

Beyond the Text #3

Diaspora

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 Yitzḥak 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 Tattlefush, 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 Yitzḥak 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 [*terutot*]? 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 H̄inena was captured at Safsufa. Rabbi Ammi and Rabbi 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)

The Glory of Rome

Rabbi Yosei said: Theodosius [Todos] of Rome, instituted the custom for the Roman Jews to eat kids roasted [*mekulas*] whole on the evenings of Passover, The Sages sent a message to him: If you were not Theodosius, we would have decreed ostracism upon you, as it appears as if you are feeding Israel consecrated food, outside (Pesachim 53a)

And it once was that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking along the road and they heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome from Puteoli at a distance of one hundred and twenty *mil*. And the other Sages began weeping and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what reason are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: And you, for what reason are you weeping? They said to him: These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly, and for us, the House of the footstool of our God, the Temple, is burnt by fire, and shall we not weep? Rabbi Akiva said to them: That is why I am laughing. If for those who violate His will, it is so for those who perform His will, all the more so will they be rewarded. (Makkot 24)

And Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Yosei, said: I saw it in the city of Rome and Sacred to God was written on one line. (Shabbat 63b)

Alexandria

Rabbi Yehuda says: One who did not see the great synagogue [*deyofloston*] of Alexandria of Egypt never saw the glory of Israel. They said that its structure was like a large basilica [*basileki*], with a colonnade within a colonnade. At times there were six hundred thousand men and another six hundred thousand men in it, twice the number of those who left Egypt. In it there were seventy-one golden chairs [*katedraot*], corresponding to the seventy-one members of the Great Sanhedrin, each of which consisted of no less than twenty-one thousand talents of gold. And there was a wooden platform at the center. The sexton of the synagogue would stand on it, with the scarves in his hand. And when the prayer leader reached to answer amen, the sexton waved the scarf and all the people would answer amen. And the members of the various crafts would not sit mingled. Rather, the goldsmiths would sit among themselves, and the silversmiths among themselves, and the blacksmiths among themselves, and the coppersmiths among themselves, and the weavers among themselves. And when a poor stranger entered there, he would recognize people who plied his craft, and he would turn to join

them there. And from there he would secure his livelihood as well as the livelihood of the members of his household, (Sukkah 51b)

When Nicanor went to bring doors from Alexandria in Egypt, on his return, a storm arose in the sea and threatened to drown him. The ship's passengers took one of the doors, and cast it into the sea,. And still the sea did not rest from its rage. They sought to cast the other at which point Nicanor stood and embraced it and said to them: Cast me into the sea with it. Immediately, the sea rested from its rage, or and for the entire voyage, he regretted the fate of the other door that he allowed them to cast into the sea. When they arrived at the port of Akko the door that was thrown into the sea was poking out under the sides of the ship (Yoma 38a)

Asia Minor: Tarsus and Cappadocia

“And an incident occurred in which they brought a box that was full of bones to the synagogue of Tarsiyim” (Nazir 52a)

“Rather, the goldsmiths would sit among themselves, and the silversmiths among themselves, and the blacksmiths among themselves, and the Tarsiyim among themselves, and the Gardiyim among themselves.” (Sukkah 51b)

“Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Bigthan and Teresh were two Tarsians, and they would talk in the Tarsian language. . . But they did not know that Mordecai was of those who sat on the Sanhedrin, which convened in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, and that he knew seventy languages” (Megillah 13b)

“And what will the Babylonians do who only have sesame oil? And the people of Medea who only have nut oil and the Alexandrians who only have radish oil? And what of the people of Cappadocia who have none of those?” (Tosefta Shabbat 2:3)

“Rabbi Akiva said: Once I was traveling on a boat, and I saw a certain boat sinking at sea, and I was grieved over the apparent death of the Torah scholar who was on board. And who was it? Rabbi Meir. But when I disembarked at the province of Cappadocia, he came, and sat, and deliberated before me about *halakha*. I said to him: My son, who brought you up from the water? He said to me: One wave carried me to another, and that other wave to another, until I reached the shore, and a wave cast me up onto dry land.” (Yevamot 121a)

The Sea and Beyond

“There was an incident involving Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Akiva, who were coming on a ship. Rabbi Akiva arose and established a *sukka* at the top of the ship. The next day the wind blew and uprooted it. Rabban Gamliel said to him: Akiva, where is your *sukka*?” (Sukkah 23a)

“And even Rabban Gamliel, was coming on a boat at the time, and a large wave swelled over him and threatened to drown him. Rabban Gamliel said: It seems to me that this is only for the sake of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus [who Rabban Gamliel had ostracized for not following majority rule]. Rabban Gamliel stood on his feet and said: Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that neither was it for my honor that I acted, nor was it for the honor of the house of my father that I acted; rather, it was for Your honor, so that disputes will not proliferate in Israel. In response, the sea calmed from its raging.” (Bava Metzia 59b)

Medinat HaYam

הַמְבִיא גֵט מִמְדִינַת הַיָּם, צָרִיךְ שְׂיֵאמֶר, בְּפָנַי נִכְתַּב וּבְפָנַי נִחְתָּם. רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, אֵף הַמְבִיא מִן הָרֶקֶם וּמִן הַחֲגָר.

An agent who brings a bill of divorce [*get*] from a country overseas, is required to state This bill of divorce was written in my presence and it was signed in my presence. Rabban Gamliel says: Even one who brings a bill of divorce from Rekem or from Heger (Mishnah Gittin 1:1)

What is the reason for this declaration? Rabba says: It is because the people who live overseas are not experts in writing a bill of divorce for her sake. Rava says because there are no witnesses available to ratify it. (Gittin 2b)

a woman who went, she and her husband, overseas, if there was peace between him and her, i.e., the couple were not fighting at the time, and there was also peace in the world, i.e., there was no war at that time, and the woman came back by herself and said: My husband died, she may marry (Mishnah Yevamot 15:1)

In the case of a husband who went overseas, and someone arose and sustained his wife in his absence, (Mishnah Ketubot 13:1)

And these may shave and cut their hair on the intermediate days of a Festival: One who comes from a country overseas (Mishnah Moed Katan 3:1)

(הַמְבִיא גֵט מִמְדִינַת הַיָּם. כֹּל חוּצָה לְאֶרֶץ קְרִי מְדִינַת הַיָּם:) ר' עובדיה מברטנורא

Aspamia/Hispania/Sfarad

Rabbi Yehuda says: [The Sages said that establishing presumptive ownership requires] three years only in order that if the owner will be in Aspamya, and another possesses his field for a year, people will go and inform the owner by the end of the next year, and the owner will come back in the following year and take the possessor to court. (Mishnah Bava Batra 3:2)

And do not wonder [how one can see from one end of the world to the other], as a person can sleep here, in this location, and see a dream in Aspamyā. (Niddah 30b)

“All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (Genesis 18:18), it indicates that even ships that come from Galia to Hispania are blessed only due to the Jewish people. (Yevamot 63a)

וְגֵלֵת הַחֵל-הַזֶּה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-כְּנַעֲנִים עַד-צָרְפָּת וְגֵלֵת יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בְּסִפְרָד יִרְשׁוּ אֶת עַרְי הַנֶּגֶב:

And that exiled force of Israelites [shall possess] what belongs to the Phoenicians as far as Zarephath, while the Jerusalemite exile community of Sepharad shall possess the towns of the Negeb. (Ovadhah 1:20)

תַּרְגוּם יוֹנָתָן עַל עוֹבְדֵיָהּ א': כִּי גֵלֵת עִמָּא הָדִין דְּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּבָאֲרַעָא כְּנַעֲנָי עַד צָרְפָּת וְגֵלֵת יְרוּשָׁלַם דְּבָאֲסַפְרָמִיָּא יַחְסִנּוּן יַת קְרִוִי אֲרַעָא דְדָרוּמָא