

Beyond the Text #2

Eretz Yisrael Part 2 and the Diaspora

Languages

“If one reads the Megilla in Coptic to Copts, in *Ivrit* to *Ivrim*, in Elamite to Elamites, or in Greek to Greeks, he has fulfilled his obligation” (Megillah 18a)

“Rabbi Yonatan from Bet Guvrin said, four languages are appropriate that the world should use them, and they are these: Greek for song, Latin for war, Syriac (Aramiac) for elegies, Hebrew for speech.” (Yerushalmi Megillah 1:9)

“In three baskets each of [the capacity of] three seahs they make the appropriation [of shekels] from the chamber. And on them was inscribed: Aleph, Beth, Gimel. Rabbi Ishmael says: Greek was inscribed on them, alpha, beta, gamma.” (Mishnah Shekalim 3:2)

the Sages did not know what is meant by *salseleha* in the verse: “Get wisdom...*salseleha* and it will exalt you” (Proverbs 4:7–8). One day they heard the maidservant in Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s house talking to a certain man who was twirling his hair, saying to him: How long will you go on twirling [*mesalsef*] your hair? ” (Megillah 18a)

“that there was a certain person from the Galilee who would walk and say to people: Who has *amar*? Who has *amar*? They said to him: Foolish Galilean, a donkey [*hamor*] to ride, or wine [*hamar*] to drink, wool [*amar*] to wear, or a lamb [*imar*] to slaughter.” (Eruvin 53b)

“One may not allow the people of Beit She’an, nor the people of Beit Haifa, nor the people of Tivon to pass before the ark in order to lead the service because they pronounce *alef* as *ayin* and *ayin* as *alef*,” (Megillah 24b)

Other Centers: Lod and Bnei Brak

Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak: The Sages who discussed this issue counted the votes of those assembled and concluded in the upper story of the house of Nitza in the city of Lod: With regard to all other transgressions in the Torah, if a person is told: Transgress this prohibition and you will not be killed, he may transgress that prohibition and not be killed, except for those of idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed. (Sanhedrin 74)

It happened once [on Pesach] that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining in Bnei Brak and were telling the story of the exodus from Egypt that whole night, until their students

came and said to them, "The time of [reciting] the morning Shema has arrived."
(Passover Haggadah)

Rabbi Simlai came before Rabbi Yoḥanan. He said to him: Would the Master teach me the Book of Genealogies? [The Book of Genealogies was a collection of tannaitic teachings that formed a midrash on the book of Chronicles.] Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: Where are you from? He said to him: From Lod. Rabbi Yoḥanan further asked: And where is your present place of residence? He said to him: In Neharde'a. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: I have a tradition that we teach these subjects neither to Lodites nor to Neharde'ans, and certainly not to you who comes from Lod and your residence is in Neharde'a (Pesachim 62)

Usha, Sanhedrin Station

"At the end of the persecution, our Rabbis assembled in Usha; they were: Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Neḥemya, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai, Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Yosei HaGelili, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov. They sent to the elders of the Galilee and said: 'Anyone who is learned, let him come and teach, and anyone who is not learned, let him come and study.'" (Shir HaShirim Rabba 2:5)

Rabbi Ile'a said that Reish Lakish said in the name of Rabbi Yehuda bar Ḥanina: In Usha the Sages instituted that a man should sustain his sons and daughters when they are minors.

Rabbi Ile'a said that Reish Lakish said: In Usha the Sages instituted that in a case of one who writes a document stating that he is giving all his property as a gift to his sons in his lifetime, he and his wife are sustained from the property until their deaths.

Rabbi Ile'a said: In Usha the Sages instituted that one who dispenses his money to charity should not dispense more than one-fifth.

Rav Yitzḥak said: In Usha the Sages enacted that a person should treat his son gently, even if he does not want to study, until his son is twelve years old. From this point forward he harasses him in all aspects of his life in order to force him to study. (Ketubot 49-50)

Twin Cities: Tverya and Zippori

"Rabbi Oshaya says: Even if she is in Tiberias and her courtyard is in Zippori, or if she is in Zippori and her courtyard is in Tiberias, she is divorced." (Gittin 77)

"Rabbi Ḥanina found a slaughtered young goat between Tiberias and Zippori and the Sages permitted it to him." (Bava Metzia 24b)

"Rabbi Yosi said: May my portion be among those who accept Shabbat in Tiberias, and among those who see Shabbat out in Zippori,"(Shabbat 118b)

Migdal

“Rabbi Abbahu said that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said in the time it takes a person to walk the distance from Migdal Nunia to Tiberias, which is a mil.” (Pesachim 46)

If there was not other dough like it, how long? Rabbi Jacon bar Aḥa, Rabbi Ulla of Caesarea: Up to four *mil*'s walk. (Yerushalmi Pesachim 21a)

Caesarea: Rome in Eretz Yisrael

“Rami bar Ḥama read the verse about him: “and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12), saying that this applies to Rabbi Oshaya, son of Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Bisa,” (Bava Batra 59a)

“Rabbi Hoshaya said: When the Holy One blessed be He created Adam the first man, the ministering angels erred concerning him and sought to proclaim “holy” before him. . . What did the Holy One blessed be He do? He cast a deep slumber upon him, and everyone then knew that he was [merely] a man.” (Bereshit Rabba 8:10)

“They said to Rabbi Abbahu: What is different about you [Sages of Eretz Yisrael], that you know the Bible as well? Rabbi Abbahu said to them: We, who are situated among you [heretics], we impose upon ourselves this obligation and analyze verses in depth.” (Avoda Zara 4a)

Shemot Rabba 29: “I am the Lord your God” Rabbi Abahu said: A king of flesh and blood may have a father, a brother, or a son to share in or dispute his sovereignty, but the Lord saith, 'I am the Lord thy God! I am the first; that is, I have no father, and I am the last; that is, I have no brother, and besides me there is no God; that is, I have no son'

“When Rabbi Abbahu passed away, the pillars of Caesarea ran with water” (Moed Katan 25b)

Ashkelon: Witches and Righteous Gentiles

“Simeon ben Shetaḥ hanged eighty women in Ascalon, (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 6:6)

Go and see what one Gentile did for his father in Ashkelon, and the name of the son was Dama ben Netina. Once the Sages wished to purchase precious stones from him for the ephod of the High Priest for six hundred thousand gold dinars' profit, and Rav Kahana taught that it was eight hundred thousand gold dinars' profit. And the key to the chest holding the jewels was placed under his father's head, and he would not disturb him. The next year the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Dama ben Netina his reward, as a red heifer was born in his herd, and the Jews needed it. When the Sages of Israel came to him he said to them: I know,

concerning you, that if I were to ask for all the money in the world you would give it to me. But I ask only that money that I lost due to the honor of Father.”
(Kiddushin 31a)

Rabbi Zeira, Ultimate Immigrant

When Rabbi Zeira ascended to Eretz Yisrael he could not find a ferry to cross the Jordan River. He took hold of a rope that was strung across as a makeshift bridge and crossed the Jordan. A certain Sadducee said to him: Hasty people who put your mouths before your ears, when you said at the time of the giving of the Torah: “We will do” before “we will hear” (Exodus 24:7), you remain hasty to this day. Why couldn’t you wait a little longer to cross the river on a ferry? Rabbi Zeira said to him: This is a place where Moses and Aaron did not merit entering; who is to say that I will merit” (Ketubot 112a)

When Rabbi Zeira ascended from Babylonia to Eretz Yisrael, he fasted one hundred fasts so that he would forget the Babylonian method of studying Gemara, so that it would not hinder him from adapting to the unique style of study prevalent in Eretz Yisrael. (Bava Metzia 85a)

“The land of Shinar [Babylonia] conceived and gave birth to him but the land of beauty [Eretz Yisrael] raised the darling of Babylonia” (Moed Katan 25b)

Rosh HaNikra: The Ladder of Tyre

“Rabbi Levi said: When Abraham was traveling through Aram Naharayim and Aram Nahor, he saw them eating, drinking, and reveling. He said: ‘Would that my portion not be in this land.’ When he reached the Tyrian Ladder, he saw them engaged in weeding at the time of weeding, hoeing at the time of hoeing, he said: ‘Would that my portion be in this land.’ The Holy One blessed be He said to him: “To your descendants I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7).” (Bereshit Rabba 39:8)

“When he was leaving Akzib there came a person to ask about his vow. He asked his travel companion, would you say that we drank a reviit of Italian wine? He said to him, yes. He told the person who asked, walk with us until we dissipate our wine. When they came to the Tyrian Ladder Rabban Gamliel dismounted, covered himself, sat down, and dissolved his vow.” (Yerushalmi Avoda Zara 1:9)

“Rav Nahman said to Hama bar Adda, emissary of Zion, : When you go up there,, take a roundabout route, and go to the Ladder of Tyre, and go to Rabbi Ya’akov bar Idi, who lives in Tyre, and raise this dilemma before him” (Betzah 25b)

Parthians and Romans

“The Holy One, Blessed be He, knows the Jewish people, who are unable to withstand the harsh decrees of the Romans. Therefore, He exiled them to Babylonia.” (Pesachim 87)

Traveling Up and Down: נחותי

And our colleagues who descended from Eretz Yisrael; and who is the Sage with this title? Ulla said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan (Berachot 38b)

When Ulla came [from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia,] he said: They sanctified the New Moon in the West, (Rosh HaShanah 22b)

When Rav Dimi ascended to Neharde'a, he sent to the yeshiva students: The statements I said to you, they are my mistake. However, this is what they said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan (Shabbat 63b)

When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia he said: No person has ever drowned in the Sea of Sodom, Rav Yosef said: Sodom is overturned and Rav Dimi's statement is backward. it is a man who does not drown in the Dead Sea, but a plank sinks? (Shabbat 108b)

: Rav Yosef, and some say it was Rabba, would announce: Those that ascend [to Eretz Yisrael from Babylonia,] as well as those that descend [to Babylonia from Eretz Yisrael,], all agree to the following *halakha*: (Bava Kamma 23b)

Babylonian Timeline

597 BCE Beginning of Jewish community in Babylonia (Galut Yehoyachin)

247 BCE Arsaces I establishes the Parthian Empire

54 BCE Beginning of Roman-Parthian Wars

70 CE Destruction of Second Temple

Circa 200 CE redaction of the Mishnah

219 Rav returns to Babylonia

Circa 220 CE Rav and Shmuel head the yeshivot of Sura and Nehardea respectively

211 CE Ardashir I establishes the Sassanian Empire, Zoroastrianism becomes the state religion

259 Nehardea destroyed Rav Yehudah founds the yeshiva at Pumbedita

Rav Yosef bar Hama founds the yeshiva at Mahoza

363 Mahoza destroyed, half the yeshiva to Naresh, half to Pumbedita

Circa 390 Rav Ashi moves the yeshiva of Sura to nearby Mata Mahaseya

636 CE Muslim conquest

Parthians, Sassanians and Zoroastrianism

Rav said to Rav Kahana: Kahana, until now there were Persian rulers who were not particular about bloodshed. But now there are Greeks who are particular about bloodshed, and they will say: Murder [*meradin*], murder,. Therefore, get up and ascend to Eretz Yisrael (Bava Kama 117a)

In the meantime, while they were sitting there, in came a certain Persian priest [*ḥabbara*] and took the lamp from before them.. Rabba said: Merciful One! Let us live either in Your shadow or in the shadow of the descendants of Esau Is this to say that the Romans are preferable to the Persians? But didn't Rabbi Ḥiyya teach. . . that the Holy One, Blessed be He, knows with regard to the Jewish people that they are unable to accept and live under Roman decrees, and therefore He arose and exiled them to Babylonia.: This is not difficult, as this before the Persians reached Babylonia,. That was issued after the Persians reached Babylonia, (Gittin 16b)

What is the ruling with regard to moving a Hanukkah candle from before the *ḥabarei*, on Shabbat? (Shabbat 45)

When they said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: The *Ḥabbarim* have come to Babylonia, he shuddered and fell. . . They were able to issue decrees against the Jewish people with regard to three matters, due to three transgressions on the part of the Jewish people. They decreed against meat, [i.e., they banned ritual slaughter,] due to the failure of the Jewish people to give the priests their gifts. They decreed against in bathhouses, due to their neglect of ritual immersion. Third, they exhumed the dead from their graves because the Jews rejoice on the holidays of the gentiles (Yevamot 63b)

Foolish Babylonians?

He exiled all of Jerusalem: all the commanders and all the warriors—ten thousand exiles—as well as all the artisans and smiths; only the poorest people in the land were left. (Kings II 24:14)

Rabbi Zeira said: Those foolish Babylonians eat bread with bread, (Betzah 16a)

Rabbi Elazar says: Ezra did not ascend from Babylonia until he made it like fine flour, and then he ascended Kiddushin 69b

Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba then asked: For what reason are Festivals in Babylonia more joyous than those in Eretz Yisrael? Rabbi Asi answered him: Because in

Babylonia they are poor,. . . [Rabbi Yochanan answered]For what reason are the Festivals in Babylonia more? Because they were not in that curse with which Eretz Yisrael was cursed, as it is written: “And I will cause all of her happiness to cease, her Festival, her New Moon, and her Shabbat and all her Festivals” (Hosea 2:13). . . Rabbi Yitzhak said: there is not a single Festival on which troops did not come to Tzipori (Shabbat 145b)

Reish Lakish said to him: My God! I hate you Babylonians, as it is written: “If she be a wall we will build a silver turret upon her, if she be a door we will cover her with boards of cedar” (Song of Songs 8:9). Had you rendered yourselves like a wall and all ascended to Eretz Yisrael in the days of Ezra, you would have been likened to silver, which rot does not infest, Now that you ascended like doors, [and only some of you came to Eretz Yisrael,]you are likened to cedar, which rot infests, (Yoma 9b)

Shmuel and Nehardea, Rav and Sura

“the father of Shmuel and Levi were once sitting in the synagogue of Shef veYativ in Nehardea. The Divine Presence came and they heard a loud sound, so they arose and left.” (Megillah 29)

Shmuel also said: The paths of the sky are as clear to me as the paths of my city, Nehardea (Berachot 58b)

The Sages of Nehardea say. . . (Bava Kamma 70a)

“I remember when I sat seventeen rows behind Rav, who sat before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and fiery sparks emerged from the mouth of Rav to the mouth of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and from the mouth of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to the mouth of Rav, and I did not know what they said” (Hullin 137b)

Shmuel and Karna were sitting on the bank of the Malka River. They saw that the water was rising and was murky. Shmuel said to Karna: A great man is coming from the West, Eretz Yisrael, and his intestines are aching, and the water is rising to greet him. Go sniff out his container, (Shabbat 108a)

Rav found an unguarded valley and fenced it in. : As when Rav arrived in Tatifush, he heard a certain woman saying to another: How much milk does it require to cook a quarter weight of meat? Rav said: Evidently, these people are not learned enough to know that meat cooked in milk is prohibited. Rav tarried in that place, and prohibited even udders to them, (Hullin 110a)

“Yet I have been to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they have come” (Ezekiel 11:16). Rabbi Yitzhak said: This is referring to the synagogues and study halls in Babylonia. And Rabbi Elazar said: This is referring to the house of our master, i.e., Rav, in Babylonia (Megillah 29a)

Tadmor/Tamar/Palmyra

“He built Tadmor in the desert and all the garrison towns that he built in Hamath.”(Divrei HaYamim II 8:4)

“When the gentiles entered the Sanctuary during the conquest of Jerusalem, they all turned to plunder the silver and the gold they saw there, but [the warriors of Tarmod] turned to the daughters of Jerusalem, as it is stated: “They have ravished the women in Zion, the maidens in the cities of Judah” (Lamentations 5:11).” (Yevamot 16b)

“Why are the eyes of the residents of Tadmor bleary [*terutof*]? Hillel said to him: My son, you have asked a significant question. The reason is because they live among the sands” (Shabbat 31a)

“Zeir bar Hinena was captured at Safsufa. Rebbi Ammi and Rebbi Samuel went to negotiate for him. Queen Zenobia said to them, your Creator usually does wonders for you; put Him under pressure!” (Yerushalmi Terumot 8:4)

Bet shearim inscriptions: the sons of Leontios the banker from Palmyra

Germanus ben Yitzchak the Tadmorite

The Rabbis said to Rabbi Eliezer: An incident occurred involving Miriam of Tarmod [who was a nazirite] (Mishnah Nazir 6:11)

Adiabene

About this time it was that Helena, queen of Adiabene; and her son Izates changed their course of life, and embraced the Jewish customs. . . . But as to Helena, the King’s mother, when she saw that the affairs of Izates’s Kingdom were in peace; and that her son was an happy man, and admired among all men, and even among foreigners, by the means of God’s providence over him; she had a mind to go to the city Jerusalem, in order to worship at that temple of God which was so very famous among all men; and to offer her thank offerings there. So she desired her son to give her leave to go thither. (Josephus Antiquities 20:2)

Rabbi Yehuda said: There was an incident involving Queen Helene in Lod where her *sukka* was more than twenty cubits high, and the Elders were entering and exiting the *sukka* and did not say anything to her (Sukkah 2b)

King Munbaz would make the handles of all the Yom Kippur vessels of gold. Queen Helene, his mother, fashioned a gold chandelier above the entrance of the Sanctuary. She also fashioned a golden tablet [*tavla*] on which the Torah portion relating to *sota* was written. (Yoma 37a)

An incident occurred with regard to Queen Helene, whose son had gone to war, and she said: If my son will return from war safely, I will be a nazirite for seven years. And her son returned safely from the war, and she was a nazirite for seven years. And at the end of seven years, she ascended to Eretz Yisrael. . . (Nazir 19b)