

Beyond the Text Part 2

#2 The Natural World

Elephants

They lie on ivory beds,
Lolling on their couches, (Amos 6:4)

Moreover they divided the beasts among the armies, and for every elephant they appointed a thousand men, armed with coats of mail, and with helmets of brass on their heads; and beside this, for every beast were ordained five hundred horsemen of the best. . . Wherefore all that heard the noise of their multitude, and the marching of the company, and the rattling of the harness, were moved: for the army was very great and mighty. (Maccabees I 6: 37, 43)

In the case where one established a wall with a tied elephant, everyone agrees that the *sukka* is fit, as even if it dies and falls, its carcass still has a height of ten handbreadths (Sukkah 23a)

The Sages taught: One who sees an elephant, a monkey, or a vulture (Rashi) recites: Blessed...Who makes creatures different. (Berachot 58b)

And the Rabbis say: Both are acquired by pulling. Rabbi Shimon says: Both are acquired by lifting. Rav Yosef objects to this: If that is so, how can an elephant be acquired, according to Rabbi Shimon? (Kiddushin 25)

ומפרש הרב משולם דלהכי נקט חבילי זמורות לפי שהן מאכל פיל כדאמרינן פרק מפנין (שבת דף קכח.) מטלטלין חבילי זמורות בשבת מפני שהן מאכל לפילין ומגביהין לפיל חבילי זמורות למעלה והוא קופץ ומגביה את עצמו מן הארץ ואוכלן

Fantastic Fish Stories

And Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: I have seen a certain frog [*akrokta*] that was as large as the fort [*akra*] of Hagronya. And how large is the fort of Hagronya? It is as large as sixty houses. A snake came and swallowed the frog. A raven came and swallowed the snake, and flew up and sat in a tree. Come and see how great is the strength of the tree, which could bear the weight of that raven. Rav Pappa bar Shmuel said: If I had not been there and seen this, I would not believe it. § And Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: Once we were traveling in a ship and we saw a certain fish in whose nostril [*be'usyeih*] a mud eater [*akhla tina*], i.e., a type of insect, had sat and killed him. And the waters thrust the fish and threw it upon the shore. And sixty districts were destroyed by the fish, and sixty districts ate from it, and another sixty districts salted its meat to preserve it. And they filled from one of its eyeballs three hundred flasks of oil. And when we returned there after the twelve months of the year had passed, we saw that they were cutting beams

from its bones, and they had set out to build those districts that had been destroyed. (Bava Batra 73b)

But doesn't Rabba bar bar Hana say: I have seen a day-old offspring of the *reima*, and it was as large as Mount Tabor. And how large is Mount Tabor? It is forty parasangs. And the length of the cub's neck was three parasangs, and the place where its head rests, i.e., its neck, was a parasang and a half. It cast feces, and thereby dammed up the Jordan (Zevachim 113b)

The Mysterious Tachash

וערת אילים מאדמים וערת תחשים ועצי שטים:

tanned ram skins, tachash skins, and acacia wood; (Shmot 25:5)

Targum Onkelos: tachash: sasgonna (proud of its colors)

Rabbi Ela said that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said that Rabbi Meir used to say: The *tachash* that existed in the days of Moses was a creature unto itself, and the Sages did not determine whether it was a type of undomesticated animal or a type of domesticated animal. And it had a single horn on its forehead, and this *tachash* happened to come to Moses for the moment (Shabbat 28b)

This is the offering ... and rams' skins dyed red, and sealskins (Exod. 25:3).

R. Judah and R. Nehemiah discussed this verse. R. Judah said: It was a large pure animal, with a single horn in its forehead and a skin of six different colors that roamed the desert. (Midrash Tanhuma, Terumah 6)

קטרת Incense

◇ ויאמר ה' אל-משה קח-לך סמים, נטרף ושחלת וסחלבנה, סמים, ולבנה זפה: בד בָּבַד, "יהיה" שמות 30:34

◇ תנו רבנן: פיטום הקטרת: הצרי, והציפורן, והסחלבנה, והלבונה – משקל שבעים של שבעים מנה. מור, וקציעה, שיבולת נרד, וכרכום – משקל נששה עשר של נששה עשר מנה. הקושט – שנים עשר, קילופה – שלשה, וקנמון – תשעה. בורית כרשינה – תשעה קבין, יין קפריסין – סאין תלתא קבין תלתא. (כריתות 6)

of the House of Avtinas did not want to teach about the secret of the preparation of the incense,. The Sages taught in a *baraita*: The members of the House of Avtinas were expert in the technique of preparing the incense, and they did not want to teach others. The Sages sent for and brought craftsmen from Alexandria in Egypt. And the Alexandrian craftsmen knew how to blend the spices like they did, but they did not know how to cause the smoke to rise like the House of Avtinas did. . . And for this matter they are mentioned favorably: Never did a perfumed bride emerge from their homes. And when they marry a woman from a different place, they stipulate with her that she will not perfume herself, so that

cynics would not say that it is with the work of the incense that they perfume themselves, (Yoma 38a)

A woman may not go out . . . with a perfume vial; (Mishnah Shabbat 6:3)

Frankincense לבונה

גִּרְדָּה וְיַכְרָכָם קִנְיָה וְקִנְמֹן עִם כָּל-עֵצֵי לְבוֹנָה מֵר וְאַהֲלוֹת עִם כָּל-רֵאשֵׁי בְּשָׂמִים: ♦

Nard and saffron,
Fragrant reed and cinnamon,
With all trees of frankincense,
Myrrh and aloes—
All the choice perfumes. (Shir HaShirim 4-14)

MISHNA: There are four types of meal offerings: Those that require both oil and frankincense, those that require oil but not frankincense, those that require frankincense but not oil, and those that require neither frankincense nor oil. (Menachot 59a)

Rav Hisda says: The court gives one who is being led out to be killed a grain [koret] of frankincense in a cup of wine in order to confuse his mind (Sanhedrin 43a)

אֶלְךָ לִי אֵל הַר הַמּוֹר, זֶה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁהָיוּ מְקַרְבִּין בוֹ מוֹר. וְאֵל גְּבַעַת הַלְּבוֹנָה, זֶה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁהָיוּ מְקַרְבִּין בְּמִנְחוֹתֵיהֶם לְבוֹנָה. ♦

I will get me to the mountains of myrrh (Song 4:6) refers to the Temple, in which they brought offerings of myrrh. And to the hill of frankincense (ibid.) alludes to Jerusalem, whither they brought their offerings of frankincense. (Midrash Tanhuma Vayera 3)

Balsam אפרסמון

R. Hisda said to R. Isaac: What blessing is said over this balsam-oil? — He replied: Thus said Rab Judah: 'Who createst the oil of our land', He then said to him: Leaving out Rab Judah, who dotes on the Land of Israel, what do ordinary people say? — He replied: Thus said R. Johanan: 'Who createst pleasant oil'. (Berachot 43a)

A certain mother-in-law hated her daughter-in-law. Said she to her, 'Go and adorn yourself with balsam oil. She went and adorned herself. On her return she said to her, 'Go and light the lamp.' She went and lit the lamp: a spark flew out on her and consumed her. (Shabbat 25b)

Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers [kormim] and husbandmen [yogbim].- 'Kornim:' R. Joseph learnt:

This means balsamum gatherers from the En Gedi to Ramah. Yogvim: These are those which catch hilazon from the promontory of Tyre as far as Haifa.

Ein Gedi inscription: Anyone who causes strife among his fellow men or informs on them to non Jews or steals his friend's possessions or tells the secret of the city to non Jews, He whose eyes roam the whole land and see everything hidden will smite that man and his children and destroy him from the earth and everyone say Amen.

צלף Capers

“Rabbi Eliezer says: as for the caper bush, tithes must be given from the shoots (תמרות), the berries (אביונות) and the blossoms (קפרס). Rabbi Akiba says: only the berries are tithed since they [alone] count as fruit.” (Mishnah Maaserot 4:6)

caper-bush that people plant with their fruit in mind, and we learned in a mishna that with regard to the parts of the caper-bush [*nitzpa*], over the leaves and young fronds, one recites: Who creates fruit of the ground, and over the berries and buds he recites: Who creates fruit of the tree. (Berachot 36a)

“Rabban Gamliel sat and interpreted homiletically: In the future trees will produce fruits every day, as it is stated: “And it shall bring forth branches and bear fruit” (Ezekiel 17:23); just as a branch grows every day, so too, fruit will be produced every day. A certain student scoffed at him and said: Isn't it written: There is nothing new under the sun? He said to him: Come and I will show you an example of this in this world. He went outside and showed him a caper bush,” (Shabbat 30b)

“The Sages taught: There was an incident with a pious man in which a breach was made in his field, and he decided to fence it in. And then he remembered that it was Shabbat. And that pious man refrained from fixing the fence [forever because he had thought about fixing it on Shabbat.] And a miracle was done for him, and a caper bush grew there and from it he received his livelihood and the livelihood of the members of his household.” (Shabbat 150b)

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: There are three impudent ones: The Jewish people among the nations; the dog among animals; and the rooster among birds. And some say: Also the goat among small cattle. And some say: Also the caper bush among trees. (Betzah 25b)

חצב Drimia

Rami bar Abba also said: The hatzav will cut off the feet of the wicked Betzah 25b)

רש"י חצובא מקטע רגליהון דרשיעיא - עשב ששרשיו נוקבין ויורדין בעומק ואין מתפשט לצדדין כלל ונוטעין אותו בין גבולי שדות ובו תיחם יהושע לישראל את הארץ מקטע רגלי הרשעים ליום הדין שגוזלין וחומסים ומשיגין גבול ואין למדין ממנו:

What is sea squill? Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: It is the growth by which Joshua established the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael for the Jews. (Bava Batra 56a)

“One may move hatzav on Shabbat because it is food for gazelles and mustard because it is food for doves.” (Shabbat 128a)

Rabbi Levi said: He took in with him branches for elephants, hatzuvot for the gazelles, glass for the ostriches. (Bereshit Rabba 31:14)

Flax פשתן

Rav Yehuda said: The benefit of bathing is forbidden to me forever if I do not bathe in water in which flax was soaked. (Nedarim 80b)

“She looks for wool and flax,
And sets her hand to them with a will.” (Proverbs 31:13)

“Now she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under some stalks of flax which she had lying on the roof.” (Joshua 2:6)

Medicine

Abaye said: My mother told me: A child’s growth requires hot water and oil for smearing. When he grows a little, he must eat egg with *kutaḥa*, (Yoma 78b)

Abaye said: Mother, told me: These roasted grains are good for the heart and drive away worrisome thoughts. And Abaye said: Mother told me. One who suffers from weakness of the heart should go and bring the meat of the right thigh of a ram, and also bring the dung of grazing cattle from the month of Nisan, and if there is no cattle dung he should bring willow twigs, and then roast the meat on a fire made with the dung or twigs, and eat it, and drink afterward some diluted wine. (Eruvin 29b)

Caves

“Rav Idi bar Avin said that Rabbi Yitzḥak bar Ashyan said: If there is a single hideaway (מחבוא) there it saves all the women married to priests.” (Ketubot 27a)

“his mother and another woman had two sons, one each, and they then gave birth to two other sons in hiding,” (Yevamot 99a)

“If a man spent Shabbat in . . . a cave, even though it was like the cave of Zedekiah king of Judah, he may walk through the whole of it and two thousand cubits beyond.” (Eruvin 61)

Sundials and Time

So the prophet Isaiah called to the LORD, and He made the shadow which had descended on the dial of Ahaz recede ten steps. (Kings 2 20:11)

”Rabbi Meir says: one may eat [chametz] the whole of the five [hours] and must burn [it] at the beginning of the sixth. Rabbi Judah says: one may eat the whole of the four [hours], suspend it the whole of the fifth, and must burn it at the beginning of the sixth. (Mishnah Pesachim 1:4-5)

Rava said to his servant: You, who are not expert in the measures of the Sages, when the sun is at the top of the palm trees, light the Shabbat lights. [His servant asked him:] What should we do on a cloudy day? : In the city, watch the roosters. In a field, watch the ravens. Alternatively, you can watch the plants [adane]The Sages taught: They sound six blasts on Shabbat eve (Shabbat 35b)

Three things Rabbi Tzadok [declares able to become] impure, and the Sages [declare] pure: the nail of a money-changer, the closet of grinders, and the nail of a stone sundial. (Mishnah Eduyot 3:8)

Desert, Shepherd, Leader, Speaker

◇ ומִשָּׁה הָיָה רָעִי יֵת עֲנָא דִּיתְרוֹ חֲמוּהִי רַבָּא דְּמַדְיָן וְדַבֵּר יֵת עֲנָא

◇ וְרַעֲוֵי כְּבָשִׂים כְּדַבְּרָם וְחֲרֻבוֹת מִחַיִּים גְּרִימִים יֹאכְלוּ:

Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and fat ones and strangers shall feed in the ruins. (Isaiah 5:17)

◇ אמר לו הקב"ה טול מקל והך על קדקדם דבר אחד לדור ואין שני דברין לדור

There must be one leader for the generation, and not be two leaders for the generation. (Sanhedrin 8a)

◇ עֲבָדַי יֵרְדוּ מִן־הַלְּבָנוֹן יִמָּה וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁימָם דְּבָרוֹת בְּיָם

“My servants will bring them down to the sea from the Lebanon; and at the sea I will make them into floats” (Kings 1 5:23)

◇ פוק חזי מאי עמא דבר

“Go out and see how the people are conducting themselves” (Eruvin 14b)