in *b. Git.* 45a as a means to bound off as an "other" a man who had specialized knowledge about divination, but who lacked rabbinic knowledge. The narrative there juxtaposed Rav Ilish's proper use of cledonancy/ornithomancy with that of the man who understands the language of birds. Unlike Rav Ilish, that man was unable to distinguish rabbinically legitimated forms of ornithomancy from illegitimate ones, the dove and the raven respectively. Thus, while a miracle occurs for Rav Ilish, who understands that one should only utilize the dove for ornithomancy, a negative outcome – death – results for the diviner who does not have rabbinic knowledge. So, this method of divination is a way to bound off someone who would have specialized knowledge as an "other" vis-à-vis the rabbis.

We see saw that in addition to utilizing "othering" techniques and negatively depicting the performance of divination by non-rabbis, when divination was depicted as performed by a rabbi, the divinatory techniques themselves were often rabbinized. In other words, the methods that the rabbis advocate are such that they would not be able to

be utilized correctly by non-rabbis. With respect to dreams, the rabbis advocate individualized methods of dream interpretation, which often rely on scriptural knowledge. For instance, for several dreams which could be connected to both positive and negative verses, the rabbis explicitly prescribe that one should recite a particular verse upon waking before one with a negative import comes to mind.

We also saw in a couple of chapters, that the rabbis utilize particularly rabbinized methods of cledonomanancy. While divination employing cledonomanancy was prevalent throughout the ancient world, the Bavli includes rabbinized methods such as the *bat kol* and bibliomanancy via a child's verse. Cledonomanancy by means of a *bat kol* is something which does not occur outside of rabbinic literature. Furthermore, the *bat kol* does not have any explicit precedents outside of rabbinic literature. While there are instances of a revelatory voice in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple literature, it is neither referred to by this term nor is it employed as a method of cledonomanancy. This makes the use of the *bat kol* in this manner particularly rabbinic.

Not only do the rabbis utilize a method of cledonomanancy based on biblical verses, but this method of divination was also utilized in the Bavli as a means to rabbinize a non-rabbinic figure. In *b. Git. 56a*, Nero is depicted as using bibliomanancy. By using bibliomanancy he is depicted as recognizing the authority that the Hebrew Bible has as a means though which one can uncover hidden knowledge. Furthermore, Nero is the only non-rabbi in the Bavli who is depicted as using the Hebrew Bible for divinatory purposes. By depicting Nero as accepting the authority of the Hebrew Bible by means of bibliomanancy, as well as depicting him as the ancestor of a prominent rabbi, this narrative is serving as a means by which to rabbinize Nero.

In addition to rabbinizing divination, we also saw both implicit and explicit connections between permitted forms of divination, Midrash and the Oral Torah. The connection between oneirocritica, Midrash and the Oral Torah has already been noted by several scholars. Not only have scholars seen connections between the hermeneutical rules used in *aggadah* and oneirocritica,³⁶⁴ but they have posited that the rabbis saw a connection between the dream text and the Written Torah, on the one hand, and the interpretation of the dream text and the Oral Torah, on the other hand, noting that just as scripture allows for the possibility of multiple and potentially contradictory but equally valid interpretations by the rabbinic interpreter, the dream-text allows for the same when interpreted by the dream interpreter.³⁶⁵ Likewise, bibliomancy and cledonancy often utilize biblical verses in divination in a method similar to dreams. In these cases, the biblical text is directly interpreted and thus provides an even more explicit parallel with the Written and Oral Torahs.

The discourse with respect to the *bat kol*, on the other hand, is in tension with the concept of the Oral Torah in that it is both the method by which the Oral Torah is legitimated and it also subverts it. In *b. Erub.* 13b, we saw that the *bat kol* is the means through which the halakhah is determined to follow Bet Hillel instead of Bet Shammai as well as the avenue through which Oral Torah is legitimated. Despite the determination that the halakhah follows Bet Hillel, the *bat kol* authorizes the statements of both houses as the “words of the living God” and hence as continuing revelation by means of Oral Torah. In *b. BM* 59a-b and the texts which quote from it, however, the *bat kol* is explicitly rejected by both R. Joshua and by the narrative as a whole with respect to

³⁶⁴ Liebermann, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 70-78; Alvstad, “Oneirocritics and Midrash,” 140-41.

³⁶⁵ Alexander, “Bavli Berakhot,” 236-38; Alvstad, “Oneirocritics and Midrash,” 140-41.

determining halakhah. This is due to the fact that the possibility of a continuing direct connection with God by means of the *bat kol* is in contradistinction to the concept that the entire Torah, both written and oral, had been given at Sinai and it contradicts the rabbis' authority as the sole heirs of the Oral Torah.³⁶⁶ Thus, the rabbis question the *bat kol*'s efficacy in the realm of the determination of halakhah in order to delegitimize methods of communication with the divine which would rival their status as the sole arbiters of the Oral Torah.

In several of the texts discussed throughout this dissertation, we can see layering in the texts which allows us to differentiate the opinions presented in the earlier attributed material with that of the anonymous authors of the narratives. For instance, we saw in *b. BB* 12a-b that the story used by the anonymous author as evidence for prophecy having been given to children simply consists of a question and answer session between R. Hisda and his daughter about which of two men she wants to marry. It is only through the anonymous authors' juxtaposition of this narrative with R. Yohanan's statement that after the Temple was destroyed prophecy was given to children which indicates that the narrative should be understood as prophecy.

We also saw a distinction between the attitudes displayed by R. Yohanan and the anonymous author with respect to the method of bibliomancy by means of requesting a verse from a child in *b. Hul.* 95b. The attributed material in that narrative ends with R. Yohanan interpreting the verse he received from a school boy as indicating that his master Samuel had died and that therefore he should not travel to Babylonia. There is no indication that R. Yohanan took issue with unconfirmed bibliomancy via this method;

³⁶⁶ We saw this tension above in *b. BM* 59a-b, in which the majority held to this concept of the Oral Torah while R. Eliezer allowed for the possibility of other methods of continuing revelation.

however, the anonymous author of the narrative takes issue with unconfirmed bibliomancy. Not only does he specifically state that R. Yohanan was wrong in interpreting the verse, but he juxtaposes this narrative with two statements which indicate that divination by means of a child is a סימן “sign,” but only if it was made known three times. In other words, the anonymous author of the narrative believed that bibliomancy of this form should be confirmed. That this is the predominant view of this form of bibliomancy in the Bavli is apparent from the fact that it is connected with confirmation in all the other instances in which it is utilized, either through repetition or by use in conjunction with another method of divination.

We can also see a distinction between the attitudes in the attributed materials and that presented by the anonymous author in two passages involving necromancy. The first of these occurs in *b. Ber.* 59a. In that text, we saw R. Kattina publicly denounce the necromancer as a liar arguing that if he was correct, they would have felt two rumblings, but they only felt one. So, that portion of the narrative could be understood as questioning the efficacy of necromancy. The anonymous narrator, however, gives an alternative in which two rumblings did in fact occur thus indicating that the necromancer was correct. We also see differing opinions regarding whether the dead have direct knowledge of the living in *b. Ber.* 18b. While the stories depict the dead as having direct knowledge of the living, the anonymous author questions this in each case by intimating that they may have obtained this knowledge by other means such as from someone who recently passed away. The fact that we can see distinctions between the views of divination in earlier material when compared with the anonymous authors not only gives us a fuller picture of the range of rabbinic views on divination, but it is also important evidence which shows

that the Talmud's later editors retained information which did not necessarily cohere with their own viewpoints.

In addition to being able to differentiate between the opinions presented in earlier attributed material and that of the later anonymous editors, it is also possible to distinguish between Palestinian and Babylonian materials.³⁶⁷ Scholars have previously noted that Palestinian attitudes towards dreams are preserved in the Bavli and have discussed ways in which the authors of the Bavli parodied Palestinian materials for their own theological purposes.³⁶⁸ The rabbinic discourse on dreams in the Bavli parodies Palestinian materials in order to warn both against acting as a professional dream interpreter and that to consult a dream interpreter is to act as a *min*, someone who would have been considered a “heretic” vis-à-vis the Babylonian rabbis.

Additionally, it is possible that the use of the *bat kol* in a divinatory context may have primarily been a Palestinian institution that is preserved in the Bavli. While most of the texts which mention the *bat kol* involve Tannaim or Amoraim dating to the 3rd or early 4th century CE, both Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis are mentioned in connection with its use as a divine revelatory utterance; however, when the *bat kol* functions in a divinatory context all are Palestinian or spent time in Palestine. Furthermore, many of the passages involving divination are couched in larger narratives in which Babylonian Amoraim dating to the 4th and early 5th century CE are mentioned. The juxtaposition of these Palestinian materials within the context of traditions attributed to later Babylonian Amoraim may be evidence of the manifestation of Palestinian materials in Babylonia

³⁶⁷ A full comparison of Palestinian and Babylonian attitudes towards divination would require an in-depth study of the depiction of them in all Palestinian rabbinic texts, which is beyond the scope of this study.

³⁶⁸ See Kalmin, “Dreams” and Zellentin, “Interpretation of Dreams.”

from the 4th century CE on, which could have been facilitated by the deportations from the Eastern Roman Empire by Shapur I in the 3rd century CE.

Furthermore, we saw that one of the passages involving necromancy, namely *b. Git.* 56b, contains a motif present elsewhere in Palestinian rabbinic sources and thus may display a Palestinian depiction of and attitude towards necromancy rather than a Babylonian one. In that narrative, Onkelos was depicted as performing a necromantic consultation in which the dead revealed to him their knowledge of the preeminence of Judaism, which they realized after death. This is a theme present elsewhere in Palestinian sources, but not in Babylonian ones in conjunction with necromancy. As was previously argued, a similar depiction occurs in the Palestinian parallels to the Tinneus Rufus passage from *b. Sanh.* 65b, which likewise utilize necromancy performed by a non-rabbi in order to show that those who do not adhere to Judaism realize Judaism's superiority after death. Thus, it appears as though this may be a Palestinian source since Palestinian sources depict non-rabbis engaging in necromancy in order to depict Judaism's supremacy over other religious beliefs while Babylonian sources do not depict non-rabbis actually performing necromancy, but only depict rabbis doing so.

Not only are there connections between the Bavli and Palestinian rabbinic materials, but we also saw several instances of connections between passages involving divination and Greco-Roman divinatory techniques as well as Greco-Roman literary motifs. It is unlikely that the rabbis read these particular narratives and borrowed directly from them; rather, there was a process of cultural influence through which a larger pattern of Greco-Roman tales and motifs circulated throughout the ancient world from which these motifs were adopted. As we saw, there were numerous instances of dream

interpretation which had parallels with the material from Artemidorus' *Oneirocriticon*. Furthermore, we saw that the rabbis utilized necromantic techniques which were prevalent in the Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian worlds.

A couple of passages involving the use of the *bat kol* and necromancy appear to have utilized Greco-Roman literary motifs. We saw that the account involving Herod's utilization of a *bat kol* in *b. BB* 3b had parallels with two different motifs from Greco-Roman literature. On the one hand, we saw that the narrative was similar to a particular type of Greco-Roman erotic narrative found in a wide array of Greco-Roman literary works, but most prominently in Parthenius' *The Love Romances*. Like those narratives, Herod was portrayed as irresistibly attracted to someone to whom he should not be attracted and the attraction ultimately ended up being disastrous for him in that it was an act of national betrayal. While at first his rebellious actions were beneficial for him in that he becomes king for a time, ultimately they resulted in his illegitimate kingship ending and Judea becoming a Roman colony. So, not only was he depicted as killing all of the Hasmoneans, but he also was responsible for ending Jewish self-rule. There is also a different parallel between this narrative and Herodotus in that both intimate that oracles are not always what they appear to be and that it is the responsibility of the interpreter to correctly gauge their meaning. In Herodotus, Croesus, like Herod, is depicted as misinterpreting an oracle and as losing his empire as a result. We also saw that *b. Ber.* 18b utilized a motif involving the use of necromancy in order to determine the location of hidden money, a motif which also has parallels in Herodotus as well as other Greco-Roman and Christian texts.

In addition to the above mentioned distinctions in viewpoints, there are a few instances in which the efficacy of divination is either questioned or limited by certain rabbis or with respect to certain practices. The predominant view in the Bavli, however, is that divination is efficacious. With respect to oneiromancy, the rabbis question the efficacy of dreams in certain contexts and, like the Hebrew Bible, the Bavli contains an attitude that dreams can be a product of one's own thoughts and therefore not prophetic. There are a few instances in the Bavli in which dreams are stated not to have any particular meaning; however, these opinions are all attributed to Tannaim.³⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the Dreambook there are statements which indicate that fasting causes a dream not to have any sort of prognosticatory value, that a dream is never entirely fulfilled because it contains some senseless content, and various statements which reveal the anxiety of the rabbis over the fact that a righteous person can have negative dreams.³⁷⁰ The overall view promulgated by the Dreambook, however, is that כל החלמות הולכים אחר הפה "all dreams follow the mouth," that is the notion that the fulfillment and meaning of a dream is dependent upon the interpretation given to it. This is apparent not only from direct statements attesting to this, but also through narratives which show the potential danger inherent in this concept and the multiplicity of methods given for dispelling dreams of their possible negative significance.

As was discussed above, the efficacy of the *bat kol* was only questioned in connection with the determination of halakhah due to the fact that since it is a means of continuing revelation, it is in tension with the concept that the rabbis had full control of the Oral Torah. We also saw in another passage, namely *b. Meg.* 32a, that the scope of a

³⁶⁹ *b. Ber.* 27b-28a; *b. Git.* 52a; *b. Hor.* 13b-14a; *b. Sanh.* 30a.

³⁷⁰ *b. Ber.* 55a.

bat kol as an omen was limited by the specification that the valid formation of a response was “yes, yes” or “no, no.” However, only those passages questioned or limited its efficacy and in several others the *bat kol* functioned as a form of cledonomanancy without any sort of limitation on its scope.

With respect to bibliomanancy/cledonomanancy, we saw that the efficacy of bibliomanancy which involved the direct request for a child’s verse was questioned when it was not associated with confirmation. As was discussed above, this appears to be the viewpoint of the anonymous authors of these texts. The attributed portion of the narrative in *b. Hul.* 95b did not mention anything about confirmation, but the anonymous author of that narrative intimated that unconfirmed bibliomanancy of this sort is ineffective by both specifically stating that R. Yohanan’s interpretation was wrong and by juxtaposing the attributed narrative with two statements that indicate that divination by means of a child must be confirmed three times. Additionally, in all the other instances in which this method is utilized it is in connection with confirmation, through either repetition of that method or it is depicted as used in conjunction with another method of divination. It appears as though the issue is with this method of bibliomanancy/cledonomanancy in itself, since in these passages the rabbis are not interpreting a verbal or visual utterance which they have just happened upon as is the case with other methods of bibliomanancy, cledonomanancy and oneiromancy. Rather, they are deliberately requesting an omen which they then interpret according to their own circumstances. This method of obtaining an omen is closer to the method attributed to Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, and Jonathan, the son of Saul, namely the request for a particular sign which was considered *שקל* earlier

in that narrative. There is no questioning of the efficacy of other forms of bibliomancy or cledonomancy in the Bavli.

And as we saw above, it was only in the attributed material that the efficacy of necromancy may have been questioned by R. Kattina in *b. Ber.* 59a. The anonymous narrator, however, states that the necromancer was correct, but projects his anxiety about this onto R. Kattina by stating that he called the necromancer a liar lest the necromancer lead the world astray. We do not see the efficacy of necromancy questioned elsewhere in the Bavli.³⁷¹ The fact that the efficacy of necromancy is not questioned elsewhere is especially interesting given that the utilization of necromancy contradicts the biblical and rabbinic prohibitions against its use. However, we also see in that passage that the fact that necromancy is efficacious causes the rabbis anxiety. This anxiety is not only limited to necromancy, but it is also apparent from the negative portrayal of non-rabbinic and professional diviners and the rabbinization of certain forms of divination.

So, we see that despite the fact that the Bavli contains some degree of variation of viewpoints with regard to the efficacy of divination, most texts do not question its efficacy. Some variation of opinions is expected, though, due to the fact that Bavli is composed of the opinions of rabbis from different geographical regions and chronological periods. We do see, however, that all of the forms of divination under discussion in this dissertation, whether permitted or prohibited, at times caused the rabbis anxiety on account of their perceived efficacy. This is not surprising given the cultural context in which the Babylonian rabbis were situated.

³⁷¹ Note that the opinion of the anonymous author in *b. Ber.* 18b is not questioning the efficacy of necromancer; rather, he is questioning how the dead obtain their knowledge.

The valorization of esoteric knowledge as a source of religious power was prevalent amongst the religious groups of Sasanian Persia, namely, Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism.³⁷² Manichaeism held that knowledge leads to salvation but, unlike the other traditions, this knowledge did not revolve around scripture. Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism each believed in something hidden from our lives by a barrier akin to a curtain that was capable of being lifted from time-to-time by certain specially endowed individuals.³⁷³ Additionally, the authority and influence of the Persian magi stemmed from the fact that they possessed esoteric knowledge which was redacted into the Avesta during the Talmudic period.³⁷⁴

In addition to valorizing esoteric knowledge, connections existed between the reliance of some of these religions on scripture and the exegetical techniques they utilized. While the Zoroastrians did not have knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and the Manichaeans would have rejected it as an evil teaching, the Eastern-Syriac Christians would have applied their own interpretive techniques to it. While the Zoroastrians adhered to a different scripture than the Jews, they had a similar interpretive framework. The *zand* was a technique of interpreting Zoroastrian scriptures into the vernacular.³⁷⁵ Furthermore, the Zoroastrians held the notion that the only way to study the sacred texts, the Avesta and the *zand*, was through memorization and oral recitation.³⁷⁶ This is similar to the rabbinic study of Scripture, Mishnah and Talmud. However, studying the Avesta

³⁷² See Levinson, "Enchanting Rabbis," 90-92 for a discussion of knowledge as a source of power in these cultures in relation to magic.

³⁷³ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 74.

³⁷⁴ Becker, *Fear of God*, 32-38; Stratton, "Imagining Power," 384-85 and *Naming the Witch*, 164.

³⁷⁵ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 77-78.

³⁷⁶ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 116-17.

and the *zand* never became a major act of religious devotion in Zoroastrianism in the way that it was amongst the rabbis.³⁷⁷

Thus, the rabbis were living as one of several religious minorities in predominantly Zoroastrian Persia, all of which considered knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge, to be a source of religious power. Additionally, some of these religions also had knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures or utilized similar interpretive techniques as the rabbis did. Through the rabbis' discourse on divination in the Bavli we see one way that the Babylonian rabbis bounded off their knowledge and authority from the surrounding culture. They did this by negatively depicting the practice of divination by non-rabbis and professional diviners. In contrast, they depicted their own use of divination in a positive manner and often rabbinized their divinatory techniques through their reliance on knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic interpretive techniques. And furthermore, at times they depict their interpretive and divinatory techniques as superior to those of non-rabbis. Thus, the rabbis constructed themselves as the leading authorities with a continuing connection to the heavenly realm and they constructed divination in a manner such that it could only be properly utilized by one with rabbinic knowledge.

Given the sparsity of works which have addressed the topic of divination in rabbinic literature, there are a number of avenues which would prove fruitful for future research. This dissertation only touched a handful of different divinatory techniques which are utilized in the Bavli. Thus, one avenue for future research would be to do a systematic study of every reference to divination in the Bavli in order to determine if the trends noted here also occur with respect to other methods of divination. One of the benefits of focusing on a single corpus, such as the Bavli, is that it allows both for the

³⁷⁷ Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 79.

systematic study of individual forms of divination and a comparison in the treatment of them within a single cultural context. In turn, this allows us to see larger patterns in the Bavli and to contextualize these patterns within the social and cultural context of Sasanian Persia. Many of the previous limited studies of divination have generalized across rabbinic literature and this has meant that scholars have not realized that there are these particular trends in the depiction of divination in the Bavli, which is probably why the scholarly consensus has been that the treatment of divination by the rabbis is “ambivalent.”

There is, however, benefit in doing a systematic comparison of the same or related divinatory techniques in the Palestinian corpora. The goal in such a study would be to determine whether there are differences between the legislation on and depiction of divination both within these corpora and as compared with the Bavli. As was argued above, there are a few instances in which it appears as though the Bavli may be preserving a Palestinian tradition. A systematic study of divination in the Palestinian corpora would allow us to confirm my hypotheses about the Bavli preserving certain Palestinian divinatory traditions. While I have already been able to note differences between how certain types of divination are treated in Palestinian versus Babylonian sources, a thorough study of divination throughout the rabbinic corpus would also allow us to determine whether differences can be seen between Tannaitic sources and post-Tannaitic sources. A thorough understanding of how divination is legislated and depicted in rabbinic texts, as well as the extent to which there are chronological and geographic variations, would prove informative about the respective social and cultural contexts in

which these depictions should be situated as well as how these different corpora treated access to esoteric knowledge.

Additionally, while this dissertation has shown some parallels between divinatory practices as recorded in rabbinic literature and those in the Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian worlds, as well as the fact that some themes from Greco-Roman literature have been adapted by the authors of narratives in the Bavli for their own theological purposes, it did not address these issues in any systematic fashion. A thorough comparison of the forms of divination and the attitudes towards them in rabbinic literature in the context of the use, treatment and depiction of divination within the surrounding Greco-Roman, Mesopotamian and Persian cultures will further allow us to contextualize the rabbis depictions and attitudes and will also inform us of the extent to which there is a shared cultural continuum in the Mediterranean.

A related avenue of future research would be a systematic study of the depiction of divination in Second Temple literature. Not only would this allow us an understanding of how divination is treated in those texts, it would also allow for a study of the relationship between the treatment of divination in Second Temple literature with that of the Hebrew Bible and later Rabbinic literature, as well as with Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian literature. As I showed above, there are a few references to one method of bibliomancy within Second Temple literature which, despite the chronological gap between it and the Bavli, may have been an antecedent for its use in Jewish literature. A systematic study of divination in Second Temple literature would also allow us to determine a possible chronology of when certain forms of divination were first utilized within Judaism and that in turn would allow us to determine whether certain forms of

divination in rabbinic literature which do not have a biblical precedent may have been adopted from Second Temple literature or adopted later from the surrounding cultural milieu.

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